



FAMILY *Matters*

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Why does my child avoid school work and obsessively play video games?

This is a common complaint I hear from parents. Kids are naturally drawn to pleasurable activities such as video games. Video game use should be monitored by parents since they can become addictive given the nature of the fast action and immediate gratification. When video game use becomes obsessive, there may be underlying issues that need to be addressed. If school work is challenging and consequently frustrating for your child, consider whether there may be a learning disability, behavioral disorders (i.e., ADHD) and/or mood disorders that may be leading them to avoid school work. If these are ruled out, there is often a more subtle contribution that is hard for parents to recognize.

In my experience, the subtle contribution that is often at the route of the problem is having a fixed mindset. A person with a fixed mindset believes that their abilities are fixed at their current level and therefore not changeable. Meaning if your child struggles with math, they may think “I am not good at math” and “will never be good at math” so why bother to try. Connected to the fixed mindset is the belief that having to work hard means you are not smart. So when a stu-

dent believes “I don’t have the skill or smarts” to succeed, students often give up. In essence, they perceive their efforts will not likely to be successful, so why try. They also avoid challenges, resist feedback and feel defined by their current performance.

Since they believe, often incorrectly, they are not skilled or smart, they look for something that they are good at to feel successful. Video games can be exciting, action packed, and achieving the next level score is within the child’s reach. Their motivation is enhanced since their effort is rewarded by the immediate and positive effects of their efforts. In contrast, they don’t have the same positive expectations with academic effort because they believe their effort won’t matter.

So then what is the solution? The solution is to promote a growth mindset over time. Growth mindset reflects an optimistic and fundamental belief about the importance of and ability to grow as a person (i.e., academically, socially and/or athletically). Having a growth mindset can lead to a desire to improve. People with a growth mindset realize potential develops over time.

In addition to reading the book *Mindset* by Carol Dweck, Ph.D., parents can promote a growth mindset by leading by example and encouraging your child to?

- Look for learning opportunities in everything they do
- See mistakes and weaknesses as learning opportunities.
- Embrace challenges to identify areas of needed growth.
- See the value of persisting in the face of adversity. (Use sport analogies if appropriate).
- View effort as the path to mastery.
- Learn from feedback rather than avoiding it.
- Look for lessons in the success of others that they can use in their own life.
- Challenge their perceived limits with objective information (i.e., test score, previously achieved grade).
- See learning and growing as a lifelong process.
- Embrace hard work as the most common path to success.
- Not see perfection as a desirable goal because it is unrealistic and frustrating.
- View what they do and don’t do as a choice.
- Set measurable and achievable goals that they are accountable for.

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