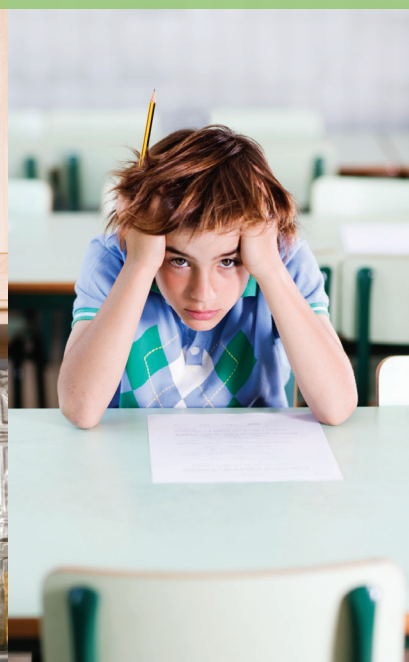




The IMPACT Parent's Guide to **Motivating Your Complex Kid**



Written by
**Diane Dempster &
Elaine Taylor-Klaus**

Do you find yourself asking...

“Why can’t my kid just (fill in the blank)?!?”

Pick your challenge:

- get out of bed in the morning
- get his/her homework done
- listen to me
- stop talking back
- get out the door on time

What if they really CAN’T just (*fill in the blank*)?

If you have a complex child, no doubt you’ve experienced the challenge and frustration of trying to get them motivated.

Perhaps they are “quirky” or “complicated,” they may or may not have a diagnosis (or few), and **they seem to march through life to the beat of their own drum.**

Whether they struggle with organization, emotional regulation, social issues or more (or all), **life for them just feels like it’s often more complicated than it is for others.**

This is especially true for people – kids and adults, alike – who struggle with challenges of Executive Function. They need to be genuinely engaged in order to take action.

Executive Functions are the parts of thinking, feeling and reasoning that help us get things done and manage ourselves.

They are often known as the “orchestra conductors” of the brain.

For people who have no real challenges with Executive Function, it can be difficult to understand why people “can’t just” do what is expected of them. **It seems like it should be pretty simple.**

The brain is wired to take action, so when faced with something that we really don’t want to do, many of us simply press our imaginary “just get it done” button, and voila! We are able to make it happen.

In complex brains, the challenge is that the “just get it done” button has a glass box around it!

They can see it, but have a very hard time accessing it. For brains that are not wired for initiating action or self-management, **the presence of a motivator is essential.**

Motivation fuels the brain’s pathways so that people with challenges of Executive Function (like ADHD or Anxiety, for example) can get things done!



MOTIVATORS HELP GET THINGS DONE

You can help your complex kid find motivation in 3 easy steps:

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

Figure out what motivates your child.

Most complex kids respond favorably to positive consequences (focus on the carrot, not the stick).

While punishment might get immediate results in the short-term, when we constantly use avoidance of punishment as our child's primary motivator, it exhausts our kids, our relationships and us.

There are five things that motivate the complex brain, though not everyone is motivated by all of them. You can remember it with PINCH:

1. **Play:** use humor or creativity to inspire ownership and participation
2. **Interest:** notice when a compelling teacher or subject of interest improves performance
3. **Novelty:** take advantage of fresh starts, like the beginning of a school year
4. **Competition:** use racing and challenges (within reason) to inspire engagement
5. **Hurry Up (Urgency):** deadlines and 'the last minute' can get things done (in moderation)

Set some time aside to explore with your children and come up with a list of motivators, based on PINCH:

- What activities do they like?
- What do they do in their free time?
- What are their favorite TV shows or movies?

Motivators don't have to be big, and they don't have to cost money.

Younger kids could be motivated by having story time with mom before bed, or choosing a favorite dessert; older kids may be motivated by choosing the radio station on the way to school.

You can also turn things that are already a privilege for your kids into a motivator.

If your kids get an hour of screen time a night, you could make it conditional instead of automatic. For example, if they are downstairs by 7:20 a.m., they get 30 minutes that night; if they get out of the house by 7:45 a.m., they get 30 more minutes.

STEP 2: INCORPORATE

Use motivators to help your children be more successful in accomplishing their goals.

Once you understand their motivators, begin to use them when you notice your child getting stuck.

For example, you might say, "I notice you're having a hard time getting started on cleaning your room. Would you like some help getting motivated? What if you set a goal to focus on cleaning for a solid 20 minutes? Then we can take a break and celebrate with a 10 minute dance party."

