



# VERTUS WARRIORS

*As the Director of Student Culture at Vertus, I am often asked how to get students motivated. Even with all my research and experience I have not found the magic bullet or an easy solution. During these times of the coronavirus and shelter in place, structure and motivation are key. Due to the impact they will have on your student's graduation, the application of the states Regents waiver policy, and credit accumulation, I thought now would be a great time to share this article from James Lehman, MSW from [empoweringparents.com](http://empoweringparents.com), an amazing resource for families.*

## **Motivating the Unmotivated Child by James Lehman, MSW**

The important thing to remember is this: your child IS motivated. They're just motivated to resist you and others when they do not want to do something. The key is to learn how to turn their negative motivation into a positive one.

### **Lack of Motivation is a Form of Resistance**

When kids won't get out of bed, won't do their homework or school assignments, or won't get involved in activities, it's important for parents to realize that there *is* motivation in the child. But the motivation is to *resist*. The motivation is to do things their way, not yours. The motivation is to retain power.

When kids feel powerless, they try to feel powerful by withholding. A child or teenager who feels very powerless will stay in bed, not go to school, avoid homework, sit on the couch, and withhold overall involvement because it gives him a sense of being in control.

### **Kids Resist Because They Lack Problem-Solving Skills**

The child who uses resistance as a form of control lacks both social skills and problem-solving skills.

They don't have the social skills to know how to talk to other people, how to be friendly, and how to feel comfortable with themselves. Also, they don't have the problem-solving skills to figure out what people want from them, how to deal with other people's behavior, and how to meet expectations and demands.

These are basic skills we all have to learn in order to be successful as adults.

If continually resisting is how a child tries to solve problems, then parents will have a hard time until they teach the child how to solve problems appropriately.

The first step in teaching kids problem-solving skills is to understand that these kids are not helpless victims. Instead, they're simply trying to solve problems in an ineffective manner.

### **Don't Argue or Fight with Your Child About Motivation**

Very often these kids are motivated by the power struggle. They find different ways to have that struggle with their parents. The job of the parents, therefore, is to find other ways for the child to solve the problem that's causing the power struggle.

But if parents don't have those other ways then the power struggle continues with no end in sight.

If you're fighting day after day with a kid who won't get out of bed, you're never going to solve that problem. Because even if he gets out of bed then he won't brush his teeth. And even if he brushes his teeth then he won't comb his hair. Or he won't wear clean clothes, or he won't do his homework.

Understand that when you yell at your child for lack of motivation, you're giving their resisting behavior power. So don't yell. Don't argue. Don't give their resisting behavior power.

I understand that parents get frustrated—that's normal. And sometimes you will lose your calm, even when you know better.

The point I want to make here is that yelling and fighting won't solve the problem. If you're yelling and fighting over these issues, you're giving him more power in the struggle, and you don't want to do that. Here's what to do instead.

**Often it's important to stop and ask yourself this question, "What's my child's responsibility here? What's mine?" If your child isn't getting his work done, your job as a parent is to hold him accountable and teach him how the real world works. In the real world, if you don't finish your work, you won't get paid.**

**Be Clear, Calm, and Give Consequences for Your Child's Behavior.** Make the situation clear for the child. Use "I" words. Say the following:

- "I want you to get up out of bed and get ready for school."
- "I want you to do your homework now."

Then leave the bedroom. If the kid doesn't do it, then there should be consequences. There should be accountability.

If your child says, "I don't care about the consequences," ignore him. He will tell you he doesn't care just as a way to feel in control. Or, he may not care now, but as consequences get applied consistently, he will eventually see compliance as a better alternative to consequences.

Therefore, give consequences. And don't worry if the kid doesn't like it. You are not your child's friend, you're their parent.

**Give Effective Consequences.** Understanding what is and what is not an effective consequence is critical. The right consequences actually motivate your child to good behavior. They put you back in control and teach your child how to problem-solve, giving your child the skills needed to be a successful adult. Know that effective consequences are not punishments. Indeed, I say all the time that you can't punish your child into behaving better.

**Help him think about the future.** For a teenager, considering the future may involve figuring out what they are going to eat in the next 15 minutes. It can be difficult for them to envision what next year will bring or even what they want to accomplish after high school. Even though he may think he has it figured out, your son needs you to walk this road with him and assist him in planning for a meaningful and successful life. The truth is that he needs your help with this step, because his brain is still developing and building an orientation towards the future is a definite skill. But of course, keep it fun, because this step can easily become a lecture and a sure way for your son to tune you out.

**Use rewards carefully.** Students who possess intrinsic motivation take on activities because of the feelings of enjoyment and accomplishment they evoke. Students who possess extrinsic motivation perform to gain a reward or avoid a punishment. Students with extrinsic motivation will generally put out the minimal amount of effort to complete tasks in the easiest way possible. In addition, external motivation only exists as long as there is external compensation. In other words, extrinsic motivation is likely to result in limited progress that vanishes when the reward disappears. So be discerning when offering rewards for good work.