

How Can Teachers Foster Students' Passion?

Passion has been identified as an important factor in supporting students' perseverance and success, particularly when they encounter challenges in their academic pursuits (Bélanger & Ratelle, 2021; Sverdlik et al., 2022).

Importantly, passion does not develop in isolation. The social environment can play an important role in shaping students' passion. Research suggests that autonomy-supportive environments can contribute to harmonious passion, while social support from teachers is positively associated with students' passion for their field (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2013; Chichekian et al., 2024).

Tips for teachers to help develop student's Harmonious passion

1. Help students find meaning and personal value.

Encourage students to consider why an activity matters to them, what they gain from it intrinsically, and how it might connect with their interests and identity.

2. Create an autonomy-supportive environment.

Give students meaningful choices in how they engage, acknowledge their perspectives and feelings, provide informative positive feedback, and create opportunities for autonomous rather than pressured engagement.

3. Help students recognize and use their strengths.

Give students opportunities to use **signature strengths** such as curiosity, creativity or leadership in their engagement. Using one's strengths can provide a sense of functioning at one's potential and has been linked with harmonious passion and well-being (Forest et al., 2012).

4. Encourage passion alongside balance.

Help students recognize that developing passion does not mean sacrificing everything else. A defining feature of harmonious passion is that the passionate activity can coexist with other important areas of a person's life.

Encourage reflection on whether their passionate activity fits alongside other valued activities, relationships and areas of life.

5. Provide Social Support

Social support can provide students with the encouragement and resources needed to pursue and sustain their interests. Teachers can support students through emotional, informational, and appraisal support, including encouragement, constructive feedback, guidance, and relevant resources. Such support can strengthen students' interest and engagement and help them feel valued and understood, which can support their motivation and persistence (Lazarides et al., 2019; Wentzel & Skinner, 2022).

The goal is not simply to make students “more passionate.”

It is to create conditions that allow students to value an activity, connect with it personally, engage autonomously, and ultimately develop a more harmonious relationship with it.

Key Definitions:

Passion	A strong inclination toward an activity that one likes (or even loves), finds important, in which one invests time and energy, and is part of one's identity (Vallerand et.al., 2003). Harmonious Passion: Results from an autonomous internalization of the activity into one's identity. The person freely accepts the activity as important without contingencies attached to it. One can engage in the activity flexibly and in harmony with other areas of life. Obsessive Passion: Results from a controlled internalization of the activity into one's identity. The person experiences an uncontrollable urge to engage because of intrapersonal or interpersonal pressures or contingencies. This Passion can control the person, making it difficult to disengage and potentially creating conflict with other areas of life.
Autonomy-Supportive	Environments that minimize the salience of external incentives and threats, avoid controlling language, and acknowledge the learners' frame of reference (Black & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Connell, 1989) Autonomy-supportive teaching involves behaviors that seek to promote students' tendency to engage in learning because they value this activity or find it interesting (Roth et al., 2007).
Social Support	Social support refers to supportive interactions that help individuals feel cared for, valued, and assist in managing challenges. It can take four forms: Emotional support: Involves care, empathy, trust, and reassurance Instrumental support: Provides tangible or practical assistance Informational support: Offers information and guidance to support problem-solving Appraisal support: Provides feedback and affirmation that can help individuals evaluate their actions and progress (House, 1981; Langford et al., 1997).

References:

- Bélanger, C., & Ratelle, C. F. (2021). Passion in university: The role of the dualistic model of passion in explaining students' academic functioning. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22(5), 2031–2050.
- Black, A. E., & Deci, E. L. (2000). The effects of instructors' autonomy support and students' autonomous motivation on learning organic chemistry: A self-determination theory perspective. *Science Education*, 84(740-756).
- Bonneville-Roussy, A., Vallerand, R. J., & Bouffard, T. (2013). The roles of autonomy support and harmonious and obsessive passions in educational persistence. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 24, 22–31
- Chichekian, T., Sverdlik, A., Vallerand, R. J., & Maheux, C. (2025). The interplay of teachers' passion, social support, and students' passion for a field of study in higher education. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 40(1), 41.
- Forest, J., Mageau, G. A., Crevier-Braud, L., Bergeron, É., Dubreuil, P., & Lavigne, G. L. (2012). Harmonious passion as an explanation of the relation between signature strengths' use and well-being at work: Test of an intervention program. *Human Relations*, 65(9), 1233–1252.
- House J.S. (1981) *Work stress and social support*. Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Langford, C. P. H., Bowsher, J., Maloney, J. P., & Lillis, P. P. (1997). Social support: a conceptual analysis. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 25(1), 95-100.
- Lazarides, R., Gaspard, H., & Dicke, A.-L. (2019). Dynamics of classroom motivation: Teacher enthusiasm and the development of math interest and teacher support. *Learning and Instruction*, 60, 126–137
- Ryan, R. M., & Connell, J. P. (1989). Perceived locus of causality and internalization: Examining reasons for acting in two domains. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 749-761.
- St-Cyr, J., Paquette, V., & Vallerand, R. J. (2025). Engaging in an activity with passion: How the situation affects our mindset.
- Sverdlik, A., Rahimi, S., & Vallerand, R. J. (2022). Examining the role of passion in university students' academic emotions, self-regulated learning and well-being. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 28(2), 426–448.
- Vallerand, R. J., Blanchard, C., Mageau, G. A., Koestner, R., Ratelle, C., Leonard, M., Gagne, M., & Marsolais, J. (2003). Les passions de l'âme: On obsessive and harmonious passion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(4), 756–767.
- Wentzel, K., & Skinner, E. (2022). The other half of the story: The role of social relationships and social contexts in the development of academic motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34, 1865–1876.