

TIPS TO HELP DEVELOP A GROWTH MINDSET IN KIDS

Redefine “Success”

If your only definition of success is making lots of money or going into a prestigious profession, your child may be getting the message that you don't care whether or not they end up happy and fulfilled. If you define success as compliance with your wishes then often the best you can hope for is grudging compliance. Redefining success as having a growth mindset and being a life-long learner will most likely result in your child succeeding AND finding fulfillment at whatever they choose to do in life.

Redefine “Failure”

“Defeat is not the worst of failures. Not to have tried is the true failure.” ~ George E. Woodberry

If a child learns from failure, then they haven't really failed.

Praise the PROCESS, not the Talent or intelligence

PROCESS praise recognizes *things they can control*, such as effort, resolve, determination, resilience, work ethic, self-honesty, perseverance and other traits that indicate they are committed to the process of learning and improving.

Examples: “I love the way you're learning to..” or “Every time you practice that, you're making connections in your brain stronger...” or “Each time you try that you get better at it! I've noticed the improvement...” or “I'm proud of how hard you tried in that game – you never gave up!” or “I love the colors in your drawing; what techniques have you tried?”

Praising talent or intelligence recognizes *things they feel they can't control* such as how easily they understand something, or how fast they can run, or how well they read.

Examples: “You are so smart!” “You learned that so fast.” “You're a natural” “Fantastic work – you made no mistakes!”

Model Growth Mindset Thinking

Explain how you deal with challenges and continue to learn. Don't label yourself or others in a way that demonstrates a fixed mindset: “I'm a terrible cook” or “I've always been bad at math” or “That driver is an idiot!” Instead you could say, “With some practice I'll be a better cook someday” or “I could have been better at math” or “He has a lot to learn about driving courteously!”

Frame Failure as an Opportunity to Grow

It is a natural instinct to protect our children from disappointment and failure, but this doesn't help them learn to cope with inevitable setbacks. Don't allow your child to label themselves or shelter from the reality of failure by blaming others. Instead ask, “What will you do differently next time?” The most successful people in any field are usually the ones with the highest tolerance for failure and the best capacity to learn from it.

Set Realistic Goals

Goals should focus on the growth of a skill or expanding knowledge rather than an end result like a trophy or a prize.

Emphasize the Journey

If they don't win the science fair or come in first place, but they learned a lot (and better yet, they enjoyed doing it) then reinforce that it was a success. It is ok to remind them that if they keep learning they may someday make money from what they learned – would they trade that for a blue ribbon?

Encourage Them to Enjoy Learning for the Sake of Learning

Instead of focusing on test scores, ask them which areas of the curriculum have interested or engaged them, then foster their interest in these. Let them see you learning about things that interest you.

Highlight the Growth Mindset of People Your Child Admires

Find out about the daily habits of your child's favorite singer, athlete, actor, etc. and talk about the work, goal-setting, and commitment it takes to do what they do. There are great videos about famous people who experienced early failures, including Michael Jordan, JK Rowling, Einstein, Thomas Edison, Lady Gaga, etc.

Take Reasonable Risks and Encourage Your Child to do so

Growth mindset is about being a life-long learner; accepting a certain amount of risk and failure is part of that process. Is there something you've always wanted to learn or try but were afraid you'd fail? Your child needs to see you overcome that fear. Make a plan to do it and ask your child to do the same or to help you. Remember that it is healthy for children to see their parents fail, as long as they also see them keep trying.

Teach Balanced Perseverance

Encourage your child to persevere, not give up, keep commitments, and power through difficulties. This does NOT mean that if your child is trying to do much you can't discuss with them what activities they need to let go of. Rule of thumb: Discourage your child from quitting something because it's difficult or because they think they can't do it, but they can quit if they are simply overextended and it is not worth the time, energy and resources it would take to continue. It is good for kids to try lots of different things and then learn where they should focus their time and energy.

Provide Honest, Constructive Criticism

Don't focus on shortcomings or past mistakes, but work with your child to identify strategies to improve in something they find difficult. Avoid comparing them to siblings or peers (favorably or unfavorably), which encourages a fixed mindset.

Set High Standards, but Give Them Help as Needed

It's good to have high standards for our children's habits, work ethic, and ability to grow. Making things too simple in order to give them an "easy win" is counter-productive in the long run. If they need more support such as homework help or equipment, provide it as best you can.