



## Helping at Home: Using Language Intentionally

Praising people is about pointing out something positive, so how could praise ever have a negative effect on a child’s self-esteem? It turns out that when we praise a child’s personal qualities, like their intelligence (“You’re so smart!”) instead of their effort or behavior (“You tried a new strategy and solved the problem! Way to go!”) it can actually lead to lower self-esteem – the opposite of what we intended!

When we praise effort or behavior, we’re helping the child take pride in something they can control, and the next time they aren’t successful they’re more likely to work to overcome the obstacle. This is called having a growth mindset, and it’s an important part of helping students develop a positive sense of themselves as mathematicians. We call this sense of themselves their math identity. When we praise a quality a child can’t change, like their natural abilities, though, failure can make them feel like they aren’t good enough as a person. It can lead to a fixed mindset – the idea that they can’t improve because they just don’t have what it takes.

Here are some things you can say, or help your child to express, to help them see themselves as a doer of mathematics.

 <b>Fixed Mindset Instead of...</b>	 <b>Growth Mindset Say...</b>
You’re so smart!	I can tell you’ve been thinking about this!
You’re really good at math.	I can tell you worked hard at this and tried a new strategy.
That’s interesting.	Tell me more about your thinking.
I never liked math.	Let’s see if we can figure this out together.
I don’t know why you have to learn math this way.	This is new to me. Let’s look at this together.