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Growth mindset: Turning 'I can't' into 'I can't yet'

by NORM BLASEG

A mindset is a set of beliefs and attitudes that influence our behaviour and predict our success.

Dr. Carol Dweck, author and professor of psychology at Stanford University, has researched motivation and its influence on achievement.

She concluded children, like adults, have one of two mindsets – fixed or growth.

When children have a fixed mindset, they see their personal qualities and traits as established at birth. They don't believe their abilities can change. They tend to focus on what they are good at rather than pushing the boundaries to learn new skills.

Children with a growth mindset believe their intelligence can grow with practice and time. They recognize the connection between dedication, hard

work, resilience and achievement. They see challenge as an opportunity to grow.

A child's mindset, as a result, can directly impact their ability to learn.

"Research shows a correlation between a child's belief in their abilities and their performance inside the classroom," says Judy Noble, superintendent of schools with Rainbow District School Board. "Introducing a growth mindset strategy to a child at an early age fosters resiliency and perseverance, qualities that shape better learners overall."

Norm Blaseg is the director of education for the Rainbow District School Board.

For more on the growth mindset read: Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (Ballantine, 2006) by Dr. Carol S. Dweck.

How can you support your child in developing a growth mindset?

- Help your child understand the brain can learn anything with practice and effort.
- Model a growth mindset when faced with personal challenges. "This is really hard for me. I'll have to keep trying."
- Teach your child that mistakes are part of the learning process.
- Talk to your child about the power of "yet." When they say, "I can't tie my shoes," respond with, "You can't tie your shoes, yet."
- Help your child set goals and seek challenges.
- Tell your child when you see them displaying a growth mindset.
- Encourage your child to use positive self-talk. Instead of saying, "I can't do this," try "I will do my very best." Praise hard work and effort more than the outcome. Instead of saying, "Great job. You're very smart," try "Your hard work and practice has really paid off."
- When students have a growth mindset, they keep trying.