

Fostering a Growth Mindset in Your Child

by Julia Clark, Ph.D.

You may have heard the term “growth mindset” from your child’s teacher, a parenting blog, or in a parenting group. But parents are often left with many questions – what exactly is a “growth mindset”? Why do we want to encourage a growth mindset in our children? And how can we build our children’s growth mindsets? Growth mindset comes out of the work by Carol Dweck, PhD, a professor of psychology at Stanford University. Dr. Dweck has spent decades researching the ways in which our mindsets, or how we view events, others, and ourselves, influence our emotions, behaviors, and long-term outcomes.

Growth mindset refers to how we view intelligence, personality traits, and skills, though most commonly has been used to refer to our views on intelligence. In a growth mindset, humans are fundamentally malleable and capable of change and improvement over time. Our brains can grow, leading to stronger intellectual abilities, improvement in skills, and the development of different person-



ality traits. People with growth mindsets believe that everyone can become smarter over time, if they work at it. A fixed mindset, on the other hand, is the belief that basic abilities, intelligence, and skills are all set and final, and people cannot improve them over time. People with fixed mindsets therefore believe that if something is challenging, they are just not naturally skilled at it, and there is no point in continuing to put forth effort in that domain. They also try to ensure they appear smart at all times and tend towards perfectionism – if making a mistake means you are dumb, rather than provides a learning opportunity, then the goal becomes to avoid all mistakes.

Research has shown that having a growth mindset leads to improved outcomes in terms of academics and grades (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007), willpower (Job, Dweck, & Walton, 2010), interpersonal relations (Yeager, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2012), anxiety and depression (Schleider & Weisz, 2018) and even

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Morrissey-Compton Education Center, Inc.

14th Annual Scholarship Event & Fall Fundraiser

“Support & Solutions for Challenging Times”

Morrissey-Compton Educational Center is a nonprofit clinic that focuses on serving the broad needs of children, adolescents, and adults with learning/processing, mental health, and/or behavioral challenges. Our vision is to enable individuals with learning disabilities to achieve their goals by providing the highest-quality diagnostic and intervention services in a supportive environment.

Our philosophy has always been to provide services to all who need them - regardless of their ability to pay. Each year, we hold a Fall Fundraiser to help families who would otherwise not have access to our services without the generous support of our community

In 2019, our Fall Fundraiser, combined with our other fundraising efforts throughout the year, raised over **\$275,000**, enabling us to provide testing and treatment services to almost **200** clients. Thank you for your support!

This year’s fundraiser will be a virtual event! Please join us online on Thursday, October 22, 2020 at 500 PM and help us celebrate ALL Educators – both AT School and AT Home! Program details to follow!

Thursday, October 22, 2020
5:00 – 5:45 pm

Virtual Event Details to Follow!

To register: <https://app.mobilecause.com/e/XdvwJw?vid=c9k1b>

A Letter from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

Writing that we have all faced challenging times during the last seven months is clearly an understatement. When the shelter-in-place mandate started, we anticipated that students, families, and teachers would experience significant stress as they transitioned to a new way of educating students. A secondary and equally challenging consequence was how parents had to significantly re-adjust in juggling their professional and family lives. For some parents, in most cases mothers, this juggling of responsibilities became untenable as they faced a new school year with virtual education and increased pressure from employers. Indeed, 57% of mothers are reporting symptoms of depression and anxiety and recent government reports revealed that more than 800,000 women left the workforce in September and 200,000 men likely, in part, in an attempt to manage their home life more effectively. In March, when we closed the Morrissey-Compton office, we quickly triaged our therapy and tutoring services to a virtual format so that we could continue our work with students. Our assessment services were suspended until June, when we resumed with in-person testing following CDC health guidelines and more recently, we adapted assessments so that they can be offered in a virtual format as well.

