

Dr. Gable's Quarterly Book Review

JUNE 2019

***Mindsets for Parents- Strategies to Encourage Growth Mindsets in Kids* by Mary Cay Ricci and Margaret Lee**

***Mindset: The New Psychology for Success* by Carol Dweck**



I can't ride a bike...I am not good at reading...I do not like vegetables...I am not a good artist...I can't run a marathon ...YET!!! Most likely we can all think of a time our children have said one of these things, or WE have said one of these things. These are examples of a fixed mindset. A belief that our intelligence and our abilities are set, we are smart, or we're not, we are an athlete, or we're not, we are creative, or we're not. A fixed mindset claims that we have little power to change these set traits, and this can be daunting. Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University challenged this idea and has studied the effects of approaching life with a growth mindset. As it turns out, this is a good idea because our mindset greatly effects our ability to grow, learn and perform.

Think of a time recently when you were trying something that was difficult, something that you were not successful at right off the bat. Maybe you decided to take up drawing, to build a bookshelf, to play tennis for the first time. Now, think of an example that involved your child(ren), your 2 year old tried to put a puzzle together for the first time and got frustrated, your daughter decided to play lacrosse this spring and all the other kids were better than her; you knew it and so did she, your son just started guitar lessons and it is really hard for him. How do you react when YOU face a challenge? How do YOU react when your CHILD does? How does YOUR CHILD respond to a challenge or failure? Dr. Carol Dweck's book *Mindset: The New Psychology for Success* discusses her research around the **growth mindset**. Mary Cay Ricci and Margaret Lee have expanded upon her research in conjunction with their own and that of others to develop their book, *Mindsets for Parents*. I will focus on these books in this review, both are excellent resources if you would like to learn more detail on this topic.

One thing I would like to say before I dive into this great stuff...We are ALL a team, you, me, the mom next to me on the sidelines of the soccer field, the dad in Target who's three year old is throwing a very large temper tantrum, the grandmother working SO hard to raise her

granddaughter, the papa who drives his granddaughter to dance because her mom is still at work, the check-out clerk at the grocery store, the mail carrier, the teenage boy you passed on the sidewalk who you think must be skipping school, the single dad (or mom) who you often see struggling, everyone. We are ALL a team. My goal is not for you to walk into your next gathering of family or friends and start mentally placing people on the fixed mindset list or the growth mindset list. I hope to inspire you to work together to help those little ones around us and our collective selves grow and learn as much as they can, as much as we can...to persevere when the going gets tough, and to have some fun doing it.



What is a Growth Mindset anyway? Dr. Dweck explains the **growth mindset** as a self-perception that your most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, that the brains and talent which seem innate are just a starting point. You can get smarter, you can get stronger, you can learn to accomplish something you had no obvious talent in previously. To achieve you need to have effort, perseverance and resilience. She does agree that some people appear to have a higher level of innate talent for a particular task but that those with less can surpass their competitors by working within a growth mindset. One famous example of this is Michael Jordan who we have all heard of and admire for his basketball success. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. Dr. Dweck would argue that it was his growth mindset which brought him so much success despite his initial set back.

Why is a growth mindset important? The growth mindset gives us the most potential to learn AND it tells us that even if we are not as good as we want to be at something on any given day, all is not lost, we can work hard and improve. The research of Drs. Dweck, Ricci and Lee shows that in situations where a fixed mindset exists a failure or a setback often results in a lack of progress and a lack of learning. For example, a child's parents continually tell her "You are an amazing soccer player" or, "You are just perfect", then she gets cut from the soccer team or she fails a test, a fixed mindset prevents her from moving beyond these failures. Furthermore, these failures can lead to anxiety about performance and certainly take the fun out of learning and hard work. With a growth mindset, you avoid these pitfalls and set yourself up for lifelong learning. Let's take a look at the same child above with a growth mindset, remember, she failed her math test...In the fixed mindset she might think, "I am no good at math", "I am stupid", "what's the point anyway?". With the growth mindset she thinks, "I really do not want to fail my math test, I need to study more, and I am confused by some of these questions, I think I need to ask my teacher for more help". We can see how this second thought process might lead to more success.

The power of praise. Dr. Dweck discusses how praising ability pushes kids into the fixed mindset. It is important to praise the process. Yes, the achievement is wonderful, and you **should** celebrate your child's successes, but celebrate in the context of **how** they were able to reach their goals. Drs. Ricci and Lee discuss three types of praise that can aid in keeping kids in the growth mindset.

