



M is for Motivation

AARMA Principle #4 – Tiny Wins build big change!

The fourth AARMA Superpower is **Motivation** — the energy that gets us started and keeps us going!

Motivation

Motivation is not just about willpower; it's about brain wiring. Every time a child takes action, achieves a small goal, or feels proud of their progress, their brain releases **dopamine** — the feel-good chemical that drives curiosity, persistence, and learning.

That's why success isn't built in giant leaps; it's built in **tiny wins** that tell the brain, "*This feels good — do it again!*"

The science

The brain loves progress. Dopamine acts like a spark plug — it fires up motivation whenever we experience movement toward a goal.

But here's the catch: the brain releases more dopamine for *progress* than for *perfection*. That means kids (and adults!) are most motivated when goals feel achievable, clear, and rewarding and we can see ourselves getting closer to them.

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Driven by purpose

Big, overwhelming goals can make the Guard Dog Brain bark — "Too hard! Too risky!" — and shut motivation down. Small, step-by-step goals keep the Wise Handler in charge, building confidence through repeated success.

Motivation grows when kids experience both **autonomy** (a sense of choice) and **competence** (a sense of success). The sweet spot is when effort feels meaningful, progress feels visible, and someone notices along the way.

Classroom (or home) activity

Primary (little humans): Create a daily "*Three Wins Chart*." Students record three small wins — things they tried, helped with, or improved at. Discuss how those tiny wins add up and how focusing on small wins helps us to be even more motivated.

Secondary (medium humans): Challenge students to pick **one small step** toward a bigger goal. Track progress for a week, then reflect: *What helped me keep going? What got in the way?* End with a celebration — because brains love rewards.

Our job as big humans



Our job is to make motivation feel safe, do-able, and rewarding. Here's how:

Shrink the step. Break tasks into small, visible wins so the brain sees progress quickly.

Notice effort. "I love how you kept trying, even when it got hard."

Connect to purpose. "What is important to you about achieving this? Who and how will it help?"

Avoid fear-based motivation. Threat might get short-term results, but it kills curiosity and courage.

Model momentum. Talk about your own small wins — "I didn't feel like exercising, but I started with five minutes, and it worked."

When kids see adults celebrating **persistence over perfection**, their brains learn that effort equals growth — not failure.

Tips for educators, parents and carers

- Make success visible — use progress charts, "streak" trackers, or celebration walls.
- Replace "Did you finish?" with "What progress did you make?"
- Encourage self-set goals — autonomy increases engagement.
- Praise persistence: "You didn't give up — that's real motivation."
- Share stories of setbacks — they teach that failure is part of learning, not the end of it.

Helping our Little Humans grow into BETTER Big Humans!



Book a chat with us



Email us at info@better-me-project.com

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