



Supporting Your Child’s Motivation in School

Parents can either increase or decrease their children’s motivation to work hard in school. Many parents believe that calling kids “smart” will increase their motivation to succeed. But labels like “smart” and “gifted” might actually do the opposite. What matters is how we think about success.

Does success come from fixed talents or intelligence?

Some children believe that success comes from their inborn talents or intelligence, not from hard work. They believe that these characteristics are *fixed*, that they cannot change. If these children fail, or even if they are challenged, they feel trapped. They start to doubt their abilities. They may avoid challenges and may fear how others will view them.

Does success come from growth and hard work?

Other children believe that success comes from challenging themselves. They believe that intelligence can be developed—that the more they learn, the smarter they become. When they have a setback, they believe that they can improve through more time and effort. These children value learning more than looking smart. They can persist through difficult challenges.

“Genius is 1% talent
and 99% hard work.”
—Albert Einstein

The importance of feedback

Feedback from parents can shape their children's beliefs. Praising the child as a person (smart, talented, etc.) develops a fixed attitude. Praising the child’s effort or progress encourages a growth attitude. A fixed approach to praise may make children focus too much on maintaining a good image. A growth approach to praise—specific and sincere—encourages more effort and progress.

Fixed Approach Examples	Growth Approach Examples
"You are so smart!"	"Good effort on your homework!"
"Good girl!"	"You really worked hard on that Spanish assignment."
"You are such an excellent artist."	"That puzzle seems easy for you. Let's try one that is a little more challenging this time."
"You really are talented at writing."	"You are making a lot of progress on getting the ball into this basket!"
"Hey, you got an A without even studying! Super!"	"Your handwriting is getting easier to read."
"You are such a great kid!"	"Almost made it. Try again!"

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