

Tips for Parents of Underachievers

Ken is a bright kid. He remembers baseball scores, batting averages, and tunes from every commercial he's seen. He is a whiz at games that require concentration and strategy. But he drags his feet on homework and gets less than mediocre grades. What can his parents do to motivate Ken?

Underachievers like Ken are often described as bored, unmotivated, lazy, or unresponsive. But school counselors find that one of the biggest reasons for underachievement is the fear of failing. Adolescents are extremely complex, and their work is very much influenced by how they feel about themselves. High expectations—from teachers, from parents, or from themselves—often aggravate their fear of not measuring up.

What can you do to motivate your underachiever?

- **Talk with your child.** Be calm, not accusing. Ask what he's doing, and why. Share some of your own failures; admit that school

can be difficult. Ask honest questions (Do you think you can't do the work? Are you trying as hard as you can? Does it feel like we're always on your case?). Then set some realistic goals—for a start, just getting all the homework done.

- **Schedule a conference with the teacher or counselor.** Go with a spirit of cooperation—"What can we do?" Get a detailed report of what your child is doing and not doing. You also might consider testing for disabilities if your child has been doing poorly for some time.
- **Set up a progress report system together.** Determine what you're going to monitor and how often (daily or weekly). When you've decided together on what precisely is acceptable performance, decide on appropriate re-

wards (TV privileges, snacks, later bedtimes, etc.). Then sign this agreement and follow through consistently. (Hint: Let your child be responsible for her part of the agreement; don't hover or nag.)

- **Reward accomplishments; ignore failures.** Build self-confidence in your child by letting his own successes prove his

Learning Blocks

There are six beliefs that block learning: I must have immediate fulfillment; I must avoid uncomfortable situations; I must be treated fairly; I must always get things to turn out right; I must have approval at all times; I must be outstanding at whatever I do, or I won't do it.

capability. Savor his achievements; don't raise the standard too quickly ("Good, you got a C; now let's work for an A"). Above all, take time to be with your child in a non-school setting, enjoying each other just "because you want to."

Involved

I believe it's vitally important to be actively involved in our children's education. Whether we send them to private or public school, we cannot shuffle all the responsibility off on the teachers. It takes work, effort, and a great deal of our time to ensure our children a quality education. These are our children—a gift from God. They are entrusted to our care to be nurtured and raised to honor, glorify, and serve God. Let us take this commission seriously, and prayerfully do our best to assure success in fulfilling their potential.

—Pat Palau

