

ACADEMIC MOTIVATION: How to Help the “Underachiever”

WHAT CHILD NEEDS

- Strong bonds with adults
- Security, consistency
- To feel lovable
- To feel safe

- To have control
- To learn to solve own problems
- To see relationship between effort and outcome

- To believe adults will be helpful, not just critical or unavailable (esp homework)

- To have role models

- To have feelings heard and validated

WHAT TO DO

- Special time for interaction (hobbies)
- Home-School teamwork
- Consistent rules
- Adult proximity and fun without judgment

- Have predictable routine
- Provide opportunities to help around the house
- Ignore helplessness and babyish demands
- Minimize external rewards
- Brainstorm ideas for problem solving
- Encourage progress and effort

- Help student get started on homework
- Be nearby and help only as necessary
- Meet with teacher to set up a homework plan

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Believe child doesn't need his/her parent
- Blame school or parent or child
- Change rules to make child happy
- Give attention and praise only when child is “good”

- Take charge of daily routine
- Do all the chores

- Rescue the child-reward helplessness
- Expect perfection
- Solve child's problems

- Do child's homework
- Criticize mistakes
- Compare with other children
- Engage in struggles over homework

- Compare child with idealized persons
- Hide mistakes

- Give advice first
- Interpret
- Judge

(MWeill—10/09)