As with other nonprofits, the COVID pandemic has led to considerable financial stress for Morrissey-Compton. To address decreased revenue, we decreased our expenses, which has allowed us to become a more streamlined organization. However, the demand for financial aid from our families has increased as they deal with the new economic reality that many families are also facing due to work layoffs, terminations, decreased work hours, and salary cuts. A recent report noted that COVID impacted low-wage workers eight times harder than high-wage workers. **This is why our upcoming fall fundraiser on October 22 is so important in our ability to serve low-income families through our Scholarship Fund.** As many of you know, during the past ten+ years, our fall fundraiser also provided an opportunity to honor outstanding educators from the Bay Area. This year we decided to use this fundraiser to honor all educators in schools and in homes. Unlike past years where outstanding educators were honored at a dinner this year, we are honoring teachers at a virtual event on **October 22**. Details about the event is listed in this newsletter, and I hope you can attend!

The staff at Morrissey-Compton is dedicated to providing services to all families regardless of their ability to pay, and we greatly appreciate your support of our Scholarship Fund.

With Warmest Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John T. Brentar, Ph.D.".

John T. Brentar, Ph.D.

Comprehensive Psycho-Educational Evaluations Now Offered Virtually!

While Morrissey-Compton continues to offer in person assessments utilizing social distancing protocols, we recognize that many families may not be comfortable with in person assessments. Even so, they continue to be concerned about the presence of a learning, attentional or mental health disorder. Perhaps, in this time of learning from home such concerns are only more apparent and their presence an even more substantial barrier to learning.

Morrissey-Compton is thrilled to be able to conduct complete assessments by our expert staff through HIPAA compliant Zoom. The process will begin with an initial parent consultation and intake at your convenience via Zoom. Rating scales, questionnaires, and testing response booklets (in a sealed envelope) will be mailed to your residence. Standardized intelligence, achievement, and cognitive tests will be administered through a digital interface. When testing is complete, a parent feedback session and our comprehensive report will follow.

Let our expert team address your concerns. We have over 35 years of experience is diagnosing and treating:

- Specific Learning Disorders in Reading, Written Expression, and Mathematics
- ADHD
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Processing Disorders
- Psychiatric Disorders such as anxiety and depression

Staff Notes: Introducing . . .

Elsa Gay

Morrissey-Compton is thrilled to welcome Elsa Gay to our team of highly skilled educational specialists and therapists. Elsa has worked as an Educational Therapist since 2015. She is currently earning her Doctorate in Psychology through the PGSP-Stanford Consortium. Her drive to serve students with learning differences is driven by her own experience with dyslexia. She is passionate about empowering her students with the tools they need to thrive academically. Prior to joining Morrissey Com-



ton, Elsa worked at the UCLA PEERS Lab at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. Elsa is an Orton-Gillingham Practitioner and Executive Functioning Coach. Elsa holds a Bachelor of Science from Northwestern University.

Elsa currently has openings for both Executive Functioning Coaching and Orton-Gillingham intervention to build foundational reading and written language skills. Interested in having Elsa work with your child? Contact our office today at 650-322-5910.

Ariel D. Marrero, Psy.D., CTRP-C

Dr. Ariel Marrero is a Latinx clinician who specializes in providing culturally attuned and trauma informed therapy, assessment, and consultation services to children and families. A New York native, Dr. Marrero received her BA in Psychology and her MS in Mental Health Counseling from SUNY New Paltz. She then moved to Virginia to pursue her doctorate at the Combined-Integrated Clinical and School Psychology program at James Madison University. Dr. Marrero recently completed her pre-doctoral internship at Milton Hershey School, a K-12 residential boarding school where she provided trauma-informed mental health services to children from low income families.

Dr. Marrero is currently a postdoctoral fellow at Morrissey-Compton and is excited to work with families in the Bay area. She is a Certified Trauma and Resilience Practitioner (CTRP) with clinical

interests in early childhood trauma, parent-child bonding, and foster/adoptive families.

