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# Parent Involvement in Reading

Laurie Elish-Piper

## About This Column

Parents play a key role in their children's literacy development and school success. To support educators in building positive working relationships with their students' parents, this column offers practical suggestions to promote parent communication, involvement, and partnerships.

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## ***Growth Mindset and Grit: Building Important Foundations for Literacy Learning and Success at Home***

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Katie has always been a strong reader, but when she encounters challenging words or has difficulty comprehending a complex text, she tends to get frustrated and give up quickly. She carefully chooses books she knows she can read rather than selecting texts that will challenge her. She sometimes avoids learning new things such as how to roller blade in favor of activities where she already excels such as dancing and playing the piano. Hector reads below grade level, but he puts forth a great deal of effort and takes pride in being able to read and understand difficult passages, especially on topics that interest him such as animals, natural disasters, and history. He has recently started to skateboard, and he practices for countless hours until he is able to complete a new trick or stunt. Why do some youngsters like Katie shy away from difficult tasks and give up as soon as things get challenging, while others like Hector stay focused,

put forth a great deal of effort to work toward their goal, and stick with a task until they are able to figure it out and complete it? One explanation that has received a great deal of attention recently in both the research literature and the popular press is grit.

A *growth mindset* is a key aspect of developing grit (Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013). With a growth mindset, an individual believes that the ability to learn is not fixed. Ability can change with one's effort, and failure is not a permanent condition (Dweck, 2007). Such a mindset is a key ingredient in successful learning because the individual believes that learning and success are associated with hard work, practice, and persistence. Figure 2 compares important aspects of a growth mindset to a fixed mindset.

*Grit* is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest . . . despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, pp. 1087-1088). Duckworth and her colleagues' (2007) research suggests that grit is a better predictor of success in school (and in life) than socioeconomic status, intelligence, talent, or achievement scores. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the key components of grit.

**Figure 1. Key Components of Grit**



**Figure 2. Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset**

<b>Fixed Mindset</b>	<b>Growth Mindset</b>
Believes that intelligence is static.	Believes that intelligence is developed through effort and hard work.
Goal is to "look smart."	Goal is to learn.
Challenges are to be avoided.	Challenges provide learning opportunities so they are embraced.
Gives up easily.	Persists even in the face of challenges.
Sees effort as worthless.	Sees effort as the path to success.
Ignores useful feedback.	Learns from feedback.
Is threatened by others' successes.	Is inspired by others' successes.

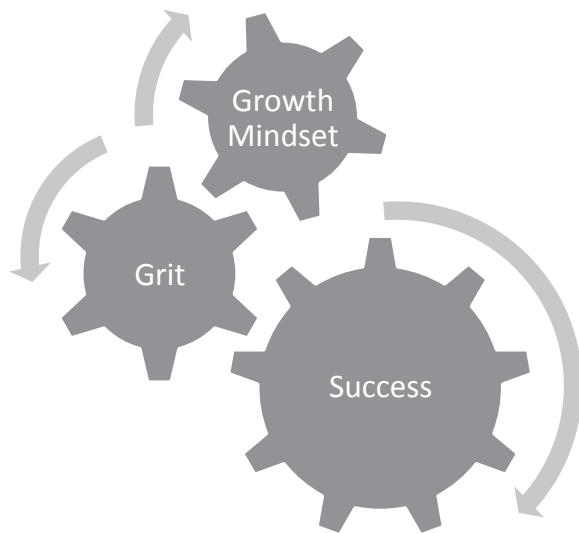
Research supports the importance of a growth mindset and grit for successful learning and accomplishments in school and in life; however, there are no easy answers, programs, or curricula available to foster grit or even to establish a growth mindset, but there are some promising strategies for developing these attributes at home and in school (Silver, 2012; Tough, 2012). The first step in helping parents raise grittier children is to share information about a growth mindset and grit with them. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of how

a growth mindset helps build grit which can then lead to success. The free online resources in Figure 4 offer helpful information for families to understand the role that a growth mindset and grit play in children's learning and success.

### **Helping Families Promote a Growth Mindset and Grit at Home**

All families can help children develop a growth mindset and grit. Doing so does not require a college degree, knowledge of algebra, or even

**Figure 3. Growth Mindset and Grit Interact to Fuel Learning and Success**



fluency in English. It just requires that families model, encourage, and reinforce a growth mindset and grit (Fink, n.d.). In doing so, children will begin to internalize these ideas and incorporate them into the way they approach their schoolwork and goals for life.

