Reluctant learners can be successful in school
How parents can help

For parents of students in grades 4-6

Reluctant learners often “appear” in junior classrooms. The increase in more traditional learning tasks, the growing importance of peers, and the increased expectation for self-directed learning can often expose the lack of confidence and self-efficacy in students at this age, making learning a sudden struggle for students, parents and teachers alike.

What is Self-Efficacy?

The belief that you can accomplish and be successful at meaningful tasks.

Myths and truths about reluctant learners

Myth: Reluctant learners are defiant and act out.
Truth: Reluctant learners are often overlooked early on. They tend to be disengaged, avoid challenges, not complete tasks, and are satisfied to just “get by”.

Myth: Reluctant learners have learning disabilities.
Truth: Although being reluctant can often be a signal that there may be a learning difficulty, these students usually have the skills and knowledge needed to achieve, but lack the motivation.

Myth: Reluctant learners are lazy.
Truth: Reluctant learners are often discouraged, lack confidence in their abilities, and feel disconnected from their work or their teacher, resulting in the appearance of laziness.

Learning styles may help

Schooling is designed to supports students who are linguistic and logical-mathematical learners, but other learning styles are often less-recognized, particularly as students move into upper grades. Knowledge of your child’s learning style may help them, you and their teacher identify ways to help them connect with tasks. Dr. Howard Gardner (1983), a well-known professor at Harvard University, identified 8 broad types of intelligences:

- **Linguistic intelligence** ("word smart")
- **Musical intelligence** ("music smart")
- **Spatial intelligence** ("picture smart")
- **Interpersonal intelligence** ("people smart")
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence** ("body smart")
- **Intrapersonal intelligence** ("self smart")
- **Logical-mathematical intelligence** ("number/reasoning smart")
- **Naturalist intelligence** ("nature smart")

Parents play an important role in supporting their child’s learning at home. Here are some tips to help your reluctant learner succeed in school:

**Make learning a priority**
- Make sure attendance is regular and on time.
- Set a regular time for homework, and insist that it take priority over TV or video games.
- Support school functions such as open houses, parent-teacher nights, portfolio parties and special concerts or events.
- Encourage your child to get involved in extracurricular activities.
- Show a positive attitude towards school.
- Talk about school every day.
- Build learning into family activities—have your child keep a journal, write a report or a news article about family events, outings or trips.

**Develop positive relationships**
- Stay in regular contact with your child’s teacher, and tell them about what is going on in your child’s life outside of school, so that they can build connections.
- Encourage your child to talk to their teacher, or another adult at school, about things that interest them.
- When there is choice in assignments, assist your child in choosing topics or formats that they will enjoy & that will use their strengths.
- Separate effort from achievement – help your child recognize the value of their personal best efforts.
- Keep reading to your child.

**Give them the tools they need**
- Insist on a healthy breakfast and lunch each day, including healthy snacks to boost brain power throughout the day.
- Be consistent about a bedtime that is appropriate for your child.
- Encourage physical activity each day by having your child participate in sports or lessons, or simply by having them play outside with friends.
- Help your child to make connections between what they are learning in school and real world applications.
- Encourage your child to ask questions about complicated topics or current events.

**Be in the know**
- Check out the curriculum for your child’s grade level (available as PDF files at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum).
- Ask your child’s teacher about major topics, especially in science & social studies.
- Borrow a copy of the math text your child is using, and ask the teacher how their math program is structured (ie. homework, classwork, extra practice, etc.).
- Use your child’s agenda to communicate with their teacher – ask questions, check for homework tips, etc.
- Attend school council meetings if possible.

**TRY THIS …**

“The One Best Thing”

First chance you get to see your child after school each day, ask them what the one best thing about their day was. It can be anything, from “Amala played with me at recess”, to “I learned a trick for how to multiply by nine” to “My teacher said my story was amazing”. It gets them really thinking about their day, teaches them to focus on the positives, and often, “one best thing” turns into many!

*This tip sheet was originally prepared by Emily Hastings-Speck, Teacher.*