

How to motivate older kids without using rewards, punishment or fear. (No, really.)

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Bo Burnham's movie "Eighth Grade" brilliantly captures the challenges facing tweens and teens. Kids at that age are experiencing a complicated and often awkward time of self-discovery and growth. They are concerned with their identity and sense of self, yet much of what they see and experience can thwart their confidence and ability to make healthy, safe choices. It's our job as parents and educators to help them develop those skills, but it's not always clear how to do that effectively. It can be tempting to use rewards, threats or even fear to motivate kids, but years of research have concluded that while those things [may work in the short term, they typically backfire](#) in developing the intrinsic motivation kids need to make good choices.

Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's self-determination theory looks at what motivates people in [making choices](#). The theory assumes that humans are naturally curious to learn and develop knowledge, and it considers autonomy (a sense of control over learning), competence (an ability to handle challenging tasks) and relatedness (feeling a sense of belonging) to be key building blocks in developing an internal motivation to do the right thing.