

Growing Resilient Learners

Now, more than ever, our children are being faced with challenges to learning. The impact of Covid-19 on education has been felt around the country, and children and their parents sometimes struggle to find effective ways to meet this challenge. It turns out, how you think about the difficulties you face can impact your success and can even make you smarter along the way.

What is Resilience?

Several years ago, researchers wanted to understand why some children who came from seemingly difficult backgrounds developed into successful and productive adults, while other children who appeared to experience fewer challenges in childhood, were less successful at adapting later in life. What developed was this concept of resilience. Resilience is generally defined as the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity. In fact, resilient people tend to accept life's challenges and even setbacks, as opportunities to grow and to learn. One of the ways they seem to do this is through developing a *growth mindset*.

Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset

Carol Dweck, PhD of Stanford University coined the term *growth mindset* to describe the way in which naturally resilient people face challenges. People with a *growth mindset* see challenges as a natural experience of living a life. In addition, they don't experience themselves as limited by their current abilities or talents, but rather they see these attributes as characteristics that can change and develop over time. It's not that people with a *growth mindset* don't experience failure or defeat, it's that they don't take their failures too seriously. This allows them to get back up and start again. It appears that some people are just hard-wired to possess this mindset.

Dr. Dweck compared folks with *growth mindset* to others who tend to have a *fixed mindset*. These folks tend to see their life experiences as obstacles and barriers. They feel limited by their personal attributes or characteristics. When they experience failure, they feel it deeply and it contributes to fear and avoidance, so they are less likely to try again. Without the ability to take necessary risks, people with a *fixed mindset* tend to miss opportunities to grow and to learn.

As you read these descriptions, you are likely considering which of these mindset's are natural for you or for your child. The good news is that even if you don't come by a *growth mindset* naturally, you can develop one through practicing certain skills. Even our adult brains, can be rewired to respond to life's ups and downs as opportunities to grow.

Here's how:

- 1) Learn to **praise effort over performance** or ability; your own and your child's. Dr. Dweck calls this "the power of not yet"; meaning, although you may not have solved a problem yet, the growth is in your attempt. Learn to use encouraging words that

focuses on the effort involved. “You’re working so hard, I see you trying to figure it out. The harder I try, the smarter I get.”

- 2) Learn to **tolerate, and even welcome, the discomfort associated with challenge**. As parents, we naturally want to protect our children from pain and discomfort. However, it turns out that it is the challenge that makes us smarter. When we learn to tolerate the discomfort of not knowing, and engage with the struggle to figure something out, we grow neurons in our brains that work to form new and stronger connections, helping us to get smarter over time. This transforms the meaning of the effort from the frustration of failure to the growth associated with the effort. Remember to take a deep breath, count to 10 and try again.
- 3) Work to develop the ability to **post-pone immediate gratification for yourself and your kids**. Setting goals and then mapping out the steps to achieve them, helps us to track our progress and appreciate that every success is achieved through a lot of other small successes, and often some failures along the way. Breaking down large tasks into smaller ones, helps us grow a sense of accomplishment and achieve small wins along the way.
- 4) **Encourage collaboration over competition**. A growth mindset encourages everyone to succeed, because everyone’s effort is rewarded with growth. It encourages collaboration and negotiation, even when there is conflict and disagreement. Seek ways to acknowledge everyone’s effort, including your own.

Research demonstrates that when children approach learning with a *growth mindset*, they show improved academic performance and increased effort in their work. In addition, children naturally become more confident because they are less focused on outcomes as a measurement of their success and more focused on their own effort. In addition, because they are engaged in the task of learning, their outcomes naturally improve.

2020 has undoubtedly challenged all of us in ways we couldn’t have imagined a year ago. As we enter 2021, show your family how to develop a *growth mindset*, and you will all become another year older and another year smarter.

Check out these other ideas on resilience:

[APA Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers](#)

[The power of believing that you can improve, Ted Talk by Carol Dweck, PhD](#)

[Resilience in Children: Strategies to Strengthen your Kids](#)