

Parent *pages*

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A Mindset for Learning



Our relationship with God is both fixed and growth. Justification was a performance that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. Sanctification is about growth. It is the work of the Spirit to help our faith to grow and show.

SALLY HAS AN IQ WELL INTO THE GIFTED RANGE, YET WHEN SHE GOES TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW, SHE BECOMES ANXIOUS AND AVOIDS THE VERY ACTIVITIES THAT WILL HELP HER LEARN. BARNEY DOES FINE IN SCHOOL, THOUGH WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER HE WAS A LITTLE LATE TO TALK AND READ. HE ATTACKS NEW PROBLEMS WITH ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM AND USUALLY CONQUERS THE SKILL INVOLVED.

Ability testing predicts that Sally would be more successful in school, but a different factor explains Barney's success. Research tells us that Barney's mindset is an advantage that's better than IQ. Mindset is a different way of being smart.

While we cannot control IQ, as parents we can have a huge influence on our child's mindset. How does he approach problems? How does she react to feedback? How does he respond when an assignment requires effort? How does she view her intelligence? The answers to these questions can have a huge impact on school performance and are things we, as parents, can influence.

Mindset is a part of a larger package known as self-regulation. When we self-regulate we think about how we learn and this influences the decisions we make about learning. Mindset is a part of motivation, which happens at the beginning of self-regulation and therefore has an impact on everything that happens in the process of learning. Carol S. Dweck has studied motivation and mindset for more than thirty years.

She identified two distinct mindsets that influence learning patterns in children and adults: fixed and growth.

The fixed mindset says: "I was born with whatever intelligence, abilities or personality I have. They cannot improve; I can only use them to my best advantage."

The growth mindset says: "My brain is a muscle that can grow through work. I can develop my intelligence, abilities and personality by finding ways to improve."

It may not be immediately obvious how these two mindsets can influence different behavior. Let's consider for a minute what happens with two learners in the following scenario:

Franny and Greta are both members of a gymnastics team. They both have the abilities necessary to compete in this sport. Franny has a fixed mindset; she knows she is good on the balance beam and glows when she is praised by her coach. Greta has a growth mindset; she has worked hard on her routine and is ready to learn the new dismount her

coach has promised to teach her. Both girls listen intently as the coach explains the new skill. Taking turns, each girl gives the dismount a try and both fail. Greta immediately asks the coach what she should do differently and prepares to try, again. Franny gets frustrated with her performance, dismisses feedback, and makes the excuse that she is tired. Greta thrives with the new challenge and eventually masters the dismount. Franny continues to try but becomes more discouraged with each lesson. She eventually quits the team.

These two girls began with comparable ability, but in each case decisions were influenced by mindset. When we don't believe we can get better, we avoid challenge and effort; the very things that help us improve. Instead, we protect ourselves by sticking with what we do well.

The best way to influence mindset is to take care in how we praise our children. Children who are frequently praised for performance may become dependent on praise. This can lead to a fixed mindset and a child who believes there is little value to effort. A child who receives feedback, input into what is good and what needs improvement, and is praised for effort, will develop a growth mindset. This is a child who will focus on effort and improvement.

These two mindsets result in very different self-esteem. The fixed mindset child may have a poor view of her abilities, or an exaggerated view, depending on performance. The growth mindset child sees himself as someone who works hard; this remains true regardless of performance.

Advice regarding praise can be summed up in three points:

Specific

Stay away from general praise regarding ability (You are good in math.) Instead be specific and

center your praise on effort. (You worked hard on long division and you conquered it.)

Sincere

When you restrict praise to specific things you tend to be more sincere in your praise. Children become suspicious of abundant or exaggerated praise. (You are the best soccer player, ever!)

Scarce

Praise should be fairly rare. If you praise too much, you give the impression that praise is necessary for learning. Too much praise results in children who lack autonomy and persistence. Instead help your child to benefit from constructive feedback that leads to more effort and better learning. This tells your child that improvement is possible.

Praise can be addictive; not only for our children, but also for us as parents. We tell ourselves that when we look for reasons to praise our children we are doing it for their sake. If we are truthful, we see that we also do it for our own sake. We feel better as parents when we see only the good in our children. It is uncomfortable for us to give feedback on what can be improved. As you work to change your praise to feedback, keep in mind that children who never know failure learn to avoid risk because they do not develop a strategy to handle failure. You will not crush a child by helping her to grow and learn; good feedback (both praise and suggestions) sends the message that a child is worthy of improvement. Those who quit and those who cheat do so because they don't see the benefit of effort.

Think for a minute how our Heavenly Father uses praise. The closest He comes to praising us is to assure us that He loves us no matter what. Our relationship with God is both fixed and growth. Justification was a performance that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. Sanctification is about growth. It is the work of the Spirit to help our faith to grow and show. Every day we are presented with challenges to our faith. For God it is about the process of



growing in grace. The apostle Paul certainly understood the power of this growth.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil. 3:12).

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For Discussion:

- ▶ How do you react to praise and criticism? Which works better for you?
- ▶ What are the advantages of feedback over praise?
- ▶ Why does too much praise create a child who is less persistent?
- ▶ Do you have a fixed or a growth mindset?
- ▶ How does feedback contribute to a child seeing evidence of success instead of merely feeling successful? Why is this important?

For Further Study:

- ▶ <http://mindsetonline.com>
Carol Dweck's website