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APATHY IN SCHOOL

Quotes

A lack of attention control may masquerade as laziness, a negative attitude, or just plain bad behavior . . . They need our sympathy and support at the same time that they need us to hold them accountable for working on their attention controls. When they sense that we're on their side and not accusing them of being bad or lazy, they often rise to the occasion.

– Mel Levine, *A Mind at a Time*, 2002

*You only lose energy when life becomes dull in your mind.
You don't have to be tired or bored. Get interested in something.
Get absolutely enthralled in something. Throw yourself into it with abandon. As you do,
making up your mind to succeed and calculating the rewards is a natural consequence.*

– Norman Vincent Peale

SAMPLE PAGE

Notes

When we think of an apathetic student, we often think of the child who sits in class and looks out the window, falls asleep, refuses to work, or mumbles comments like, "This is boring. This is stupid. What a waste of time." Is the child really bored? Is he being defiant? Could it be that the teachers and/or parents are somewhat to blame for his lack of motivation?

There are several possible causes for a student being apathetic. Yes, it is possible the child is bored and needs more challenging work, but most often this isn't the main cause of not working. The child, as noted from Mel Levine's quote above, could have an attention problem. He could also have an undiagnosed learning problem that interferes with his progress. The child may be dealing with emotional problems such as depression or worries about his parents getting a divorce. We can't rule out medical and nutritional factors. Also, a small number of teens display apathy in the classroom because of possible drug and alcohol use.

Instead of coming down hard on these children, we may need to show more compassion. Nagging, complaining, threatening, and punishing these kids seldom is effective. We need to be patient, investigate probable causes, and come up with realistic plans.

Recommended Resources

- 101 Creative Strategies for Reaching Unmotivated Student Learners
- Monday Morning Messages
- 201 Amazing Mind Boggling



APATHY IN SCHOOL

Strategies

1. Consider taking the child to his/her doctor for a complete physical/ check-up to rule out any medical problems that could be interfering with learning.
2. Have the child's seeing and hearing tested. Children often appear to be apathetic or lazy when they can't see or hear well.
3. Show an interest in their interests. There is an Amish saying that notes, "Work along with your children in their work and take an interest in what they do, or they may lose interest in what they do."
4. Utilize the many professionals at the school who may help motivate your child. Sometimes a counselor, social worker, or physical education teacher can "light a spark."
5. Without preaching, try to help the child understand how school is relevant to his future.
6. Set limits on passive activities at home such as watching television. Get the child engaged in some positive activities.
7. Take a close look at the child's diet. Many children today are loading up on sugar and junk food. They may need more fruit, vegetables, carbohydrates, and protein to give them more energy.
8. Parents and school personnel need to work together to determine the child's learning style. Bob may be more engaged in a class where the teacher uses a more "hands on" style of teaching than he would in a room where the teaching style focuses on lecturing.
9. Set short term goals. Instead of saying, "Sylvia, you better get working or you'll never pass algebra," try, "Sylvia, let's see if you can master this short formula by the end of the week." Goals that are too difficult or long term can cause these children to give up too soon.
10. It is crucial that parents provide unconditional love. Children need to feel that they are more important to their parents than their school performance. If Jason senses his parents are more in school. No matter how poorly he is doing in school, his parents need to tell him daily, "Jason, we love."
11. Teachers may need to get creative with the child's schedule. Does the child need more movement, more hands-on activities, more independent research, or more physical activity?
12. Realize that not all children need to be college bound. Many students who seem apathetic in core subjects may excel in opportunities where they utilize mechanical or technical skills. Brian seldom showed interest in algebra, chemistry, social studies or reading novels. He had no desire to go college. His goal was to graduate from high school and work in his father's garage as a mechanic.
13. It is important for parents not to show apathy. They must show interest in how their children are doing. They need to get involved by communicating with their teachers, attending school meetings, checking on their homework and test scores, and monitoring their whereabouts after school.
14. Even though the child may be struggling, let him know you still have high expectations. Let him know that he is capable of doing great things.
15. Parents and teachers are often successful with these children if they perceive themselves as being a coach or cheerleader. Often small bits of advice, words of praise, and a "thumbs up" get better results than long lectures.
16. Sometimes the school may not have programs available to assist these apathetic children. Parents may have to seek out tutoring programs, volunteer work, or unique activities such as gymnastics or martial arts.
17. Play with the child. It is quite amazing how these children "light up" when we play table games or invite them to throw a Frisbee. Productive conversations can occur during these times.
18. Many of these children respond favorably to storytelling, magic, humor, and other creative arts.

