



Supporting a Growth Mindset

Persistence in the face of frustration or challenge – sometimes called “grit” – has been shown by scientists to be one of the most important ingredients for children’s success in school and in life. But it doesn’t come naturally to all children. Fortunately, as a parent, you can teach and strengthen persistence by supporting a growth mindset (instead of a fixed mindset) in your child.

What is a growth mindset?

- The belief that no matter who you are, you can always become better at something
- The idea that achievement is based on effort and hard work, not just natural talent
- The ability to embrace challenges and love learning, even when it doesn’t come easily

What is a fixed mindset?

- The belief that people are either just “good at” something or they’re not
- The idea that intelligence is something you’re born with and can’t be changed
- The habit of labeling people as good at only the things that come easily to them
- A fear of trying new things because you may not be good at them
- A way of thinking that can develop in toddlerhood (“I’m a good painter”)

How do mindsets develop?

- Some children are born predisposed to fixed mindsets
- Girls tend to have fixed mindsets more than boys do
- Girls believe that others’ opinions are a good way to judge their abilities
- Adults can guide children away from a fixed mindset and towards a growth mindset

Strategies for Supporting Your Child’s Growth Mindset

Stress the importance of effort

- “How hard you try is more important than what you make or how you do.”
- “Everyone can get better at everything.”
- “Success results from hard work, and learning from mistakes.”

Praise effort, not outcome or ability

- Praising your child’s ability teaches them that your approval is tied to the skills they’re good at
- Your child also notices that they don’t get praised for skills they’re not good at

- Children are good at the things that come naturally to them, which is not something they can control
- Praising your child's effort teaches them that your approval is tied to how hard they try, which is something your child can control
- When you praise effort, it helps your child believe that they can always get better at something

Focus on the importance of taking on challenges throughout the learning process and not just when problems arise

- “Let’s pick a hard one. Hard ones are fun!”
- “Wow! You’re trying another way!”

Role model effort and persistence

- Point out moments when you’re feeling challenged or frustrated and talk about things you do to calm down and push forward

Talk about people / situations / examples of persisting through obstacles

- Use people your child admires to discuss the value of practice, hard work, dedication, etc.
- Read books about persistence together (such as “The Little Engine That Could”)
- Share stories about times when your mistakes helped you improve

Emphasize taking on challenges as a family value

- Come up with a family mantra or slogan that conveys an overall attitude of “Bring it on!”
- Discuss challenges at the dinner table (instead of the “easy” parts of everyone’s day)

Teach your child “bounce back” statements

- “The only way to get better is to keep trying.”
- “Mistakes let us know what not to do next time.”

Resist the urge to rescue and fix

- Your child learns best from making mistakes
- Frustration can lead to the motivation to learn more or do better
- Figuring things out on their own builds children’s confidence and motivation

Let your child “lose”

- Teach your child that everybody loses sometimes
- Help your child understand that failure or disappointment can make them more prepared the next time

Support your child’s interests

- Enthusiasm for something inspires motivation to practice, persist and improve through effort

Give your child “fuel” to face challenges

- Your child needs to be well-fed and well-rested
- Many children need a chance to release some energy (for example, jump, run, wiggle) before facing a challenging task

Acknowledge setbacks and struggles

- “That must be really frustrating. You keep trying to fit that piece in the puzzle and it’s just not fitting.”

Teach coping techniques in the face of frustration

- Discuss ways your child can “get the frustration out” such as running around the room, stretching, breaking the challenge down into smaller steps, putting the challenge away and coming back to it later, etc.

Teach your child comeback strategies

- Redirect focus to constructive thinking: “What can I do differently next time?”

Remind your child of times their persistence paid off

- Talk about specific examples where your child’s hard work during a challenge paid off