

Growth Mindset Reminder

The Staples Resilience Project welcomes you to a new school year! We hope that all of our students, parents and teachers alike were able to use the slower pace of summer to re-charge. We can't think of a better way to start the new school year than with a re-cap of the importance of mindset to our students' success. If you were with us last year, you may remember that Mindset is a theory initially developed and researched by psychologist Carol Dweck at Stanford University.

In an effort to support students and raise their self-esteem, adults often praise them for their inherent talents. Unfortunately, research has shown that such comments can lead students to protect their identity as athletic, intelligent or creative by avoiding challenges and the possibility of failure. Students with this "fixed mindset" are afraid of disappointing the adults who have shown such enthusiasm for their "fixed" abilities. These students will avoid situations that, they fear, may expose them as incapable, or worse, as a fraud.

In contrast, students who are praised for their efforts are excited about challenges because they understand that they are in control of the effort necessary for success. Students who focus on effort and learning as critical to eventual success look for opportunities to grow as both a student and person. Students with this outlook are referred to as having a "growth mindset."

How can we foster a growth mindset in our children?

- 1) Highlight the value of mistakes in the service of learning. Celebrate mistakes in the classroom and at home as opportunities to learn and grow. Help students to develop the long view of learning as satisfying and exhilarating rather than a single performance to be rated.
- 2) Rather than evaluating a student based on a single grade, ask him/her to rate how s/he is doing in a given area. Ask open-ended questions that prompt kids to think for themselves: How did you prepare? What confused you on the test/homework? How do you plan to learn more about that topic? What did you learn? What can you do next time to improve?
- 3) Praise the process, not the person. While it feels good to be told, "You are so smart!" the focus becomes on the judgment you have about him/her not on the attention, effort and strategy expended. When they feel they are being judged, kids believe that they are always at risk of disappointing you next time, which leads to ever-increasing anxiety. Comments such as, "I am proud of the effort you put forth to achieve..." or "OK, you didn't do as well as you wanted to. Let's look at this as an opportunity to learn. What can you do next time to improve? How can I help? Or do you know anyone who does well in this area and you can ask him/her what strategies are used."
- 4) Don't over-praise other students or children – especially not for their attributes or performance alone. Commendations should be reserved for pro-social behavior – accepting challenges, staying on task, persisting and being resourceful, as well as volunteering, helping others and--our favorite--being kind.

Interestingly, a recent article on Education.com, “[6 Secrets to Unlocking Your Child’s Talent](#),” by Danielle Wood makes many similar suggestions as a method for parents to support children in their pursuit of excellence. We’ll wrap up with this article’s closing passage:

“Teaching kids that talent is built, not born, allows them to look at failure in a completely new way. Failure is not a verdict—it’s a path forward. And mistakes are not something to be embarrassed about. They’re steps on the path to success. Without them, greatness is not possible.”

The Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples Guidance Department aimed to promote the well-being of our students and foster a positive, inclusive school community.

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