

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation is the need or desire to attain certain standards of excellence ([page 359](#)).

Those high in achievement motivation (on the average)

- set challenging, but attainable goals*,
- have a lower fear of failure*
- sit closer to the front of the classroom,
- score higher on exams,
- obtain better grades in courses relevant to their career goals, and
- more realistic about their career goals.

Those low in achievement motivation (on the average)

- set extremely easy or impossibly high goals* ([page 359](#)).
- have a higher fear of failure*

Four factors affect your ability to achieve long-term goals

1. the goals themselves
2. your sense of self-efficacy
3. your ability to delay gratification
4. grit

*this may be inconsistent with your schema and may require extra effort to remember.

Achievement Motivation: Good Goals

Good goals should not be overly difficult. Goals that are too easy or too hard may undermine your motivation to pursue them. Your goals should

- describe what you will do--not what you won't do,
 - I will wake up to go to class on time, not I won't sleep in
 - I will save money, not I won't spend too much money
 - I will eat healthier, not I won't eat junk food.
- have a doable implementation plan. Make a specific plan for turning your goals into reality. Specify where, when and how you will carry out the intended behavior.
 - I will go to bed at 10:00, turn off all electronic equipment by 9:00.
- be specific enough so you can assess whether you have met your goals or not.
 - I will wake up on time or go to bed earlier is a bit too general to be assessed.
 - I will study 2 hours a day is more specific than I will study more.

Your task:

1. Identify a behavior you wish to change.

What do you want?

2. Describe a GOOD specific goal intention or behavior.
3. Describe the same goal intention in a POOR manner.

How are you going to achieve it (what is the plan)?

4. Describe a GOOD implementation intention.
5. Describe the same implementation intention in a POOR manner.

I wish to have a healthier lifestyle

	Good	Poor
Goal Intention	<p>I want to walk 30 minutes a day</p> <p>I will eat more fruits and vegetables</p>	<p>I want to exercise more</p> <p>I want to avoid fast food</p>
Implementation Intention	<p>I want to walk 30 minutes a day on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday after dinner</p> <p>I will buy a sprig of broccoli, bananas and carrots when I go to the store to eat for dinner</p>	<p>I want to exercise more during the week</p> <p>I will eat healthier food</p>

Goals and Skill Level

Generally, good goals are set slightly above our skill level. However, in order to properly set our goals, we need to know what our skill level is. To gauge our skill level is, we need to practice the skill and get feedback.

Your actual skill level	Your belief about your skill level	
10 →	◀ You believe you are more skilled than you actual are	<u>Poor metacognition:</u> You are less likely to practice, seek feedback, and learn
8-9 →	◀ An appropriate belief about your skills	Healthy beliefs
6-7 →	◀ Your belief matches your skill level	Good metacognition
4-5 →		
2-3 →	◀ You believe you are less skilled than you actual are	<u>Poor metacognition:</u> You are less likely to persist in the face of difficulties
1 →		

Achievement Motivation: Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the expectation that your efforts will lead to success.

If you have an optimistic sense of self-efficacy, you will approach a difficult task as a challenge to be mastered. This sense of self-efficacy needs to be realistic and based on actual accomplishments and not based only on positive self-talk.

- To strengthen your sense of self-efficacy, you need to experience success at moderately challenging tasks.

In these tasks, you should

- Strive for progressive (gradual) improvement rather than perfection on the first attempt. Perfection is a road, not a destination.
- Not succeeding on the first attempt is seen as a learning experience, not a failure of character.
- Understand that setbacks serve a useful purpose in teaching us that success requires sustained effort (because we tend to hear about a person's "success" story, but not the failures, we overestimate the likelihood of success-- _____ heuristic).



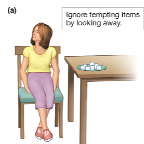
- When struggling, seeking help or a "teacher" to provide you with guidance about where you are successful and where you are struggling.
- Getting feedback on your performance lets you know how you are progressing and where you aren't quite there yet.
- Related to previous topics,
 - strategies to improve your memory
 - problem solving strategies
 - avoiding errors and biases in reasoning and decision-making

Achievement Motivation: Ability to Delay Gratification

One common problem to achieving our long-term goals is focusing on working toward them and not being distracting by more immediate activities.

Children were offered

1. a smaller amount preferred food (one marshmallows) now or
2. offered a larger amount of preferred food in a few minutes (two marshmallows) was used to measure their ability to delay gratification.



Some strategies to delay gratification were to ignore the tempting items or use self-distraction.

