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Nurturing a "Growth Mindset" in Your Child

26 March, 2018 by [Babysparks \(https://babysparks.com/author/babysparks/\)](https://babysparks.com/author/babysparks/) in [Cognitive \(https://babysparks.com/category/cognitive/\)](https://babysparks.com/category/cognitive/)

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The baby and toddler years are a time of rapid growth and development, with endless opportunities to say things like, "Good job! You're so smart!" This kind of praise boosts your little one's self-esteem and gives her the confidence to try new

things, right?

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Wrong, says Carol Dweck, a psychologist and researcher who's now-famous

(https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve)
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has sparked a revolution in the way parents and educators speak to children

about their accomplishments and failures. Her extensive research shows

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that we can either nurture a "fixed mindset" or a "growth mindset," and the difference matters, a lot.

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What is a Growth Mindset & Why Does It Matter?

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A person with a growth mindset believes that qualities such as intelligence, talent, and creativity can be developed through effort and learning from mistakes. A person with a fixed mindset believes that these qualities are something you either have or you don't, and they can't be changed. "I'm just not good at math" is a fixed mindset; "I can get better at math" is a growth mindset.

The way we react to children's accomplishments and failures shapes their mindset. In one of her studies, Dweck gave a group of elementary students puzzles she knew they could complete. When they finished she told half of them they must be smart, and the other half they must have worked hard. In the next round, the majority of children praised for working hard chose a more difficult puzzle, while most of those praised for being smart chose an easy one.

What Dweck discovered in this and many other studies is that children who are told "You're so smart," "You're a natural athlete," "You're my little artist," and so on, develop a fixed mindset. They may avoid challenging themselves because if they fail they risk not looking smart, athletic, artistic, etc. If they encounter something difficult to do, they may give up quickly and say "I'm just not good at this." They may believe that having to put in effort reflects badly on them.

On the other hand, children who are praised for their efforts and taught that failure is an essential part of learning develop a growth mindset. They tend to take risks, challenge themselves, enjoy the process of learning, and

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believe they can get better at something if they try—all of which is linked to higher self-esteem, confidence, resilience, happiness

(<https://babysparks.com/2018/02/08/raising-happy-child/>), and success in academics and beyond.

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What You Can Do

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Dweck says: "If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning."

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As a parent of a baby or toddler, you're in a unique position because children at this age naturally embody a growth mindset; they are curious risk-takers who love to learn. You can help your little one keep a growth mindset and avoid falling into a fixed one with these tips:

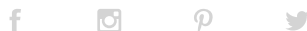
Shift praise from results to process, and from her to her efforts. She graduates to building a four-block tower and looks at you proudly.

Fixed-mindset response: *Good job! You're so good at building towers!*

Growth-mindset response: *It takes a lot of practice to do that! You must have concentrated really hard.*

Rather than rescuing her, help her problem-solve. While playing with a toy lock and key, she is becoming impatient as she tries to open the lock with the key upside-down.

Fixed-mindset response: *Don't get frustrated. Turn the key this way.*



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