BULLYING

Quotes

About three out of four students reported they were bullied, according to research by Bully Police USA, a national organization that advocates against bullying. The organization also reported that 90 percent of students said bullying causes social, academic, and emotional problems.

– Arizona Republic, July 3, 2005

More than 160,000 children stay home from school each day because of verbal intimidation and put-downs by their peers.

– USA Today, April 10, 2001

Notes

Besides helping the victims, we must help the bullies change their ways. If they don't, they often end up in serious trouble. Most studies in the United States find that about 25% of bullies (as a youngster) end up in trouble with the law. One Canadian study found that approximately 60% of boys who were characterized as bullies in grades 6-9 had at least one conviction by age 24. One other important note here about bullying is that there is a "huge" increase in the number of girls who are becoming bullies.

Strategies

1. First and foremost, teachers and parents **must** take teasing and bullying seriously!
2. Forget about the theory that bullies have low self-esteem. We are discovering that bullies have "high" self-esteem and they gain power, and enjoy, hurting others.
3. How can you tell if your child is being bullied? Study these signs.
 - Child comes home with cuts, bruises on body
 - He or she has torn clothing
 - Child "claims" he lost his lunch money
 - She becomes more quiet, withdrawn
 - He doesn't want to go to school
 - She complains of sore stomach or other illnesses
 - He is more moody or irritable
 - She has trouble sleeping
 - Child's schoolwork starts to suffer
 - She becomes more aggressive with siblings

Recommended Resources

- Please Stop Laughing At Me
- The Bully, The Bullied and Beyond
- Out of This World–Tiglos vs. Secca Ma
- Salvaging Sisterhood



BULLYING

Strategies

4. How can you tell if your child is a bully? Study these signs.
 - Your child comes home from school with “gifts” from other children
 - Child gets in many fights with peers
 - Child is insensitive to the emotions of others
5. Have children at home and school develop pledges “not to bully others.” Repeat the pledges daily.
6. Schools can place a Bully Box near the counselor’s office. Students can “anonymously” report bullying situations.
7. Teach children how to “walk” tall. Bullies often pick on people who appear to be weak and walk with their heads down. Children can be taught ways to walk that gives them more of an assertive posture. My father told me to, “Walk like you like yourself.” It makes a lot of sense to me now!
8. Teach children “calming statements” to use when they are confronted. Examples are, “I can handle this.” “I’m a good person.” “I’m not going to let her mess up my day.”
9. Parents may wish to encourage their children to become more assertive by getting them interested in martial arts.
10. Students should be encouraged to join clubs, sports, and other school activities. When students become part of a club or team, it gives them a good support group and they are less apt to be teased. Often it is the “lonely” kids who become victims.
11. Children need to be told that it is not a sign of weakness to walk away from rude individuals.
12. Teach children strategies to control their anger. Bullies enjoy seeing their targets get angry.
13. Have children make a list of caring adults that they can go to when they are bullied or scared.
14. Conflict resolution expert Naomi Drew recommends victims to implement the “Stop, Breathe, Chill” strategy. STOP: take a step back and notice what’s going on inside of you, BREATHE: inhale deeply right down to the pit of your stomach 3 times, CHILL: walk away for a moment, get a drink of water, wash your face, or do something else to release the energy of anger, then go back and talk about the problem with someone you trust.
15. Create a Kindness Committee at the school to teach children how to be kind and respectful to others.
16. Do not let child stay home as a way of avoiding a bully. Tell your child that every day he goes to school it is a triumph over the bully. It lets the bully know that your child has a right to be at school and he will not be deterred.
17. It is very important to teach bystanders ways to help out their friends who are being bullied. They can distract the bully or encourage their friend, “Hey come with me.”
18. Let’s not forget about all the bullying that takes place via the computer. This is known as cyberbullying. Teach your children these strategies to help prevent most cyberbullying.
 - never give out personal information, passwords, PIN numbers
 - don’t believe everything you read....bullies like to lie
 - don’t respond....bullies want you to
 - if you get a threatening message, don’t delete it....show an adult
 - don’t send a message to someone when you are angry
 - don’t open messages from someone you don’t know
 - never agree to meet with someone you met online