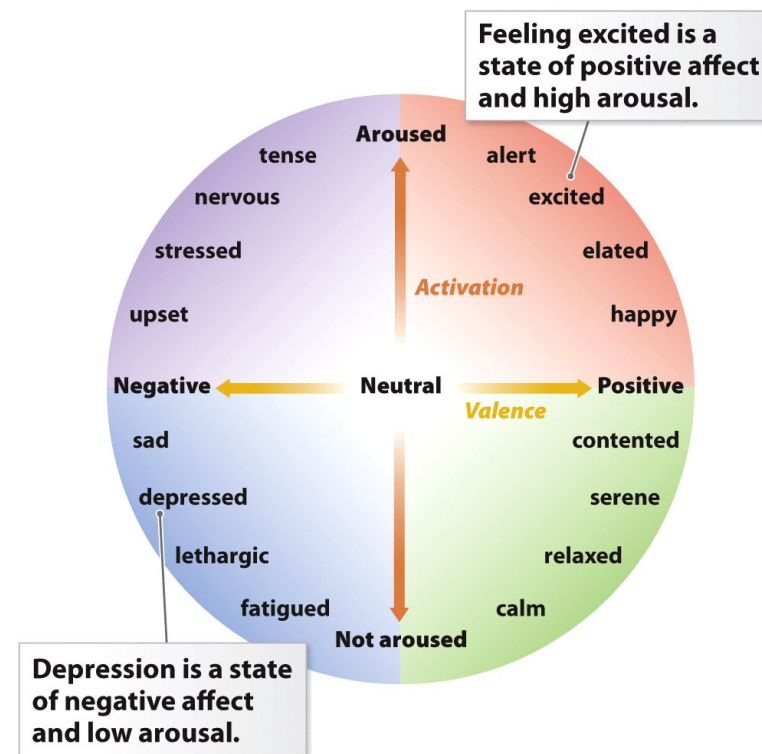


FIGURE 9.15
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Children at age 4 who delayed gratification were rated 10 years later as being more socially competent and better able to handle frustration. The ability to delay gratification in childhood has also been found to predict higher SAT scores and better school grades, though, recent studies suggest this effect is not as strong and related to socio-economic status ([page 360](#)).

The Regulation of Emotion

Emotions can be disruptive and troublesome. Negative emotions inhibit our behavior. Emotional regulation refers to the cognitive and behavioral strategies people use to influence their own emotional experience. These strategies usually involve reducing the arousal of an emotional response so that we become less inhibited.



The Regulation of Emotion

To reduce emotional arousal, some may engage in the less adaptive methods.

Behavioral strategies may include

- avoiding stressful situations,
- distracting themselves by watching television, or
- taking drugs

Cognitive strategies may include

- Trying not to think about automobile accident, rent due, etc.

If these strategies are successful, they are more likely to be repeated in the future because of they are generally negatively reinforced.

Regulating your emotions is important

When someone tries to trigger you by insulting you or by doing or saying something that irritates you, take a deep breath and switch off your ego. Remember that: if you are easily offended, you are easily manipulated.



I had a listener say he didn't trust the **President** and that he thought he'd "made the Sandy Hook shooting happen" to get re-elected.

I explained that Sandy Hook happened **AFTER** the election.

His response?

"That's your opinion."

The stupid is strong, folks.

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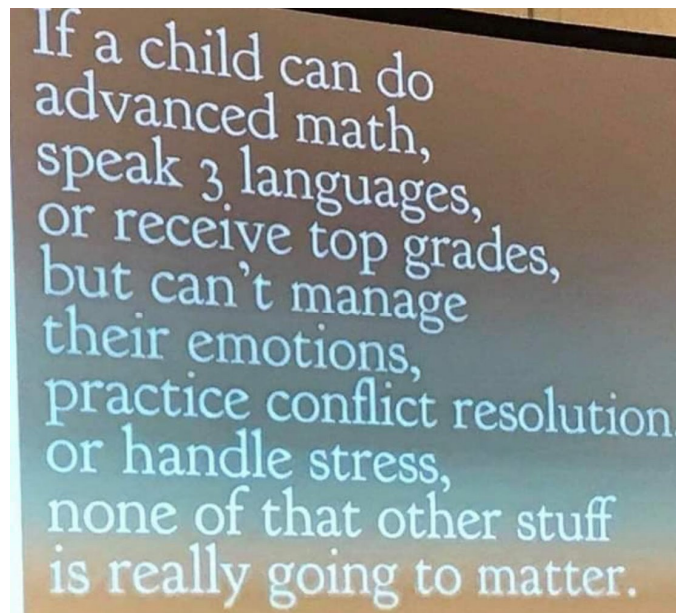