To help children develop and maintain a growth mindset, parents can remind their children of a time when they learned something new that was challenging for them. For example, it may have been when they learned to ride a bike without training wheels, to swim, to play the piano, or to memorize the multiplication tables. Families can discuss how “getting

good” at something takes time and effort. In this conversation, it’s important for families to talk about how making mistakes, practicing, and “sticking with it” contribute to successful learning of challenging skills, tasks, or content. Families can teach children to “talk back” to the negative self-talk that is associated with a fixed mindset. When children get frustrated by a challenging task, family members can prompt them to tell themselves things such as “This is hard, but if I stick with it and practice, I will get better.” It’s also important for family members to model a growth mindset for children by talking about (and showing) how they have worked hard and kept trying to learn or accomplish something. For example, if family members are training to run a race, learning a new language, or trying to earn a promotion at work, they can share with their children how effort, practice, and perseverance contribute to their progress and success. Family members will also want to discuss their failures and help their children see that failure and setbacks are normal and useful parts of learning. In addition, it’s important for family members to discuss how they (and their children) can learn from failures to enhance their learning in the future.

Families can also support their children by helping them embrace frustration and modeling resilience (Fink, n.d.). While parents often want to jump in with a solution as soon as their

**Figure 4. Free Online Resources for Parents About Growth Mindset and Grit**

Concept	Free Online Resources
Growth Mindset	Dr. Carol Dweck discusses fixed mindset vs. growth mindset (YouTube video, 4½ minutes) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTsF2TaEaJA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTsF2TaEaJA</a> <i>Fostering Growth Mindsets</i> (Mindset Works Series – 4 videos, 3 to 4 minutes each) <a href="http://www.mindsetworks.com/webnav/parenttips.aspx">www.mindsetworks.com/webnav/parenttips.aspx</a>
Grit	<i>The Key to Success: Grit</i> (TED Talks video, 6 minutes) <a href="http://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_the_key_to_success_grit">www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_the_key_to_success_grit</a> <i>What Advice Would You Give to Parents Who Want to Cultivate Grit in Their Children?</i> (YouTube video, 2½ minutes) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di7u-4gTUxY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di7u-4gTUxY</a> “The Power of Defeat: How to Raise a Kid with Grit” (online article from Scholastic.com) <a href="http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/social-emotional-skills/power-defeat-how-to-raise-kid-grit">www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/social-emotional-skills/power-defeat-how-to-raise-kid-grit</a>

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children experience a challenge or struggle, this is a perfect time to foster perseverance. For example, family members can say, “It looks like you’re having a hard time. What do you think you can do to overcome this challenge?” Then, parents can help children think through their next steps so they have a plan for overcoming the challenge. Taking this stance will help children learn that they can solve and overcome their problems.

At times, children will become so frustrated that they think they can’t continue. For example, Jamal had practiced his guitar solo so much that he was confident he would win the middle school talent contest. When he didn’t even get an honorable mention for his performance, he was devastated. His mother reminded him that just because he did his best didn’t mean that he was guaranteed to win. She shared how she had applied for a promotion and been denied, but then she stepped back and developed a plan to build her skills and experiences so that the next time she applied for a promotion she’d be as ready as possible. As Debbie Silver (2012) reminds parents, children, and teachers, successful individuals may fall down seven times, but they get up eight times. In other words, they don’t give up, and they keep working toward their goals.

In addition to family members sharing their own experiences, children’s literature can be used to help children understand the importance of a growth mindset and grit. By seeing characters deal with frustrations and persevere toward long-term goals, children will have more role models for developing these important character traits. For example, in the picture book, *Miss Dorothy and Her Bookmobile* (Houston, 2011), children can see how Miss Dorothy set a goal, worked diligently toward it, weathered setbacks and frustrations, and finally accomplished her goal. Similarly, classic books such as *The Tortoise and the Hare* (Pinkney, 2013) and *The Little Engine that Could* (Piper, 2012) highlight the persistence and grit of

main characters. In addition, the picture book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998) demonstrates how Trisha is encouraged by her teacher to persevere, work hard, and use her talents to accomplish her goals. Biographies are helpful for getting children to understand and embrace the notion of grit, and they provide excellent models of resilience. *Salt in His Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream* (Jordan & Jordan, 2003) highlights the challenges Michael Jordan faced and how he developed patience, determination, and a commitment to hard work. Many biographies of famous people, such as Abraham Lincoln, Jackie Robinson, Helen Keller, Oprah Winfrey, Thomas Edison, and Bill Gates, demonstrate how resilience, perseverance, and grit helped them reach their goals and succeed.

## Conclusion

While it may be difficult or uncomfortable for parents and teachers to discuss their struggles and failures with children, it is essential for helping them understand that everyone experiences challenges and must work hard to accomplish their goals. Furthermore, by giving children (and their families) insights into the important attributes of a growth mindset and grit, we can increase the likelihood of learning, accomplishment, and success for all children.

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## **About the Author**

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