



Supporting Your Child’s Motivation in School

How do I support my child’s motivation?

The way we respond to our children strongly influences how motivated they are to work hard and succeed. The research of Carol Dweck ("Mindset: The New Psychology of Success") indicates that 85% of American parents believe it is important to tell kids they are smart. But labels like "smart" and "gifted" might actually decrease children's motivation to work hard and persist in the face of challenges! Dweck says that "mindset" is what counts.

Fixed Mindset: My successes are the result of innate talent or intelligence.

Children may believe if you have to work hard, you don't have the ability. They believe you are stuck with the intelligence with which you are born - if you have ability, things will come naturally. If these children fail, or are even challenged, they feel trapped and think I must not be that smart. They may avoid challenges and fear not looking good to others.

Growth Mindset: My successes are the result of my hard work.

Children with a "growth mindset" believe that the more you challenge yourself, the smarter you become. They believe that intelligence can be cultivated - the more learning you do, the more intelligent you can become. They understand that even geniuses have to work hard. When they have a setback, they believe that they can improve through more time and effort. These children will value learning over "looking smart." They can persist through difficult challenges.

Dweck's research indicates that parents can shape their children's mindsets through the kind of feedback we give. Praise about the child as a person (smart, talented, etc) is associated with the fixed mindset. Praise about the process in which the child engages tends to expand the growth mindset. Overpraised children may start to focus too much on maintaining a good image. Praise can be a motivating force if used effectively - specific, sincere, describing child's real behavior, effort or progress.

Fixed Approach Examples	Growth Approach Examples
"You are so smart!"	"Good effort on your homework!"
"Good girl!"	"You really worked hard on that Spanish assignment."
You are such an excellent artist."	"That puzzle seems easy for you. Let's try one that is a little more challenging this time."
"You really are talented at writing."	"You are making a lot of progress on getting the ball into this basket!"
"Hey, you got an A without even studying! Super!"	"Your handwriting is getting easier to read."
"You are such a great kid!"	"Almost made it. Try again!"