The Regulation of Emotion

More adaptive methods for reducing emotional arousal are

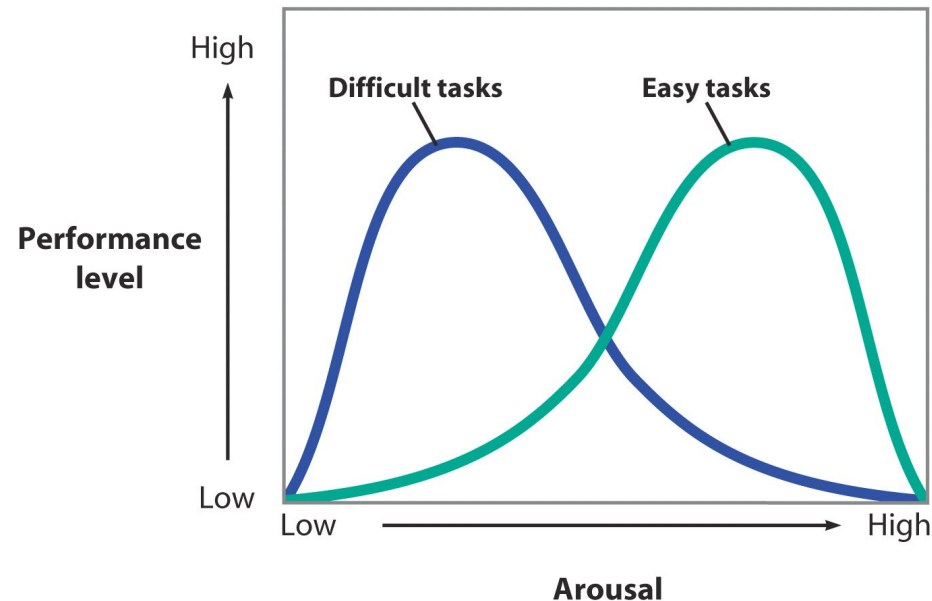
- Humor
- Distraction

Distractions can be helpful if you need temporary relief from your problems creating negative emotions. However, if you avoid your problems all together and engage in distractions that make your problem worse such as drug use, gambling, watching television too much, you avoid dealing with the cause of your negative emotions.



If a child can do advanced math, speak 3 languages, or receive top grades, but can't manage their emotions, practice conflict resolution, or handle stress, none of that other stuff is really going to matter.

Arousal Theory and Task Difficulty

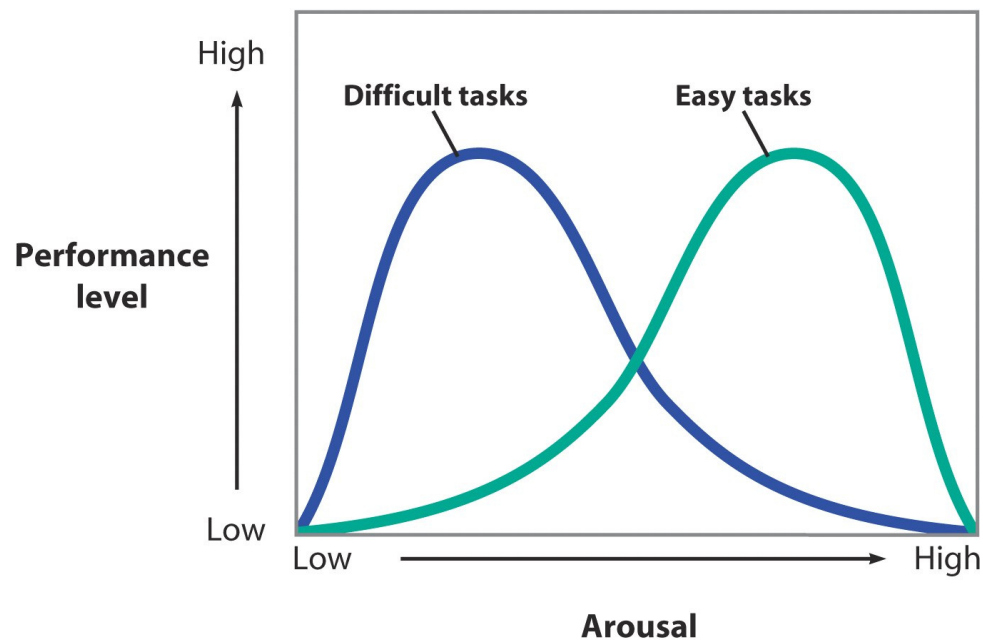


A little bit of arousal can make difficult tasks difficult to successfully perform (see [blue arousal curve](#)). New tasks and tasks where you set your goals too high tend to be difficult. To facilitate performance, we need to make difficult tasks easy tasks (see [green arousal curve](#)). This requires practice and feedback.

