

The difference between a smart child and a determined child

Learning about growth mindset and the messages we give our children

For parents of junior and intermediate students

What is a fixed mindset?

“My neighbour’s daughter got all As on her report card; she’s the smart one!”

How many times have we heard this? Unfortunately, more than we can count. This statement is an example of a *Fixed Mindset*. That is, parents believe that their children are either born smart or not. This needs to stop, now...

What is a growth mindset?

Growth mindset is not a new concept but has caused a big mind shift in the way educators teach and speak. In her revolutionary book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dr. Carol Dweck’s research shows that intelligence is not predetermined and it is never set in stone. Her work shows that children can learn absolutely anything with determination, effort and practice in a positive, supportive environment

Intelligence is malleable.

Let’s think about that again - intelligence is malleable. The very definition of malleability is that something can change and adapt to different situations. Intelligence can be developed, changed and built. How liberating is it for parents to know that their children have the ability to change their brains? There are no smart children, rather, determined children who are persistent and keep trying.

How do you help children unlearn traditional beliefs about born talent and intelligence through a growth mindset philosophy?

Anyone can learn anything. First and foremost, believe in your children’s abilities to learn. They do not have a predetermined intelligence, but the ability to grow their brains.

Do avoid statements that grades or abilities come from ‘natural talent’ or good genes.

Visit “Parents Boost Learning” at www.peelschools.org for more *Parent Tip Sheets*.

Do praise continued effort on developing skills, not intelligence or talent.

Do have high expectations for your children. Research shows that when you believe they can learn, they will rise to the expectation.

Do celebrate high marks on tests or report cards, but make sure your children associate success with hard work, not an innate ability. Discuss the efforts they made that made a positive impact on their grades.

Do encourage your children to say, “*I am not there YET*” or “*I can’t do it YET*” if they are struggling with a Mathematical concept.

Do explain to your children that the time they spend on homework or a project is important. If they do not believe they can improve, ask them to reflect on something they are good at and then explain how much time they dedicated to it. For example, if a child is great at MineCraft or basketball, encourage him/her to think about how many hours is dedicated to playing and practicing. This will help him/her to see the relationship between effort and outcome.

Do encourage personal responsibility for learning. Emphasize that effort is as important as ability.

How do you help your child respond to challenges using a growth mindset philosophy?

Do support your children through the ups and downs of their efforts. There will be good days and not so good days but continue praising their efforts.

Do ask about the areas of math your children are learning and why it is important. If they are struggling, ask them to talk to their teachers or search *Google* or *Khan Academy* to help with concepts.

Do talk to your children about Albert Einstein, Michael Jordan and Bill Gates, who all believed that it was not their intelligence and talent, but their willingness to

embrace challenges and keep trying despite failure that made them successful.

Do praise your child highly when they accept a 'tough assignment' or challenge when they could have opted for an easier option. Let them know you value their willingness to embrace a challenge.

Do discuss their report cards and ask them to reflect on what they can learn from the grades and comments. Try doing so without judgment and negative emotions.

Do help your children understand that even world champions such as David Beckham and Steve Jobs were asked to work on areas they could improve on.

Do value the professional judgment of the teacher. Let him/her be the one to provide areas to work on. Your role as a parent is to gently reinforce why these areas are important.

How should YOU respond to your child when he or she struggles with Math using the growth mindset philosophy?

"I am not good at this"

Respond by asking "What do you think you might be missing?"

"I am awesome at this"

Respond by saying, "It seems like you are on the right track, keep up the hard work."

"I give up"

Respond by saying, "What are some of the strategies your teacher has showed you in class?"

"This is too hard"

Respond by saying, "It's going to take time and effort to do this, but you will get there."

"Math is not my thing"

Respond by saying, "You can actually train your brain into liking Math by working hard at it."

"She's so smart Mom, I can never be that smart"

Respond by saying, "Maybe you can ask her how many hours she spent learning this, she probably spent a lot of time practicing."

"Mom and Dad, I can't do any better than this"

Respond by saying, "You can always improve just keep trying, you're doing great."

"I am done and it's good enough"

Respond by saying, "Is it your best work?"

Growth Mindset Research

Dr. Carol Dweck's research shows that people learn from mistakes and their brains actually grow. Failures promote the growth of intelligence. When children make mistakes, their brains grow new synapses.

Isn't it amazing? Imagine the power our children will feel knowing that with extra effort, their brains will actually grow.

Something to try at home:

When your children are struggling with a Math concept at home and feels like giving up, ask them to crumple a piece of paper and throw it across the room. Then, ask them to get that same piece of paper, open it up again, and colour in all the lines that came from the crumpling. These lines actually resemble what it looks like when brain synapses are firing up in the brain while a child makes a mistake, AND learns from it.

Additional Resources

- The Myth of Ability Nurturing Mathematical Talent in Every Child - John Mighton
- Mindset the New Psychology of Success - Dr. Carol Dweck
- Mindsets in the Classroom - Mary Ray Ricci

Useful Websites

www.peelschools.org/parents/tips/math
<http://mathonline.peelschools.org>

*Tip sheet prepared by Zohrin Mawji and Jennifer Stegeman, Teachers, SouthFields Village Public School
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