

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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Do you have the type of child who jumps out of bed, eager to get started on whatever kind of learning is on the schedule for the day--online-only or a hybrid of remote and in-person? If so, you can stop reading. On the other hand, is your child just as dazed and confused as you are about what this school year is going to be like and needs some inspiration to stay motivated: then stay right here! When you can tap into what motivates your child, just step back, and watch them soar. It may take some trial and error to find out what your child responds to best. Just remember: Your goal is to support them in making progress in their own goals and aspirations. Save the honor-roll-pressure for when things get back to normal. This year let the joy of learning be your guide. In this edition of the Carpe Diem-Seize the Day Blog, we will explore helpful tips and techniques to encourage and motivate your child during virtual lessons in what promises to be a very unusual school year.

Getting started

Check in

- Kids may be motivated by different things than they were last year. Your type A kid may no longer work for gold stars, and your slowpoke may speed through work just to get it over with. Do not make assumptions on what is going to work. Instead, ask questions: See how they are holding up, ask how they feel, determine what they want to accomplish, and figure out what you can do to support them.

Lead by example

- Your energy will wax and wane but keep your attitude positive and your approach consistent. If you sense your kid is flagging, find role models -- from movies, books, or real life -- whose grit may inspire them.

Build their work ethic

- Yes, we all want this to be over with, but remember that learning is a lifelong goal. When discussing schoolwork, focus on the skills kids are building, the value of seeing things through, and the feeling of accomplishment. Most kids can push themselves when it is something they love, like creating a successful game or mastering dance choreography. Ask them to call on the same skills that drive them in other areas.

Praise effort

- Maybe they got a problem wrong but asked the right questions. Maybe they breezed through the day's reading assignment when yesterdays was tough. Now, more than ever, taking notice of and commenting positively on how your kid is growing and progressing can really give them forward momentum.

Motivation 101: Proven motivational strategies for just about every kind of student

Establish structure and routine. Sticking to a schedule provides the stability kids need to keep plugging away. Plus, it minimizes their instincts to go rogue. When expectations are set, it is more likely they will be met. You can try digital tools like to-do lists, site blockers, and screen-limit settings when kids need help staying on task.

Maintain accountability. Maybe *you* cannot motivate your kid -- but their best friend can. Have them schedule daily check-ins with a friend either by text or on social media. Accountability helps kids realize they are not alone and gives them a tangible reason to work hard.

Incentivize. Kids may be motivated by rewards, but you want to make it feel as though they have earned their treat (or you will end up in a vicious cycle). If they finish one packet, they can choose a board game to play; two packets, they get to make that brownie mix you have been saving.

Make it special

Mark the occasion. This school year kids will not get to have Friday pizza parties and dances. But you can still give them something to look forward to. Plan a celebration (online) with family and friends, like a virtual class party, a Zoom dance, trivia night, or a watch-together movie.

Let them see progress. Some kids respond well to visual cues. Use a calendar or another visual aid to mark time so they can see how much they have accomplished and how much more there is to go.

Do a related activity. A positive aspect of remote learning is the flexibility to go deep on topics kids really love. Build upon and extend what they are learning with a natural connection. If they're learning about the solar system, let them stay up late on a weekend night and use an astronomy app to map the night sky.

Mix it up

Be willing to experiment. If a kid is struggling with reading a book, turn it into a read-aloud or get an audiobook. If math is "too boring," do the problems on a whiteboard or outside using sidewalk chalk. A change of scenery can do wonders for a kid's motivation.

Break up the day. If you have some control over when they do the work, break things up a little. Let them have a slower-paced morning and do their work after lunch. Make an agreement in advance: "If you take the morning off, you still have to get your schoolwork done before you can play online with your friends later today."

Change the timing. There is nothing magical about the hours of 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. -- that is just when we are all used to school happening. Of course, if your kids are in online classes, you have to accommodate those schedules. But for things like working through a packet of assignments from a teacher, there is no harm in experimenting with different times of day. Sometimes the change is all it takes.

Troubleshooting

Appeal to a favorite teacher

A word of encouragement, such as a recorded video message, a text, or an email, from a beloved teacher can be just the thing. Your kid would not want to let the teacher down.

Rule out other issues

Sometimes what looks like a lack of motivation is actually a kid covering up for a problem. Probe for underlying issues and address them.

Adjust expectations

If we have learned anything during this crisis it is to expect the unexpected. Your kid may not take to the new learning environment. Insist on the bare minimum (completion of all assignments), and set up natural consequences for noncompliance (maybe they miss out on an online playdate). Empathize with your kid's feelings and move on. Allow yourself a moment to gather your strength and recharge. Celebrate the little victories and start tomorrow with fresh eyes.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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