Her goal is to help caregivers understand and respond to their child's unique relational needs to promote positive family relationships. Her clinical framework is deeply rooted in cultural humility, equity, and social justice, recognizing the impact that culture, identity, and power have on our day-to-day lives. Dr. Marrero utilizes interventions such as Child-Centered Play Therapy, Theraplay, Child-Parent Relationship Therapy, and Circle of Security to empower families and provide them with the tools needed to overcome their challenges.



Molly Black

Molly Black is an Executive Function Coach, serving middle, high school and college students throughout the Bay Area. Molly has worked with students with ADHD and EF challenges for over 30 years. She founded the Learning Disability Program at Stanford University in 1989, and was the director of Stanford's Disability Resource Center. Later, Molly directed the LD program at the University of Texas College of Engineering.



She is also founding director emeritus of the Academic Resource Center at Crystal Springs Uplands School, an independent school for students in grades 6-12 in Hillsborough, CA.

Molly draws on a depth of experience with students to provide online coaching and strategies for time management, organization, planning, prioritizing, study skills, test prep and self-advocacy.



Morrissey-Compton staff are available and accepting appointments for psycho-educational evaluations, executive functioning coaching, tutoring, and other services. Please call our office at (650) 322-5910 with a confidential inquiry.

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whether people are willing to confront prejudice (Rattan & Dweck, 2010). Having a growth mindset leads individuals to have increased motivation to continue persisting on difficult tasks because they believe it is possible for them to become more successful at the tasks over time. Having a fixed mindset results in people giving up when they experience setbacks because they expect to continue to fail. Thus, encouraging a growth mindset in our children not only results in increased persistence, determination, and grit, but also increased psychological well-being. Rather than viewing anything less than perfect as a total failure, setbacks are viewed as opportunities to continue working on and building a skill.

That leads to the question of how to go about developing a growth mindset in our kids. Decades of research on learning has demonstrated the importance of modeling the behavior we want to see in our children (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961) and rewarding desirable behavior (Skinner, 1950). The first component – modeling the behavior we want to see in our children – shows our children how to act, think, and feel. It shapes the way in which they interact with and view the world. When we make a mistake, saying “Oh well, now I know for next time!” demonstrates that making mistakes leads to skill-building and improvement, and does not reflect negatively upon us. If we say, “I can’t believe how stupid I was!” or “I guess I’m just bad at that”, we are demonstrating that making a mistake means that the person is stupid or inherently unskilled in a certain area. This response leaves us nowhere to go - there is no room to improve and no reason to continue to put forth effort. On top of the lack of persistence, there is the added anxiety added of trying to ensure that the mistake is avoided, lest we appear stupid again. It sounds simple, but in order to have a growth mindset, kids need to know that a growth mindset exists, and kids are always watching their parents. Modeling a growth mindset not only helps foster this belief in your child, but will likely help increase your growth mindset as well!

In addition to modeling a growth mindset, reinforcing or rewarding our kids when they demonstrate a growth mindset increases their tendency to continue having a growth mindset. Rather than thinking of rewards as tangible objects, rewarding a growth mindset involves giving specific praise to your child for certain comments and actions. If your kid is having a hard time learning a new skill, make sure to tell them how proud you are of them sticking with it. Praise them for putting in the effort and time, and state that you believe the effort will pay off. For example, if your child makes inattentive errors and says, “Wow I can’t believe I missed that on the test. Guess I need to double check my answers!”, praise the way they have developed their own learning opportunity. If they say, “I missed all of those problems in that one area – I really need to work on learning that type of problem better!”, you can say how impressed you are that they are recognizing where they have room to grow and that they are willing to sit down and do the work needed to increase their skill set.