Or you might say, "I can see that you're having a hard time getting started on your homework. Is there anything you're looking forward to doing tonight that will encourage you to get going? Maybe we can play a game or read together when you're done. What do you think - does that sound like a good motivation to get started?"

Or it's possible you might use your understanding to connect your child to what's important to her. "I know you said you wanted to make something for your new friend, but it seems like you don't know what to choose. Would you like some help making a decision? What is important to you about making something for her? What kinds of things does she like? Can you think of something that you both have in common that might get you started?"



STEP 3: EMPOWER

Shift the responsibility for motivation from you to your child.

Motivation is a powerful tool.

Since we know that complex brains need to be motivated in order to maintain focus, the goal is to begin to transfer that awareness to our kids. It is all the more powerful for them – and liberating for us! -- when our kids begin to understand the concept and create tools to help themselves.

When kids get clear on their own motivation for doing anything, they can get tasks done in the short-term, and learn a powerful self-management tool that will support them throughout their lives.

Here's what it might look like:

Mom: "Son, you look like you've lost focus. What do you need to do to get back on task?"

Son: "I need a motivator! When I'm done, I think tonight I'll get ... a bowl of ice-cream" or "some extra time on my games" or "read the comics!"

We want our kids to learn to create incentives for themselves. When it works well, they learn to take care of their responsibilities -- and can even finish their homework in record speed.



HOW TO GET STARTED

Educate your kids about how their challenges show up as early as you can, using terms they understand.

For example, you might say: "Honey, did you notice how fast you were able to clean your room when you knew that your favorite show is starting in 15 minutes? Your brain definitely focuses well when there is something you really want waiting at the other end. We'll have to remember that next time you're having a hard time staying on track."

It might be helpful to share some information with them about your own motivators, as well.

They need to understand that we all need to motivate ourselves sometimes – it's not just a complex brain thing!

Finally, instead of telling them what to do, encourage them to pull from a "tool-box" of tricks that you have both learned.

Take the results of the brainstorm you did earlier and create a list or a "box" of ideas that they can refer to if they need a motivator.

At the end of the day, when our kids CAN'T *just get things done*, it's (usually) not that they are lazy, inconsiderate, or disrespectful. It is simply a side effect of their executive function challenges.

Teach them about motivators and get things moving!



QUICK TIPS FOR MASTERING MOTIVATION

- 1 Know what motivates your child**
Does your child respond better to the carrot or the stick?
Explore with your child to identify what might work well as a reward.
- 2 Allow natural consequences**
Sometimes you have to let the chips fall where they may, which lets you show compassion without being “the bad guy.”
- 3 Make it easy for you**
Always choose a reward or consequence that is simple for you to administer – don’t make it a punishment for you, or too hard to manage!
- 4 Be clear & specific**
Make sure they know exactly what is expected of them, when, and how.
Don’t be afraid to get really specific on details.
- 5 Make motivators timely**
Rewards or consequences should be “soon.”
Even waiting for the weekend can be too long for some kids.
- 6 Give credit for trying**
Sometimes our kids have a hard time getting to the finish line.
Create motivators for good effort and little successes along the way.
- 7 Have them set the motivators**
If your child is having a hard time getting something done, help him or her figure out the motivation and reward for staying on track. Less work for you!



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



As the mothers of 6 complex kids between their families, Elaine and Diane saw that there was a critical need for training, coaching and support for parents.

They co-founded ImpactADHD® in 2011 to meet those needs, starting with the ADHD community and expanding quickly to support parents of children with a wide range of complex needs. Their blog has been award-winning for several years running.

Their mission is to make excellent resources accessible – online and on the phone – to effectively and affordably support parents.

Authors of *Parenting ADHD Now!*, Diane and Elaine are passionate about empowering parents to more confidently and effectively raise complex children by using a coach-approach and the IMPACT Parenting Model. Their signature parent management program, Sanity School™, is licensed internationally and was recognized by CHADD as an Innovative Program in 2017.

They volunteer nationally and locally for medical and coaching organizations, including CHADD (Children and Adults with ADHD) and the International Coach Federation (ICF), and have served professionally as parent advisor for the American Academy of Pediatrics and parenting expert for Pfizer's Making Moments campaign. They present workshops globally for international conferences and local organizations.

Diane and Elaine give a voice to parents of complex kids around the world.



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