- 1) **Process Praise**- Directed at what the child accomplished not who they are. "Wow, great race, all that hard work really paid off."
- 2) **Strategy Praise**- providing feedback and guidance while at the same time reinforcing good choices. "I read your English paper and I noticed how accurate you were with your spelling and punctuation. Setting 20 minutes aside each night to work on it seems like it was really helpful, good job". Or, "Wow, you scored 3 goals in your soccer game today, all that time you spent in the backyard shooting goals with your brother was worth it."
- 3) **Persistence Praise**- praise for times when tasks were difficult and obstacles arose, but the child pushed through those obstacles. Or tried to push through obstacles, even if they were still unsuccessful. "Even though you were not able to do a back hand spring today at gymnastics I noticed when you got frustrated, you took a couple deep breaths and kept trying. Great job being persistent". Or "I saw you try a roll dodge move today in the lacrosse game, that guy still blocked you, but I liked to see you trying out a new move". By the way, um, my husband just explained what a roll dodge move is to me, so if you don't know...(Roll dodge: when a lacrosse player rolls backwards past the defender while protecting the stick with their body in order to get a shot at goal or be able to pass the ball).
- 4) **The Power of YET.** I find this one to be very helpful for me when talking with patients and my own kids. Emphasizing that goals are not reached quickly and easily, but it will likely happen down the road if they work hard and are persistent. "You will learn to swim, you just cannot do it YET, keep working".

On the path of growth mindsets, a couple hiccups to look out for...

#1 No one has a 100% "fixed mindset" or a 100% "growth mindset". We all have situations where we can display a growth mindset and some where we can get stuck in a fixed mindset. As you grow and learn about mindsets try to recognize when a fixed mindset sneaks in. These moments influence how we react to our children and in turn how our children feel about themselves as learners. I know when I am worried about getting out the door on time I can get caught slipping into a fixed mindset. Our youngest daughter may say, "Mom, can I pack my lunch for school myself?" As my best self I would say, "Sure honey, that's great, go ahead". In the flurry of getting out the door my response might be, "Honey, you are not old enough to pack your lunch, here I'll do it". I just caused her to miss a great opportunity for perseverance and learning.

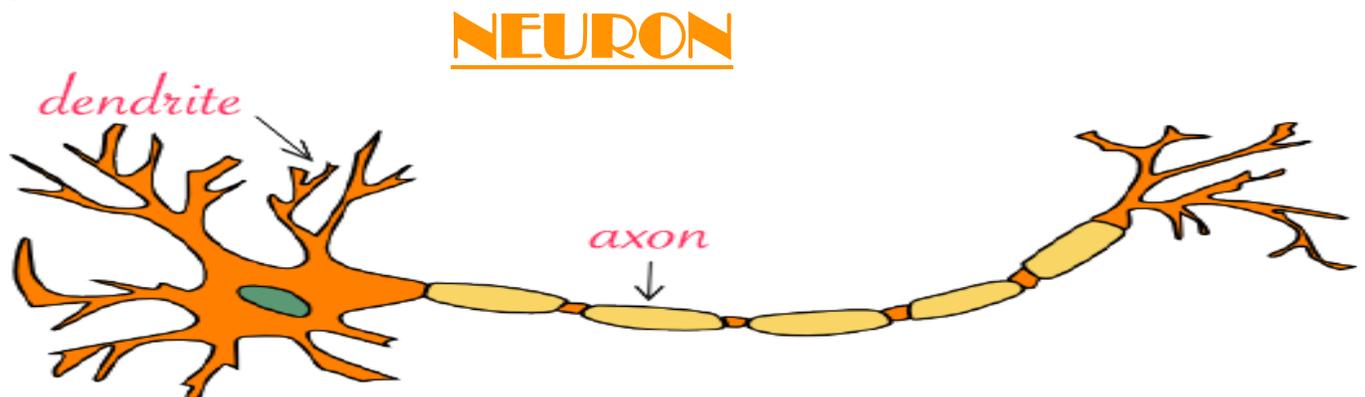
#2 The FALSE GROWTH MINDSET trap. WHAT you say? A False Growth Mindset would be telling our kids, "Honey, you can do anything you want if you put your mind to it?". It sounds awesome, and I'm pretty sure some people told me this growing up, BUT it is not actually true. You can do **A LOT** of things if you work hard and persevere, but knowledge and experience are **ALSO** necessary to do almost all of the "things". In addition, luck, skills,

opportunities or lack thereof opportunities play a part. Let's try to teach our children to set goals but when we are helping them reach for the stars, let's help them identify the process it will take to reach that goal and a realistic view of the necessary hard work.

