



How Do We Make School a Place Our Children Look Forward to?

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For most families, the “back-to-school” season is often accompanied by a scene all too familiar to parents: children groaning, rolling their eyes, complaining, and dragging their feet instead of expressing excitement and joy about going to school. This behavior is not simply a reaction to the end of summer’s freedom and fun, but a clear indicator of a more profound issue: a genuine dislike for school!

The first question that comes to mind is: “How can we make school a place our children look forward to?” Have you ever wondered what we, as parents and teachers, can do to transform school from a place children resent into one they eagerly anticipate every morning? The answer is not to push them, outsmart them, or manipulate them into accepting the harsh reality of school, but in nurturing their natural motivation and innate love of learning! This article explores the leading causes of children’s dislike of school and offers potential solutions to address them.

Unpacking Children’s Aversion to School: Understanding the Roots of the Problem

To answer this question, we must first confront the difficult question of why school evokes such negative sentiments in so many children. Is the problem rooted in the school as an institution, in the absence of parental encouragement, or in how teachers engage with students?

A large-scale 2020 study from Yale University revealed that about 75% of high school students reported negative feelings toward school, including boredom, fatigue, and anxiety. The data point to a real crisis in student motivation for learning, and sometimes parents can unknowingly contribute to these negative feelings. Here are some of the primary reasons why children lose interest in school:

1. Focus on Memorization and Rote Learning Instead of Active Student Engagement

Educational practices in most of our schools predominantly feature one-way communication in the classroom: the teacher instructs, explains the lesson, and asks questions, while students passively listen to absorb the load of information shared, instead of engaging in interactive dialogue, exploration,



and experimentation. This drains children's curiosity and cultivates feelings of boredom and undue pressure.

Imagine spending seven hours a day in a place offering little to no intellectual stimulation, where you are often subjected to endless lectures and repetitive assignments, creating a crushing sense of monotony. Such monotony is dangerous because it extinguishes children's innate curiosity and motivation to learn and explore. How then can we reignite excitement in the classroom and create active learning opportunities that get students moving and participating instead of being stuck in their seats all day? If you put yourself in your child's shoes, you'll find their attitude somewhat justified as they try to avoid waking up early just to repeat the same things every day.

2. Disconnect Between the Classroom and Children's Everyday Lives

In many Arab countries, the reality of education reveals a clear gap between what children learn in school and what they experience in daily life. This gap undermines their motivation to learn and reduces their perception of the school's value to earning a certificate. A UNESCO report (2021) highlights that much of what children study at school is abstract and disconnected from practical realities. Such disconnection leaves children feeling that school neither reflects their world nor meets their needs, strengthening the view of school as an imposed burden, a "necessary evil".

3. Anxiety and Pressure from Exams and Grades

In our society, exam results and grades are often prioritized and valued over genuine learning. As a result, children come to associate school with anxiety and fear of failure rather than with curiosity and a love of knowledge. Traditional curricula emphasize cramming vast amounts of information and relying on exams as the primary measure of understanding and intelligence, intensifying this pressure. The outcome is a school environment that struggles to be joyful or engaging and instead, becomes a source of stress.

Parents often unintentionally add to this pressure with high expectations, as many await their children's results as though they were their own, often emphasizing the importance of getting top marks to make them proud. Consequently, children begin to fear failure more than they pursue learning, driven by the worry of disappointing their parents. The competitive environment makes this even worse: only those with the highest grades or the quickest answers are celebrated, while others feel like failures simply because



they did not come first. Such outcomes are the product of a system that rewards rote memorization and recall instead of genuine learning and meaningful progress.

“When learning is reduced to rote memorization, disconnected lessons, and relentless pressure over grades, students inevitably become bored and disengaged in school. Their curiosity and motivation to learn gradually fade away.”

From Struggles to Success: The Power of the School-Home Partnership

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” – William Butler Yeats.

Simple, Practical Steps Parents Can Take to Boost Motivation for Learning

Home is where a child’s journey and love of discovery are first ignited. It is a safe space to practice, repeat, and refine their language, motor, and cognitive skills. Parents’ role becomes even more critical once children enter school, where they engage with teachers and peers, and learn how to interact and build relationships while still shaping their identities. Parents play a vital role in planting and nurturing a child’s love for learning in their hearts and minds, for a child’s perception of school and their behavior within it is largely shaped by that early love.

1. Helping Children Build Emotional Readiness

Begin the academic year with a fresh outlook by highlighting the positive aspects of school to spark your child’s excitement. Talk about the “exciting projects” they’ll be part of, the “new skills” they’ll acquire, and the friendships and adventures that await them, instead of focusing on “loads of homework” or “tough exams.” This shift in perspective helps children see school as a place of opportunity and anticipation, thus transforming the morning rush from a daily struggle to the start of a new adventure.

2. Praising Persistence Not Just Performance

Many parents fall into the trap of focusing solely on exam scores and final grades and pose questions like: “What grade did you get?” or “Why didn’t you get a perfect score?”



Such questions send a dangerous message: a child's value is tied to their results, not their effort and persistence. Over time, this erodes their self-confidence, and they learn to feel proud only when they achieve high marks and feel guilty or discouraged when they don't. For many children, this pressure even leads to exam anxiety. In reality, a grade is nothing more than a snapshot of performance at a specific moment in time, measuring certain knowledge and skills. It does not reflect a child's true value, intelligence, or potential. Parents need to reframe the meaning of grades and place them in their proper, limited role within the broader learning journey.

