

COUNSELING CORNER WITH MARCIA WEILL

ACADEMIC MOTIVATION: How to help the “underachiever”

One of our biggest challenges at school is figuring out how to “motivate”

- the capable child who seems able but doesn't seem to care
- the child who can do the work but homework is always a struggle, or
- the child who blames adults for problems.

First we want to rule out other causes for these behaviors, such as a learning disability, physical problems or emotional reactions to life changes, such as the loss of a loved one or problems with friends.

Once we have determined that these behaviors are a performance rather than a learning problem, we can look beyond the surface behaviors and try to understand what the child currently believes about himself. Most chronic underachievers believe one or all of the following statements:

“Nothing I do makes a difference, so why try?”

“I don't belong.”

“Nobody's going to help me, they'll just tell me I'm wrong.”

“I'm not good enough/ I'm dumb/ I'll never get this.”

“I don't care---AKA “Nobody cares about me”

The following page is my attempt to give ideas about how to help students like these—trying to help them change their beliefs in order to increase self-esteem and independent motivation. These beliefs are based on research in cognitive behavior therapy.