

The Motivator Molecule

Boosting Dopamine in Constructive Ways

Nowadays it seems that children are only interested in their video games, smart phones, and social media platforms. Parents are frustrated with their children's lack of motivation for and attention to other activities that they are at a loss as to what to do. Therefore, parents often respond by taking devices away and punishing their children. And although this seems like the right approach, it can reduce motivation even more. To truly change children's behaviors, parents need to understand how to boost dopamine in natural and more positive ways so that children will be propelled into more constructive actions.

When dopamine levels are low, symptoms such as difficulty focusing, and decreased motivation can result, so simply removing devices is not helpful. Dopamine is often referred to as the "motivator molecule" because it causes us to seek out things that produce good feelings. Devices and apps give children an influx of this, so they continue their screen time to keep the boost going. The neural circuitry targeted by varying apps is the same as casinos have been using for years with slot machines. The anticipation of a reward is what keeps us coming back for more. The remarkable factor about dopamine, however, is that it can help modify behavior in a positive way as well. The good feelings that dopamine produces creates motivation, so we can also learn and retain information better.

When given the proper channels, dopamine levels can be boosted, and children can benefit from an increase in more positive goal-directed behaviors. To help enhance dopamine levels naturally, parents can make sure children get adequate sleep and avoid processed foods, sugar, and caffeine. In addition, making sure that children get daily physical exercise is essential. The key to this, however, is to make sure children find activities that are enjoyable to them. By immersing children in an environment that generates a flood of dopamine in more productive ways, children will form more constructive habits, and learning will be supported.

The progressive methods of the **SKILLZ** Child Development Centers were created with the **brain** in mind. By implementing **techniques** in class that trigger students' dopamine systems, the "dopamine-seeking reward loop" initiates. This generates neural pathways that open students' motivation to learn and helps them retain knowledge. This **game-based** learning approach along with applying **Teaching SKILLZ** such as trickery and intrinsic motivation, keep students engaged and having fun. In addition, students are given **skill stripes** at the end of each class so the anticipation throughout keeps them extrinsically motivated as well. Parents are then able to implement these types of systems at home to reinforce these behaviors even more.

An essential element to increasing children's dopamine levels naturally is knowledge. When **parents** and other adults in a child's life are familiar with the reward pathways of the brain, they can ensure that children get dopamine boosts in the best way possible. By reinforcing the relationship between wanted behaviors and a "feel-good" reward, parents can be confident that children will be more focused, listen better, and be motivated to do their best.