Here is a few more examples of fixed and growth mindsets:

1. *I am not good at painting. (fixed mindset)*
I would like to learn how to paint flowers that look more realistic. (growth mindset)
2. *I am so dumb when it comes to math. (fixed mindset)*
I keep mixing up my regrouping when I am subtracting and then I get confused, I'd like to figure out a strategy to keep myself more organized. (growth mindset)
3. *I am not good at swimming. (fixed mindset)*
It's hard to be at practice and always go last in my lane, coach what can I do to help my freestyle become more efficient. (growth mindset)
4. *Writing is too hard, I quit! (fixed mindset)*
Writing is really difficult for me, but when I looked back at my writing from earlier this year, I can see how much I improved, if I keep working hard, I will keep improving. (growth mindset)
5. *I can't do it! (fixed mindset)*
If I keep working my neurons will grow! (growth mindset)

Growing your neurons! Neuroplasticity! Neuroplasticity is the flexibility and changeability of your brain. Learning about the biology behind the growth mindset can give us and our children a concrete way to visualize the process. Neurons are the cells in your brain that make connections with each other in order to send messages around your brain. Neurons are made up of axons and dendrites (see image below). The more we use our neuronal paths, the stronger they become. Think of something you just learned as a thin strand of hair, if you pull to hard it could break. With some practice it becomes as thick as a piece of yarn and with a lot of practice a thick strong rope, unbreakable, we have really mastered the skill. Likewise, if we do not use our neurons, they can thin.



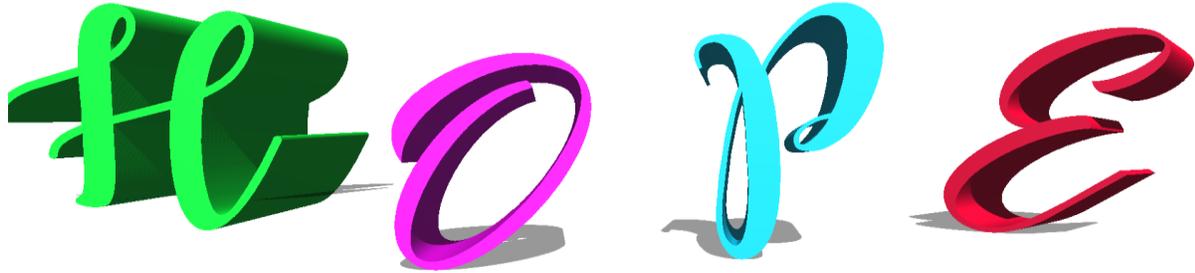
Working with children to help them understand this process can be empowering. Drs. Ricci and Lee have published some great resources regarding ways to teach children about neuroplasticity and they are listed in their book. Here is one exercise you can do at home. Try sitting down with your child and coming up with a list of things they have learned by being persistent. Everyone has some which are obvious, learning to walk, learning to talk, learning to write their name and read. Then encourage them to come up with a list of things they are still working on. You can even discuss if this skill is still a strand of hair or has grown into a thick rope. For example, I would put on my list for growing my neurons...

1. I am practicing my effective writing skills by writing a challenging paper at least quarterly. Writing can be a difficult task for me, but if I am persistent and take my time, I can write a fun, educational essay. ☺
2. I am working on finding ways to get to bed earlier and get more sleep. Some nights I try really hard and still am up too late. If I am persistent in working towards my goal every day, I know, even if at first I fail, I will be able to do it.
3. I am working on being healthy by trying to drink 80 oz. of WATER a day. The water goal is a hair strand for me, but I am working on it, I am just not really good at drinking a lot of water YET!

There are also benefits to be gained from **reframing failures and setbacks as opportunities for growth**. Having this mindset allows us to try new things and failing does not affect our view of our own self-worth. I tend to be involved in at least one D.I.Y. project at any given time. A year or so ago my older daughter said to me, “Mom, no matter what project you are doing, there is ALWAYS a problem.” I could get my feelings hurt by this statement, but the truth is, THERE IS always a problem. I’d be lying if I told you I **always** take on these moments with ease and grace, but thinking creatively about hiccups develops problem solving skills, decreases fear of failure, and fosters the development of **hope**.

What does HOPE have to do with it? Hope is important because life is HARD. When you are 7 it might be that reading is hard, when you are 13 may be getting cut from the basketball team is hard, when you are 16 feeling left out is hard, when you are 40 juggling kids, work, and a relationship is hard. Having hope is what drives us to keep going. C.R Snyder, a former psychologist at the University of Kansas, Lawrence and author of the *Handbook of Hope* defined hope not as an emotion but as a cognitive process. Hope according to Snyder is the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and to motivate oneself via agency thinking towards those goals. He also believed that children learned hope from their parents. I first read about this in Brené Brown’s work. She discusses that the children who are hopeful have been given the opportunity to struggle and by doing that learn to believe in themselves. In other words, children need to set a goal that is important to them, develop a plan for how to make it happen, feel motivated to set the plan into action, and if they hit a road block change paths to continue towards their goal. We (grown-ups) need to follow the same steps in our pursuit of hope. The growth mindset, in which we encounter struggle, change strategies and persevere teaches hope. In my mind hope may be one of the most valuable commodities and recently one

that may be in decreasing supply. The growth mindset gives us a vehicle towards increasing our collective hope.

