

Independent Learning Newsletter Tips

Carrot or Stick?

Are you a 'carrot' or a 'stick' person?

Knowing whether you are motivated by avoiding pain and the pressure of consequences or by achieving pleasure and rewards can help you (and your parents) work out the best way for you to be motivated to do your work for school.

The concept comes from the idea that to make a donkey move forward you can either tempt it with a carrot (a reward) or threaten it with a stick (a punishment). Now we are not saying that you are a donkey! But we are saying that different things motivate different people.

You are likely to be more of a 'carrot' person if you:

- tend to be focused on achieving goals
- make lots of plans and lists for yourself
- find the concepts of rewards and prizes very motivating
- often have a clear picture of what you want to achieve

You are likely to be more of a 'stick' person if you:

- tend to leave things to the last minute
- put off unpleasant tasks
- prefer to do things when you 'feel' like it rather than when you plan it
- like the idea of rewards but aren't keen on doing the work to achieve them

If you are a 'carrot' person, you can get yourself motivated to do the work by breaking down the task, setting targets and goals and making plans. The thought of getting a good mark or achieving a prize is very motivating for you. Your parents can motivate you further by offering rewards for achievements!

If you are a 'stick' person, you find it harder to get yourself motivated to do the work. You are more likely to work when you focus on the consequences of NOT working. When you are putting things off, spend a minute or so brainstorming all of the outcomes if you do not get started on the work. Then decide the first 3 most important things for you to do. Don't worry about the rest at this stage, just focus on the top 3. For parents of 'stick' children, these students may often require more micromanagement.

Students may need help in determining what they are going to work on, and parents may need to then check in every half hour or so to ensure students are staying on task. These students will be more motivated by negative consequences such as removal of technology or other privileges if outlined working conditions are not met. However it is a good idea to always balance the introduction of consequences for not doing the work with rewards for doing it! This may not be the driving force for their motivation, but positive reinforcement for doing the right thing can lead to really good outcomes.

For students who get frustrated with themselves being 'stick' people and leaving things until the last minute, you can start to move towards becoming more of a 'carrot' person. Identify some of your 'carrot' friends, and start to model their behaviour. Ask if you can plan the work together and check in regularly with each so you stay on track. It is possible to switch from one modality to another! However no one can make you do it, you need to want to change and then you need to work towards switching your mindset.