

# How to Praise Your Child and Encourage a Growth Mindset

## Motion Math Blog

*"The wrong kind of praise creates self-defeating behavior. The right kind motivates students to learn."* – [Carol Dweck](#)



Stanford professor Carol Dweck has discovered that how we praise our children can benefit or detriment their self view. Being mindful about how you praise your child can help your child foster a *growth mindset* and boost his or her motivation, resilience and learning.

### **Understanding the fixed mindset**

When you praise intelligence, you foster a fixed mindset, the belief that one's intellectual ability is inherent. Those with a fixed mindset tend to agree with statements such as "You have a certain amount of intelligence and cannot do much to change it." They see mistakes as failure and as signs that they aren't talented enough for the task. More concerning, they seek experiences that reinforce their ability and prove their intelligence, leading them to avoid challenging tasks. The desire to learn becomes secondary.

### **Understanding the growth mindset**

When you praise for effort, you encourage a growth mindset, the belief that intellectual ability can be developed through education and effort. Those with a growth mindset believe that they can get better at almost anything, as long as they spend the necessary time and energy. Instead of seeking to avoid mistakes, they see mistakes as an essential precursor of knowledge.

### **Implications for children's attitudes: fixed vs. growth mindset**

Dweck's most famous study, conducted with Claudia Mueller, examined 400 fifth graders

in 12 different New York City schools. She gave them a relatively easy test of nonverbal puzzles. Half the students received their scores with the praise: “you must be smart at this” (praised for smarts). The other half of students received their scores with the praise: “you must have worked really hard” (praised for effort).

These students were then offered a choice of an easier or more challenging puzzle:

- Nearly 90% of students praised for effort chose the harder set of puzzles for the next test, worked hard to figure out the puzzles, were interested in understanding their mistakes, and on a subsequent test showed an average 30% improvement.
- Those praised for smarts mostly chose the easier set of puzzles, were easily discouraged, on a subsequent test saw their scores drop by an average of almost 20%.

Praising kids for smarts encourages them to avoid the most useful kind of learning activities, those in which we learn from our mistakes. Without experiencing and focusing attention on mistakes, minds will not revise its models. Mistakes are repeated and challenges avoided. Those with fixed-mindsets seek self-confidence at the expense of self-improvement.



### **What can you do to encourage your kid to develop a growth mindset?**

Citing specific behaviors such as the amount of time spent or the approach your learner is taking to figure out the task enables the child to connect their actions with results.

Additionally, the praise needs to be sincere, otherwise your kid will discredit all praise – insincere and sincere. (See Po Bronson’s NY Magazine article, “[How Not to Talk to Your Kids](#)”)

*If you see your child working on math homework:*

You might say: "I'm proud of you for sticking with it and taking the time to understand the concepts you're trying to learn." If your child works hard but doesn't do well, you might say: "I noticed you spent a lot of time figuring out your homework – I'm happy that you're so dedicated. Let's work together to figure out what you don't understand."

*If your child is attempting a new challenge, such as a brand new Motion Math game:*

You can observe: "It looked like you were enjoying getting to the next level" or "You seemed to be trying really hard to unlock feathers and twigs ([Motion Math: Wings](#))."  
Reinforce the positives of new learning experiences with "Good job trying something new and different – I know you haven't done this before."



*If you and your kid are exploring math activities:*

Statements like: "When you ask questions to figure out what you're doing, I appreciate your curiosity." or "It makes us happy that we can discuss these activities." – show your child that you value curiosity, intellectually stimulating conversations and the exploration of ideas.

Learning, playing and growing mathematically is filled with challenges. By fusing learning with fun in the context of games, we offer safe environments for learners to take risks.

*What have you found to be most effective in encouraging your learners?*