

Develop a growth mindset to build confidence in kids

Perhaps the most exciting news in the parenting area over the last decade is the discovery of brain plasticity. That is, the brain is always growing and developing as opposed to it developing and reaching its nadir at a certain age; and then it's all downhill from there.

It's exciting to know that your child's talent and smarts are not fixed. Their brains can always learn more, continue to grow and be stretched. This doesn't mean that your child doesn't have a propensity to be smart in certain areas such as maths or language learning or that all talent is created equal. Genetics gifts us with certain abilities that are either developed or they're not. Instead, your child's abilities and talents, just like yours, are evolving over time.

So as parents it seems smart that you should be developing a growth mindset in your child. A fixed mindset is limiting, even debilitating for kids. You want them to believe that with effort and practice they can develop their skills and abilities in whatever area or interest they want.

Science is on their side – their brains will continue to grow and stretch however a fixed mindset will let them down. If they believe that intelligence and talent is fixed then those beliefs will become self-fulfilling prophecies. Once again, it all comes down to attitude!

Carol Dweck, author of "The New Psychology of Success" believes that a growth mindset is the quality that separates those who succeed from those who don't. Her research reveals how the use of language when praising kids can have a profound impact on their attitudes. Subtle differences in tone, wording and phrasing can lead even a child at two and half to have self-limiting beliefs when he or she started school a few years later.

Don't overpraise

The problem with praising intelligence and ability is that it leads to fixed mindset development. Kids believe that their success is reliant on their ability or talent, rather than their effort or attitude. So to be respected and recognised as successful they become risk-averse. Far better to achieve some success no matter how meagre, than risk failure and being seen as dumb, stupid or a failure.

So how can a parent develop a growth mindset in children? Well, it does come down to language and a few other strategies as well. Here are three simple ideas to get you started:

1. Praise effort, strategy and action, not results

Focus more on the processes of what kids do rather than results to develop a growth mindset. Kids need to hear comments such as "You worked hard to get that right!" (effort), "That was a smart idea to tackle the hardest task while you were fresh!" (strategy) and "You recognised the first few steps were the most important but then after that you were right." (action). This type of praise, also known as encouragement, helps kids develop the belief that success has more to do with what they do than innate smarts and talents.

2. Look for opportunities to stretch your child's capabilities

Encourage kids to stretch their capabilities by adding depth and breadth to their list of activities. Boys, in particular, often go deep investing all their time into areas such as sport or online gaming to develop their talents over time. Encourage them to stretch their capabilities across a range of areas rather than a few. Conversely, encourage a child who dabbles in many areas or interests without specialising in any area, to go deeper in one area.

3. Give honest feedback

Providing your child with honest feedback about their performance not only helps them improve, but also promotes a growth mindset. We often shy away from giving feedback for fear of harming children's self-esteem. Confidence can be maintained by being sensitive to **how** we provide feedback. For instance, focusing on two or three things kids do well before giving constructive feedback is one way you can keep a young learner's head up while giving pointers about better performance.

Having brain plasticity means that we can continue to acquire new skills, learn new things and embed new habits across our lifespan. It is important then that we help children develop a growth mindset so that they can reap the benefits of brain plasticity over their lifetime rather than be limited by their belief systems.

