

Parenting with a Growth Mindset Approach



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A Guide to Parenting with a Growth Mindset Approach

Prof. Carol Dweck's work on mindsets provides a useful guide for helping parents to raise more adaptive and resilient children. Dweck has spent the past several decades conducting research identifying two distinct ways in which children view intelligence and learning. Children with a "fixed mindset" believe that their intelligence is simply an inborn trait—they have a certain amount, and that's that. In contrast, individuals with a "growth mindset" believe that they can develop their intelligence over time (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 1999, 2007).



A child's mindset influences how they perceive and respond to their world. In a growth mindset, children understand that challenges and failure framed as learning opportunities can help them to become smarter. Struggling and working on a challenge or setback is good for the brain's neurological growth. Whereas in a fixed mindset children work to look smart, avoid challenges and shy away from taking risks where there is the possibility of failure. This can impact a child's development at school, sport and their relationships.

Much of what we do as parents influences our child's mindset.

Here are three practices you can start trying to assist your child with more of a growth mindset response.

1. Just have a growth mindset

Once we learn about growth mindset we assume we can simply tell our child to have a growth mindset and that's it. As Dweck states "You don't get a growth mindset by proclamation, it's a journey."

We are all a mixture of fixed and growth mindset. Let's face it we all have times when we think we can improve and when we bounce forward after a setback. We also have days when the smallest setback knocks us over and we give up. Working to recognise when your child is having a fixed mindset response and help them name how they feel. When they are calmer, explore what strategies they have tried, how effective they are and what new strategies they could try.

As odd as it may seem, we need to think more about our fixed mindset in order to develop a more persistent growth mindset. Accepting our child's fixed mindset moments

and helping them to develop strategies for overcoming them is part of our role. This can take a long time to accomplish and we can be assured that we will have setbacks along the way. Remaining supportive and consistent over time is the key.

2. Talent Praise verses Effort Praise

When you give your child feedback about how smart or talented they are you send the message that your child has talent in some areas, but not in others. When they struggle to learn something, they view this as not having the talent and won't ever be good at it. Talent praise also makes your child want to demonstrate their talent by doing things that they can do well and avoiding difficult or challenging tasks.

The alternative is to praise the effort and hard work that goes into learning and success. For example:

TALENT PRAISE

Well done you're really smart.
Wow, you got an A.
You nailed it – you're a natural.

EFFORT PRAISE

Well done, I noticed how much you practiced.
What did you find helped you to do so well?
Great, what did you find most difficult to learn?

3. Responding to Failure and Setbacks

Dweck and Haimovitz have found that the way parents respond to failure and setback is one of the most important factors in how children develop a fixed mindset response. Parents that downplay ("It's okay, you can't be good at everything") or over react to a setback ("How did you such a simple mistake! What were you thinking?) sends the message that our child doesn't have the natural ability to succeed.

Dweck points out that the better response for a parent is to focus on the learning and growth that comes from a setback. "Hey, I noticed that you didn't do well in the game today. What do you think you need to work on to get better?" This sends the message that mistakes do not define ability and are not permanent. Life is full of challenges and setbacks and that if we aren't making mistakes we aren't learning or growing our brains.

As a parent are you failure-is-enhancing or failure-is-debilitating?

Research shows that parents with a **failure-is-enhancing** view believe that struggles are a helpful experience and are vital for facilitating learning and growth.

Parents with a **failure-is-debilitating** view believe that failure inhibits learning and is a roadblock on the pathway to improved performance. They worry about their child's abilities and focus on their child's performance rather than what they learned from the failure.

Mistakes are part of life and need to be accepted calmly.

Research has demonstrated that parent's have a big influence on their children's mindset. Most of the things we do and say as parents send either a fixed or growth mindset message to our children. Being mindful and developing these simple practices into your parenting will help your child to develop a stronger growth mindset over time.