In addition to the indirect ways of teaching through modeling and rewarding the expression of a growth mindset, it always helps to directly teach and coach the belief. Help your child to see the value in making errors by reminding them that getting a “bad” grade on a test tells them where they need to focus when they study for the final. Not making the basketball team means they now know which skills they need to work on for when they try out again next season. When learning something new feels really difficult, it’s because the brain is forming new connections that will strengthen over time (this is called “neuroplasticity” in the psychological research, and has been proven to be true in neuropsychological research, see Draganski, 2006; Gaser & Schlaug, 2003).

These methods of building a growth mindset help students not fall into the trap of the “false growth mindset”, a term used by Dr. Dweck to explain what happens when parents or teachers inadvertently communicate a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2015). This “false growth mindset” can occur when parents praise only the child’s effort, and not the outcome. In order to foster a true growth mindset, we must first acknowledge that there will be times when we have a fixed mindset. We simply won’t have a growth mindset about everything we do all the time. Instead, we can monitor our reactions and notice when we are having a fixed mindset, and then work to reframe it into a growth mindset. Secondly, building a growth mindset is not about only praising effort. Praising effort is part of the equation, but it is not enough on its own. Part of building a growth mindset is showing our kids that there are different ways to



approach a problem. If we tell our kids that with enough effort, they can do anything, we teach them to continue to work on problems using the same technique that got them stuck in the first place. Not all learning techniques will work the same way for all kids – some students learn best by practicing the skill over and over, some learn best by talking it through with another person, some learn best by finding ways to connect information to their interests, and so on.

To truly foster a growth mindset, we need to praise the effort, continue to have reasonably high expectations, and suggest new ways to problem-solve. This might look like saying, “Wow, I’m so impressed by how much work you have put into this math assignment. I know if we keep working on it, you can get it. Let’s see if there is another way we can think about this problem. Would it help to draw it out?” If we stop after only praising the effort, kids do not learn how to creatively problem-solve. In fact, saying something along the lines of “That’s okay, you’ll get it eventually if you keep trying!” can be really frustrating for kids. Sometimes they actually will not understand the concept if they continue to get stuck on using unhelpful strategies. Instead, try saying “That must feel really frustrating to have put so much effort in and still not understand. It’s okay to not get it all right away. The point of doing homework or practicing something new is to build your knowledge over time. What could we try next or differently?”

Fostering a growth mindset is particularly relevant now, while distance learning is happening, and kids are stuck inside and cannot socialize or engage in extra-curricular activities in the ways they are used to. Not only does growth mindset apply to academic settings, but it can also apply to problem-solving environmental constraints and problems in all domains of our lives. If your child talks about how hard it is to focus on Zoom, you can praise the effort they are showing, and problem-solve with them about ways to keep their attention going during the day, or how to refocus when it is homework time. If your child mentions being sad that they cannot see their friends, acknowledge how hard that is, and then help them figure out ways to continue to connect with friends, whether that is through online means, going over for a socially distanced backyard visit, or sending written letters in the mail. Overall, building a growth mindset not only helps your child succeed across various domains, but also builds resilience and improves psychological well-being.



Further resources for parents:

1. “Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfill Your Potential, Updated Edition” by Dr. Carol S Dweck (2017)
2. <https://www.mindsetworks.com/parents/growth-mindset-parenting>
3. <https://www.mindsetkit.org/growth-mindset-parents>
4. Carol Dweck’s TED talk: “The Power of Believing That You Can Improve” (2014)

Children’s books that teach growth mindsets:

1. “When Sophie Thinks She Can’t...” by Molly Bang (2018)
2. “Salt in His Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of His Dream” by Deloris Jordan and Roslyn Jordan (2003)
3. “The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes” by Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein (2011)
4. “Beautiful Oops!” by Barney Saltzberg (2010)

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Our Mission

It is the mission of the Morrissey-Compton Educational Center to empower those with learning, behavioral, and social-emotional challenges to succeed throughout their educational journey. In a supportive environment, Morrissey-Compton Educational Center, a nonprofit, provides the highest quality diagnostic, intervention, and treatment services through innovative programs with scholarship opportunities.