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How to Get Your Child's Learning Mojo Back

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This year of fear has resulted in many students feeling anxious, isolated & has left too many of them feeling overly-reliant on screens & under-motivated for learning.

Even those students who have thrived during these uncertain times have been on heightened alert status all year long (as have their parents). It is time to heal those wounds.

Compassion & love are our oldest medicines. Add to this, hope & connectedness & we have the 4 most powerful ingredients for healing.

Starting with Heart

It is time to rebuild self-belief. Most young people develop this by having parents & teachers who believe in them & value their contribution. This is not the time for pep-talks, rev-ups & restrictions. Yelling & arguing are counter-productive.

Even though it has been a frustrating time & most of our plans have been thwarted, the antidote is not in adding more anxiety or coercion. We need to play the 'long-game' by increasing kindness & understanding.

We also need to accept that some young people have been feeling so lonely & shell-shocked that our initial acts of kindness may not always be reciprocated. A slow & patient rebuild that creates trust & certainty is more likely to have enduring positive effects.

Re-building Connections

After an extended time away from others, some students may feel anxious about re-connecting. Many of their friendships are based on currency- they are familiar with being up to date with the latest goss & being in almost constant contact with one another. After an extended break, some will feel worried & cautious. Some will avoid their friends rather than exposing themselves to a feared rejection.

Link them into existing friendship groups before school goes back, if you can. Chat rooms, student groups, playing multi-player games or just texting a few classmates may ease some of the apprehension.

Emphasize the idea that everyone has been through similar experiences. A special type of belonging is forged between people who share tough times.

The connections that need to be rebuilt are not only social, they are also intellectual. There has been a lot of coverage focusing on students falling behind & almost none on the gains made from home-based learning.

Help your student reacquaint him or herself with how they are smart & how to get smarter by completing the analysis and plan at www.mylearningstrengths.com. The full report outlines a Learning Success Plan & links their strengths to potential career areas.

Not all learning occurs at school. Consider developing a home-based passion project linked to their learning strengths & interests.

Increase the amount of conversational time in the family. If family meals have been intruded upon or avoided, re-establish them & insist that they remain device-free.

In some cases resuming an interesting conversation with a reluctant child or teen will be a slog. Expect mono-syllabic replies for a while. Despite all appearances to the contrary, there is more going on in their minds than they are showing you.

Re-kindling Hope

Hope is the birthplace of possibility. It is more than idle wish-making, it can become a creative act. The time for innovation is now. This is the time for young people to have a say in creating a better world.

Times of challenge accelerate change. Every crisis conceals an opportunity. There seems little doubt that the pandemic has highlighted shortcomings in our planning as well as our care of particular groups in our society. This is the time to have conversations about creating a cleaner, greener, kinder world.

By engaging children & young people in conversations about what sort of world we want for our future, we help them build a future story for themselves.

Re-igniting Action

Many of us have survived this time through a combination of distraction & diversion, mostly involving screens. For some of us, it has been a time of passive inactivity.

The problem is the less young people do, the less they feel like doing. The reason is the build-up of stress hormones such as cortisol & adrenaline are not being dispersed by physical exercise. This can lead to lowered mood, motivation & feelings of exhaustion.

Activating a grumpy sloth-like kid can be quite a challenge, so start gently. We need to guide them over the energy hump of inertia and back to a more engaged relationship with the world. Walks, bike rides, Wii-fit, shooting hoops, indoor badminton, table tennis, learning skateboard moves- basically anything involving movement.

The lessening of screen time also needs to be done delicately. Please read my accompanying paper, *'How to Wean Your Teen From The Screen'* if this has been an issue in your family.

It will take some persistence on your part to inspire your child or teen back into the world of learning & achievement. You are your child's circuit breaker- be gentle but don't give up.

Stay in touch with Andrew and receive updates-

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www.andrewfuller.com.au
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Books for Parents

'Tricky Behaviours'
'Unlocking Your Child's Genius'
(www.badapplepress.com.au)

Book for Teachers

'Neurodevelopmental Differentiation- Optimising Brain Systems To Maximise Learning' (Hawker-Brownlow).

