

# Encouraging the Growth Mindset in Children

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*“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.”* – Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein, the 1922 Nobel Prize winner in physics, was considered to be an average student with a great deal of curiosity. His biographers report that he became fascinated with the workings of a compass at the age of four. By the time he was 10 years old, he was studying algebra, philosophy, and popular science on his own. His parents, extended family, and family friends reportedly encouraged his quest for knowledge and learning by providing him with books and puzzles.

Albert Einstein is considered to have had a “growth mindset” according to Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University. For the past two decades, Dr. Dweck has been researching achievement, success and how to foster success. She defines mindsets as your beliefs about yourself and your most basic qualities of intelligence, talents, and personality. There are two types of mindsets the “fixed mindset” and the “growth mindset.”

The “fixed mindset” is the belief that our intelligence, talent and personality are fixed. With this view, individuals tend to behave in accordance with how they think of themselves or how they have been taught to think of themselves. The downside to this type of mindset is that talents and abilities are not developed but rather documented instead. If you have been given high intelligence, talent and abilities then you are all set. There is a pervading idea that “you cannot teach an old dog new tricks.” Children with this type of mindset usually shy away from trying new activities and may become anxious with new tasks or challenging problems.

Conversely, the “growth mindset” is the belief that our most basic abilities, intelligence and talents can be developed through dedication and hard work. This view helps to create more of a resiliency to new or challenging tasks. Children with this type of mindset are more likely to take on challenges and to stretch their abilities.

For example, a child is given a problem to solve that they have never seen before. The child with a fixed mindset will often view the problem in terms of what they have been able to accomplish in the past. If they have struggled with this type of problem, their reaction will often be one of anxiety and trepidation. Whereas, in the same circumstance a child with a growth mindset will often view the problem in terms of what they can learn from the situation. The child will more likely have the attitude if I try hard, I can solve the given problem. This child is more likely to succeed.

Parents can help their children develop a growth mindset by offering more encouragement than praise and focusing more on the effort than the result. By encouraging children to love learning and enjoy the process of learning, children are more likely to develop a growth mindset. In turn, they will more likely be resilient to taking on challenges and not to view themselves or tasks in terms of pass or fail.

It has been reported that Thomas Edison tried over 1000 different materials for the filament of the electric light bulb. When asked about the “failures,” Edison was quick to point out that there were not any failures because learning what materials did not work was just as valuable as learning what material did.

References:

<http://www.mindsetonline.com/whatisit/themindsets/index.html>

<http://rescomp.stanford.edu/~cheshire/EinsteinQuotes.html>

<http://www.sparknotes.com/biography/einstein/section1.html>

*For more information on encouraging children listen to Lynda Savage's four part radio series Parenting: Language of Encouragement at: [http://pfl.org/searchresults/?keywords=encouragement&show\\_results=N%25](http://pfl.org/searchresults/?keywords=encouragement&show_results=N%25)*

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