

Growth Mindset: What You Need to Know

By: [Amanda Morin](#)

At a Glance

- Growth mindset is a concept that refers to how we face challenges and setbacks.
- Having a growth mindset can have real benefits for kids with learning and attention issues.
- There are lots of ways to help your child develop a growth mindset.

Does your child take on challenges and persevere when it comes to learning? It may be more than just being [motivated](#) or [resilient](#). Your child's approach may be the result of having what's called a *growth mindset*.

This term describes how a child faces challenges and setbacks. Kids with a growth mindset believe their abilities can improve over time. By comparison, kids with a *fixed mindset* think their abilities are a set trait that can't change, no matter how hard they try.

For kids with learning and attention issues, having a growth mindset can have real benefits. It can help kids (and parents) reframe how they approach challenges. It can also provide insight into what types of teaching and support can help kids be more successful.

Learn more about growth mindset and what developing a growth mindset can mean for your child.

What Is Growth Mindset?

The concept of growth mindset has been around for a while. It was developed by Stanford University professor Carol Dweck. Dweck and her colleagues did a series of studies that found that kids who pushed through challenges held the belief that they could improve their abilities. Kids who pulled back from challenges believed their abilities were fixed.

Picture a child who struggles with writing and has gotten low grades on her recent papers. If she's convinced she's "just bad at writing," and that no amount of work will change that, she's showing a fixed

mindset, and is likely to stop trying. If she says she has trouble with writing, but continues to try to improve at it, that shows a growth mindset.

But how a child approaches challenges isn't set in stone, according to Dweck. That's one of the misconceptions about growth mindset—that either you have it or you don't. In fact, we all have a mix of fixed and growth mindsets that change based on the experiences we have and the feedback we get.

[Explore 11 books that can help kids with learning and attention issues develop a growth mindset.](#)

Having a growth mindset means more than just accepting feedback and being open-minded. Kids with this mindset take feedback, and what they learn from experience, and create strategies for improving. They believe that even if they fail at something, they can still succeed.

Why Growth Mindset Is About More Than Just Effort

Another misconception about growth mindset is that it's the same thing as effort. Knowing the difference can allow parents to use a type of praise that can help promote growth mindset.

Parents sometimes think it helps to praise their child's talent or "smarts." But if you say to your child, "You're really good at math," it actually promotes a fixed mindset. You're really saying that the ability to do math is just something your child "has."

Praising your child's effort—"you worked really hard"—is helpful, and can [help build your child's self-esteem](#). But that's not enough to promote a growth mindset. Kids can try hard but not succeed because they aren't using strategies that work.

What's most important is to praise the way they approached the challenge, not how hard they tried or how well they did. For instance, you might praise your child for the way she solved a math problem or how she organized her homework to get it all done.

This is called *process praise*. It's the most helpful type of praise for promoting a growth mindset. It puts the emphasis on the steps your child took to get to the end result.

By focusing on process, you and your child's teachers can show how getting stuck, [asking for help](#) and trying new strategies are important, too. For instance, you might say to your child:

“I’m impressed at how hard you worked to complete that science project. I know you had trouble getting started, but it made a lot of sense to ask your teacher for help in figuring out how to break down the assignment. It seems like working with a partner really helped keep you accountable for getting all your work done. Your grade reflects all that hard work!”

In this video about growth mindset, watch expert [Ellen Galinsky](#) explain how to encourage your child to take on challenges.

Growth Mindset and Kids With Learning and Attention Issues

We all have times when we feel like we’ll never get better at something, or that we’re destined to fail. Kids with learning and attention issues often face more challenges and setbacks than other kids. That may lead them to have more of a fixed mindset about their difficulties.

Kids with learning and attention issues can feel judged and criticized. They know they’re not doing as well as their peers, and they [may feel “stupid.”](#) That can make them insecure or defensive, which can get in the way of growth.

[Find out how a dad realized he needed to stop telling his daughter to try harder.](#)

The mindsets of parents and teachers can also get in the way. They may tell kids to [just “try harder”](#) using the same strategies or ways of learning that haven’t worked before. Doing that isn’t going to make kids feel good about the effort they’re putting in.

How to Help Your Child Develop a Growth Mindset

A big part of having a growth mindset is not letting failing at something stop you from working to improve. It’s important for your child to know that setbacks can actually provide a way forward. Tell your child it’s OK to speak up when something isn’t working. Encourage her to [self-advocate](#) and ask for help from the people around her.

Your child also needs to know that the people around her believe she can find ways to fix mistakes. Your natural response may be to reassure your child by saying something like, “Don’t worry about it. Maybe science just isn’t your subject.” That reaction can promote a fixed mindset, however. It teaches your child that science is something she can’t improve at.

Instead, it's better to have a conversation about next steps. Talk about what your child learned from the experience. For instance, you might say, "How would you study differently next time? Would it help to talk to your teacher? Would a study guide be useful?"

Developing growth mindset is an ongoing process. Getting and taking feedback from others, learning from mistakes and finding innovative ways to approach tasks isn't easy. But it's a valuable way to help your child learn that her talents can be developed.

Looking for ways to help your child handle challenges? Explore [strategies to promote positive thinking](#). Discover ways to [build your child's self-esteem](#). And find new [ways to respond when your child is frustrated](#).

Key Takeaways

- Kids with a growth mindset believe their abilities can improve over time.
- Praising the way kids approach a challenge is key to helping them develop a growth mindset.
- Talk with your child about what she learned from experiences. Ask questions like, "How would you study differently next time?"

About the Author:

Amanda Morin is a parent advocate, a former teacher and the author of *The Everything Parent's Guide to Special Education*.