

Some Child Development Characteristics Related to Lack of Engagement or Motivation		
Grade	Characteristic	Influences on engagement
2nd (ages 6–8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't like taking risks or making mistakes • Sometimes inward-looking and moody • Very concerned about finished product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May avoid assignments for fear of making mistakes • View certain tasks or assignments as impossible and quickly give up on them
4th (ages 8–10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complain frequently • Critical of self and others, including adults • Often worried or anxious • Can be sullen, moody, and negative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May find fault with assignments or be skeptical of why they should do them • May worry about making mistakes on assignments and thus avoid them • Question teacher's authority to give assignments or whether assignments are meaningful or relevant
6th (ages 10–12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be inward-looking and moody • Like to challenge rules and test limits • Enjoy arguing and debating • Worry about who's "in" and who's "out" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to see what will happen if they refuse to do certain work • Trying to connect socially with classmates who, at least outwardly, view academics negatively

You may encounter students at any grade or age who lack motivation. But if you teach at the grade levels listed in the table, be especially alert for how developmental characteristics might be further diminishing students' engagement.

Talking With Parents About Lack of Motivation

Instead of this	Try this
<p>“Nick just doesn’t get much work done. Does he normally have trouble with motivation?”</p>	<p>“Nick sometimes struggles with starting and finishing his assignments. I’d like to see him be more engaged with his work. I’ll share what I’ve been trying and I’d also like to hear any ideas you have.”</p>
<p>“I have been working so hard to get Andrea to care more about her work. She does the bare minimum—just enough to get by.”</p>	<p>“When Andrea is interested, her work really shows her talents. For instance, her poems were very moving. Often, however, she works too fast and doesn’t reach that same level of quality. When we researched a famous leader, she found two facts right away, and then said she was done. How does this compare with what you experience at home?”</p>
<p>“Lana seems to just want to socialize with her classmates. Schoolwork really doesn’t interest her.”</p>	<p>“I’m hoping to share with you what we’ve been doing to help Lana be as excited about the academic parts of our day as she is about the social aspects.”</p>

Some Child Development Characteristics Related to Listening Struggles		
Grade	Characteristic	Influence on listening
Kindergarten (ages 4–6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to move regularly • Learn best through concrete experiences • Tend to verbalize as they think 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to sit for long stretches in whole-group settings • Need to talk more to process what they're learning • Need hands-on activities to break up "sit-and-listen" times
1st (ages 5–7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tire easily • Need to move a lot • Very social; concerned with social issues • Very verbal; like to explain things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more chances to move • More concerned with social issues than academics • Need to process what they're learning by talking
3rd (ages 7–9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very social; concerned with social issues • Like to talk; full of ideas • Experiencing a growth spurt; need physical movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could use more time to connect with friends, even around academics • Need more chances to talk to process learning • Need more chances to move
5th (ages 9–11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing large muscle growth spurt; need physical movement • Very social • Expressive; talkative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need more frequent opportunities to stretch, change position, and be active • Need more time with friends • May need more time to talk or to verbally process learning

Communicating With Parents	
Instead of	Try
<p>Using general language • “Sean can’t seem to listen or pay attention. No matter what we’re doing, he seems off in another world.”</p>	<p>Giving specific details • “At times in our whole-group discussions, Sean plays with his pencils and eraser and doesn’t look at the person speaking. At other times, he talks when others are talking.”</p>
<p>Expressing defeat • “Lucinda is such a chatterbox. She can’t stop talking no matter what I do.”</p>	<p>Naming the proactive steps you’re taking • “Each lesson, I make sure all students have a chance to interact as much as possible, and I don’t expect total silence during work times. I’ve also been working with Lucinda to help her channel her outgoing nature in productive ways.”</p>
<p>Being judgmental • “Aisha bothers her classmates with her interrupting and fidgeting. No one wants to work with her.”</p>	<p>Describing objectively • “Sometimes Aisha doesn’t listen to directions and then interrupts her classmates to see what she missed. Other times, she distracts them when they’re working and they get frustrated with her. This is what I’m working with Aisha on . . .”</p>
<p>Shifting responsibility to the parent • “I need you to talk with Bryan about listening and how important it is at school.”</p>	<p>Being partners • “I would like to share with you some strategies I’m using to help Bryan develop stronger listening skills. If you have ideas, I’d like to hear those, too.”</p>