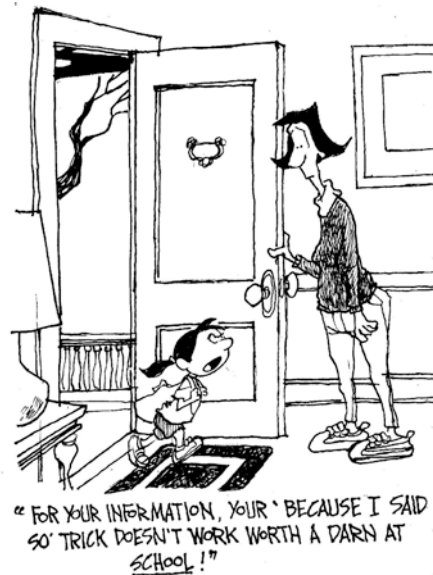


## Curiosity Questions: Motivational

*Any authority that is not spontaneously recognized, but has to be forced upon us, is a sham; true authority and discipline come from within.*

Alfred Adler<sup>1</sup>



Bill Schorr

The *Curiosity Questions: Motivational* tool is different from the *Curiosity Questions: Conversational* tool (Page XX). The latter invites conversation. By listening to the responses to your questions, you can *get into the child's world* to gain an understanding of the beliefs that may be fueling the behavior.

This tool is designed to motivate students without conversation—for the simple reason that they have been respectfully asked a question that invites them to think and to come up with

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature*, 1927

an answer from their inner knowing. As Adler's quote at the beginning of this chapter states, motivational questions help students develop discipline from within.

The cartoon teaches us so much about the psychology of motivation. How do you feel and what do you want to do when someone demands something of you? Do you feel respected? Do you feel motivated to cooperate? Or do you feel like rebelling? On the other hand, how do you feel and what do you want to do when someone respectfully asks you a question? Are you motivated to think about it and maybe even cooperate?

Actually, physiology (as well as psychology) is involved. When someone makes a demand of you, notice that your body stiffens a little (or a lot) and the message that goes to the brain is, "Resist." When someone respectfully asks a question, your body relaxes and the message that goes to the brain is, "Search for an answer." While searching for an answer you feel capable, connected, and more inclined toward cooperation. Just as you might feel more motivated to cooperate with someone who respectfully asks you a question, children might feel the same.

Caution. Note that the tool recommends "curiosity" questions, not "compliance" questions. Some teachers are disappointed when their curiosity question doesn't "work." Need we say again that there isn't any tool that works with every student every time—this is the reason we need so many tools. Still, let's take a look at why sometimes curiosity questions may not work.

- 1) Perhaps there hasn't been sufficient training for the student to know what is expected and how to accomplish it.
- 2) Perhaps you haven't taken time to create the *connection* before *correction*. One way to accomplish connection is through the tool of *validating feelings*: "I know you are angry. What could you do to calm down before focusing on a solution?"

3) Could it be that your *tone of voice* implied *compliance* instead of *invitation*?

Simple motivational questions often invite students to use their personal power to search for answers instead of using energy to push back when told what to do. You will find several examples in the Tool Tips below:

### **Tool in Action from Atlanta, Georgia**

I have a success story to share about asking questions instead of engaging in power struggles. We were outside at an exercise break, and I have a couple of students who are always late coming inside because they continue to throw the balls and play. I said, "I noticed everyone else is by the door, ready to come in, and you are still on the soccer field."

They said, "Eh, we'll be fine."

Normally, I would want to get in a power struggle and tell them to move faster, but instead, I said, "What needs to happen for us to be on time?"

As they got to the end of the field, they started running and got to the door on time for class. It was so nice to let them make the decision and to watch them make a good decision!

I have also noticed a change in my math group overall--they are often ready for class now without discussing it all, and today one of them asked the others, "Are you ready to begin?" Do you have your materials?" while they were chatting getting ready for class.

*Elise Albrecht, 5th Grade Teacher, The Howard School*

### **Tool in Action from Atlanta, Georgia**

I'm off to a good start with applying *Positive Discipline* principles. For example, I have one student in my Geometry class who I've always been telling, "Come on, let's get to work. We've got 20 minutes left of class," while he sits in front of a blank piece of paper.

By adjusting my language from telling statements to questioning statements, he has really turned things around. Now I'll ask him, "What's your plan to finish your classwork in the next 20 minutes?" or "What resources do you need from me to ....?"

At first he looked at me like my head was spinning around, but he quickly got to the point of realizing that he is in control of his actions. This change has sparked a whole conversation on being present and mindful in class; and he is actually working with our school counselor now on practicing mindfulness techniques.

When the ball was in his court to justify to himself why he wasn't getting his work done he finally admitted that he wants to work but get's spaced out and can't stop thinking about all the stuff that he has to do later in the day. His real challenge has always been that he has trouble being present and mindful, but it always looked like he was just being lazy or defiant.

*Bryan Schomaker, MAT, Lead High School Math Teacher, The Howard School*

### **Tool Tips:**

1. Simple motivation questions invite students to search for answers.
2. Avoid commands (telling) that invite resistance and rebellion, and ask questions that invite feelings of capability and cooperation. **Examples:**

- What is your plan for finishing your work by the end of class today?
- What do you need to take so you won't be cold outside during recess?
- How can you and your friend solve this problem together?
- What did we decide in our class meeting to do when this happens?
- What is your plan for getting your desk in order before we leave for the day?

3. See "Curiosity Questions Conversational" tool.

**What The Research Says:**

Dr. Dan Siegel, a psychiatrist well known for his work in Interpersonal Neurobiology, reports neuroscience research that supports Positive Discipline Tools. For example, Siegel and Bryson<sup>2</sup> recommend using asking statements rather than telling statements during times of conflict to avoid power struggles. Asking invites constructive problem solving rather than “telling statements” that increase biochemical stress response (which may look like rebellion or withdrawal) .. Siegel and Bryson describe how asking works to integrate the “upstairs” brain, and telling activates the “downstairs” brain. Asking questions invites the upstairs brain to engage in processing choice and planning. This choice is optimal compared to triggering the “downstairs” brain and its reactivity. Siegel and Bryson report that when we facilitate thinking, there is a decrease in stress levels and emotional reactivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Siegel & Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies for Nurturing Your Child's Developing Mind*.