The difficult task arousal curve can explain why those suffering from test anxiety impairs performance. To reduce test anxiety, one needs to practice taking tests in their topic, or find ways to reduce their anxiety.

Anxiety from Fear of Failure Influences Performance

Likewise, anxiety from the fear of failure can make it difficult for people to succeed on new and difficult tasks.



Achievement Motivation: Grit

People with grit have a deep passion for their goals and a willingness to keep working toward them, even in spite of hardships and pitfalls. Those with less grit get discouraged more easily, lose motivation in the middle of pursuing their goals, or get sidetracked from their goals by new interests ([page 360](#)).

Perseverance appears to be the most important aspect of predicting outcomes such as grades for college students, graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point and ranking in a national spelling bee ([page 360](#)).

What probably influences grit?

- optimism
- high self-efficacy
- growth mindset
- intrinsic motivation
- low fear of failure (an avoidance motivation)

Achievement: Approach versus Avoidance Motivation

- Approach motivation: A motivation to experience positive outcomes
 - I want to learn as much as possible from this class.
- Avoidance motivation: A motivation not to experience negative outcomes
 - I just want to avoid doing poorly in this class.

We have a combination of both approach and avoidance motivation. In addition, approach and avoidance motivation can depend on the context. As examples of approach and avoidance motivation, see [Table 8.3](#).

Achievement: Approach versus Avoidance Motivation

TABLE 8.3	
BIS/BAS	
To what extent do each of these items describe you? The items in red measure the strength of your avoidance tendency and the items in green measure the strength of your approach tendency.	
• Even if something bad is about to happen to me, I rarely experience fear or nervousness. (LOW AVOIDANCE)	
• I go out of my way to get things I want. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• When I'm doing well at something, I love to keep at it. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• I'm always willing to try something new if I think it will be fun. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• When I get something I want, I feel excited and energized. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• Criticism or scolding hurts me quite a bit. (HIGH AVOIDANCE)	
• When I want something, I usually go all-out to get it. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• I will often do things for no other reason than that they might be fun. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• If I see a chance to get something I want, I move on it right away. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• I feel pretty worried or upset when I think or know somebody is angry at me. (HIGH AVOIDANCE)	
• When I see an opportunity for something I like, I get excited right away. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• I often act on the spur of the moment. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• If I think something unpleasant is going to happen, I usually get pretty "worked up." (HIGH AVOIDANCE)	
• When good things happen to me, it affects me strongly. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• I feel worried when I think I have done poorly at something important. (HIGH AVOIDANCE)	
• I crave excitement and new sensations. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• When I go after something, I use a "no holds barred" approach. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• I have very few fears compared to my friends. (LOW AVOIDANCE)	
• It would excite me to win a contest. (HIGH APPROACH)	
• I worry about making mistakes. (HIGH AVOIDANCE)	

Achievement: Approach versus Avoidance Motivation

Both approach and avoidance motivation is important. Those who are high achievers tend to have more approach motivation.



Achievement: Approach versus Avoidance Motivation

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Development of Achievement Motivation

Achievement Motivation: The desire to excel at some task.

How does achievement motivation develop?

- Provide a cognitively stimulating home environment that fosters a child's intrinsic motivation (doing something for its own reason) to perform academic tasks.

A stimulating environment is one that makes the child think, challenges the child, and is engaging. Just listening to “Baby Einstein” CDs may not help the child think, challenge them or engage them.

- Encourage activities the person finds intrinsically interesting. This may require you to experiment with a lot of different tasks and provide guidance for that person to succeed (this can relate to Erikson's Psychosocial stages of development).
- Praise the learning process, hard work, and diligence (*you worked hard*). Don't praise innate ability (*you are smart*).
- Caregivers that encourage and reward achievement, but don't punish failure help foster a strong motive for success (punishments can increase anxiety).
- Fear of failure develops when caregivers take success for granted and punish failure. Fear of failure keeps people from taking safe risks.