



Growing Through Challenges:

Building a Growth Mindset in Young Children

Young children often give up after one try. They may say "I can't do it" before they even start. This is completely normal. It is also something adults can gently help change over time. Research shows that how children think about their own skills matters just as much as the skills themselves.

Two ways of thinking

A **fixed mindset** is the belief that you are either good at something or you are not. A **growth mindset** is the belief that hard work and practice help us get better at almost anything.

A fixed mindset can show up as early as the toddler years. A child who says, "I am a good painter," may also be quietly deciding they are not good at other things. The good news is that adults play a big role in shaping how children think. Small, daily moments are where that change happens.

Why it matters

Children with a growth mindset are more willing to try hard things. They bounce back from setbacks. They keep going when something is tough. Research also shows this way of thinking helps children do better in school and feel better overall. Pushing through challenges is one of the strongest signs of success in school and in life.



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



What this can look like at home

The most powerful shift adults can make is to praise effort instead of skill. Saying "you worked so hard on that" teaches children that trying is what matters. Saying "you are so smart" can quietly send a different message. It tells the child that success comes from talent, which they cannot control, not effort, which they can.

A few simple phrases that help:

- » "You tried your hardest! That is the most important thing."
- » "How hard you try matters more than how it turns out."
- » "Mistakes help us figure out what to do differently next time."
- » "Let's try a hard one. Hard ones are the most fun!"
- » "That is really hard. But I see you keep trying, and that takes courage."
- » "It is okay to feel upset. We all feel that way sometimes. Do you need a break before you try again?"

It also helps to let children struggle a little before stepping in. When children figure things out on their own, they learn that mistakes are ok. They learn that they are capable.

Modeling matters too

Children learn by watching. When adults talk out loud about their own struggles, it helps. Saying "this is hard for me, but I am going to keep trying" shows children that struggle is a normal part of learning for everyone.

Have more questions?

Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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