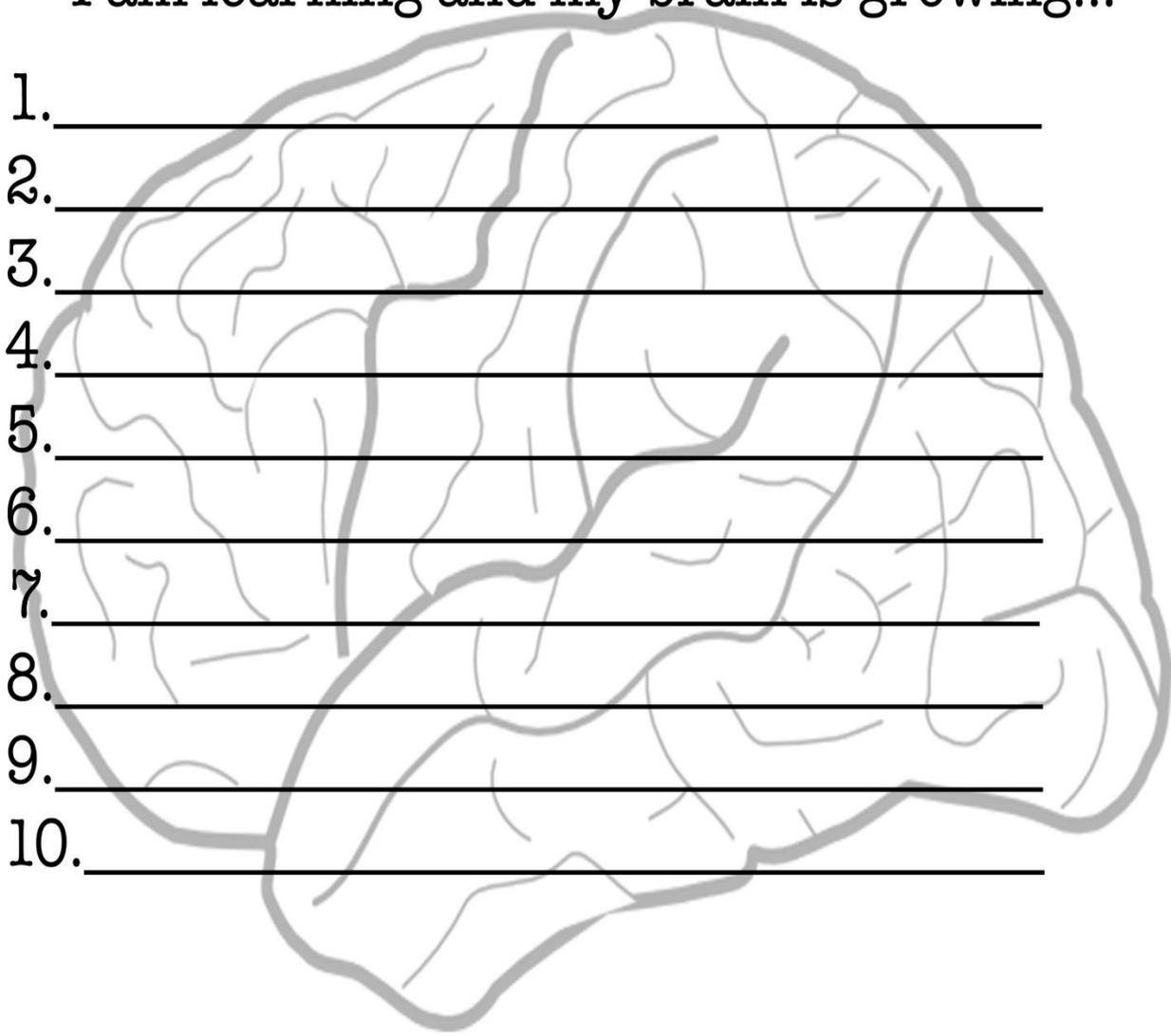


I HOPE you find this helpful in your interactions with your children, your colleagues, your friends and your family. Remember that changing mindsets is difficult and will take time. None of us is perfect and we are all doing the best we can. I know when I can put down my fear of failure, I can allow myself to try new adventures and I can learn new skills. These steps lead me to feeling more confident, to noticing more joy and gratitude in my life, and to experiencing HOPE.

**“LOVE CHALLENGES,
BE INTRIGUED BY MISTAKES,
ENJOY EFFORT AND
KEEP ON LEARNING”
-CAROL DWECK**

** The opinions in this piece are solely of Dr. Gable and do not necessarily express the opinions of other providers or Pavilion Pediatrics as a whole.

I am learning and my brain is growing...



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

**Use this worksheet to record some things you are doing to help grow your neurons, write down what you are learning and how you are practicing persistence.

**Is your skill strong like a large rope or still fragile like a piece of hair?

Keep practicing and strengthening those connections.