Parents play an essential role in building their children's self-confidence and belief in their abilities, while encouraging perseverance throughout every stage of school. These qualities will serve them well throughout their lives, whether in education, work, or family. Instead of tying praise only to outcomes, parents can use affirmations like:

- 'I'm proud of you for the effort you put in.'
- 'I can see your progress, you're improving step by step.'
- 'It's wonderful that you kept trying even when it was hard. That's real success.'
- 'Your curiosity while searching for the solution matters more than the answer itself.'
- 'You didn't give up, and that's what counts. Every attempt makes you stronger.'

Celebrating your child's effort and persistence when you see them trying fuels their motivation to learn, helping them fall in love with the process itself, regardless of results.

3. Turning Everyday Life into a Learning Experience

Learning neither begins nor ends at school; life itself is the true classroom. Parents have countless opportunities to connect what's taught in school to real-world experiences, especially when children are young and the line between home and school is still fluid. Simple, everyday moments can be transformed into chances to connect theory with practice, turning routine activities into meaningful learning experiences.

For instance, a simple shopping trip can become a math lesson. Ask your child to calculate prices, compare weights, and total the bill, giving them practice



applying numbers to daily life. If they study plants, take them to a garden or nursery to explore different herbs and flowers, and let them choose one to bring home and care for. A lesson on stars and planets can turn into a nighttime adventure of stargazing, matching constellations in the sky to those in their book. Studying can also be playful with flashcards, quizzes, or family games. Turn revision into a fun ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire’ round instead of a stressful oral test. Such integration makes learning enjoyable and meaningful, challenging the common belief that school is disconnected from real life.

4. Beyond the Curriculum: Discovering and Nurturing Children’s Talents

Children’s lives extend far beyond school, even though it takes up much of their time, energy, and relationships. Parents must ensure their children also engage in activities that support balanced, healthy growth by nurturing their talents. We cannot expect schools alone to discover and develop these abilities; we, as parents, are responsible for encouraging them to explore and practice hobbies they enjoy.

Whether it’s art, music, sports, or chess, hobbies are far more than entertainment or a way to fill free time. They provide rich opportunities to develop cognitive and creative abilities, boost mental health, reduce stress, and build essential social and life skills such as teamwork, perseverance, and forming friendships.

Teachers and Schools: Creating Classrooms That Motivate and Inspire

“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.” – William Arthur Ward.

While parents play a vital role in motivating their children to learn, we must also examine the crucial impact of teachers and schools, as this is where children spend a large part of their day. Teachers hold immense power and influence in making school a place children love, shaping their daily learning experiences in ways that can either inspire or discourage. Recent educational research, including the OECD’s Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2021) and studies from Harvard and Cambridge universities on classroom climate and student motivation, points to three core responsibilities that teachers hold in nurturing children’s love of school:



1. Building Trusting Relationships that Inspire Curiosity and Participation

Children cannot truly learn or enjoy school if they are weighed down by fear, tension, threat, or ridicule. The teacher is responsible for creating a safe environment built on mutual respect, where every child feels seen, understood, and valued, their efforts are acknowledged, and they experience a sense of belonging. Students also need encouragement to ask questions and take risks without fearing punishment or mockery. Every contribution, no matter how simple or off-track, should be welcomed and appreciated by teachers, as this gradually breaks down fear and expands children's confidence and thinking.

Practical examples include greeting students with a smile, addressing them by name, or setting aside a minute at the start of class for one child to share something personal, like a hobby or small achievement. Teachers can also offer supportive notes during the week with messages such as, 'I loved how you helped your friend today,' or 'Your enthusiasm in class was wonderful.' Small gestures like these build trust and warmth, transforming the classroom into a second home.

2. Bringing Learning to Life: Connecting Lessons with Children's Real Experiences

Rote lecturing is dull and outdated, yet it still dominates many classrooms. Research shows that children learn best when lessons spark their natural curiosity and connect with their world. Teachers can bring learning to life by linking content to real stories and practical projects, shifting it from abstract information to hands-on experiences through group projects, field trips, or interactive activities. Such approaches improve retention and transform students into active participants rather than passive recipients in their learning.

3. Building a Genuine Partnership with Parents

Effective communication with parents is the cornerstone of building a strong, authentic partnership. Parents entrust their children to teachers and schools, making them true partners in their upbringing, education, and intellectual, emotional, social, and personal growth. Together, home and school form a team dedicated to nurturing the whole child.

Schools can strengthen this partnership by establishing and maintaining consistent communication channels. They can send weekly or monthly



newsletters via email or apps summarizing past and upcoming events and offer practical tips for supporting learning at home. Teachers can also make positive phone calls to share achievements, not only challenges, which helps build trust and pave the way for future collaboration.

In addition, schools can organize parent workshops on topics that interest them, such as using classroom technology, managing homework, or engaging in cultural and sports activities. When parents feel welcomed and included in the school community, their motivation and sense of belonging grow, making them more invested partners in their children's success.

Final Thoughts

Parents plant the seed of love for learning at home, and teachers nurture it daily in the classroom. When parental encouragement joins with teachers' efforts to create safe, joyful, and motivating environments, school transforms into a place of growth and discovery that children eagerly look forward to.

Let this be a new beginning: Shift your perspective on school, walk hand in hand with your child on their learning journey. Remember, even the smallest steps can spark significant change.

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