

Talking About Mental Health: Intrinsic Motivation April 2021

This month's Umbrella Theme is Intrinsic Motivation. So what is that? It is when we can do something, enjoy something, complete something – and feel good about ourselves and our accomplishments. It's about not needing anything external to make you feel better – grades, rewards, incentives, etc. We want our kids to WANT to do well because it feels good not because it is a competition or there is a reward. Don't get me wrong – there are times for rewards and competitions for sure! But this month we want to focus on the ways we can foster that sense of internal satisfaction, accomplishment and motivation.

Consider your child is studying for a test. They are working hard and using some solid strategies for studying. Then they bring home a grade that they don't feel great about. That can be very disappointing. Or the child who creates all sorts of creative pieces for the school holiday bazaar but hardly anyone purchases anything. Thoughts can quickly move to: I guess my stuff wasn't that great or Why did I even try, etc. Our children need to know that not getting the grade, not making sales, etc. is okay. Try to help them see failure, frustration, disappointment, etc. as a beginning rather than an end point. If we help our children to recognize the joy and accomplishment they feel when they are "doing" then the outcome is less of a negative impact. This is because the joy, the sense of accomplishment, the sense of success is in the process – not the product. Focusing on this area can increase confidence, school engagement, development of coping strategies, positive mood and our ability to stick to tasks longer.

"If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning. ... They will have a lifelong way to build and repair their own confidence" Carol S. Dweck, Developmental Psychologist

Here are some tips:

- Make room for mistakes – encourage to keep trying
- Recognize hard work as much as outcomes – this is less about praise and more about helping your child reflect on their own feelings when they work hard on something
- Break down big goals into smaller steps – focus on process and recognize progress
- Celebrate successes – enjoy and share your child's successes which is the ultimate "reward"
- Foster gratitude – even on your child's worst days, what are they thankful for?

Remember, as parents we can also benefit from these same strategies! Have fun this month exploring and learning more about intrinsic motivation!

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