

Finding The Spark

Rewarding effort helps this age group stay motivated by **Michelle Anthony, M.A., Ph.D.**

S EVEN- AND EIGHT-YEAR-OLDS' beliefs about effort, ability, and reward systems are shifting rapidly. In earlier years, children assume that hard work makes someone smart; it brings positive attention and earns praise. In contrast, by third grade, children are more realistic about their relative standing in the classroom. There are two explanations for this change: One, it's the way kids develop, and two, schools rely more and more on standardized evaluations.

That's both good and bad, says Dr. Jennifer Henderlong Corpus, children's motivation researcher at Reed College in



Portland, OR. Having a realistic sense of one's own abilities is helpful. But "it may also be costly in terms of children's ability to cope with setbacks. They become hesitant to take on challenges and give up when success doesn't come easily."

Dr. Henderlong Corpus suggests that parents boost motivation by rewarding effort and improvement. Make achievements individual and personal, and emphasize skills rather than test scores.

External rewards can be useful tools if they're related, meaningful, and fun. If your child struggles with words, have her read to a pet. If chores are a bore, offer to time her. Celebrate when she attempts a new skill or recovers from a setback. Doing so will build up the internal motivation she needs to face the developmental challenges ahead. **P&C**

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