

Reframing Our Thinking

Children and teens may sometimes feel that the adults in their lives have all the power, but really their own thinking has a significant impact on their experiences and achievement.

- ▶ Most students don't regularly reflect on the stories they choose to tell themselves, but their own patterns of thinking affect their effort, persistence, and learning.
 - ▶ Studies show that what we think can have a powerful influence on how we feel emotionally and physically, and on how we behave.
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- ▶ For many children and teens, a challenge or a mistake can cause negative thoughts, and sometimes they might shutdown.
 - ▶ They may wait for an adult to help them fix a mistake, walk them through each step of fixing a problem, or they may become frustrated or disengage.
 - ▶ A discouraging inner voice can create stress and discourage children and teens from trying new things.
 - ▶ But research shows that harmful thinking patterns can be changed.

How can we help children and teens reframe their inner critic into an inner champion?

- 1. Model how we ourselves approach challenges. Our words and actions can model healthy responses.**
 - Show how you process your feelings.
 - Take a slow, deep breath, and talk through your response to a challenge out loud. For example, you might say “Darn. That didn’t go the way I wanted it to. That’s not great. I guess I’ll have to try another way.”
 - Show you can stay optimistic when things don’t go as expected.
- 2. Help your children step out of their “comfort zone” into the growth zone.**
 - One great activity with young people is to make this concept concrete.
 - Place a hula hoop or a mat on the ground to represent the “comfort zone.” For example, that might be staying home from school because there is a test that day.
 - Have your children step in the hoop or on the mat. Talk about what is keeping your child in the “comfort zone.” Talk about what might help them step out.
 - Ask your child to step out of the hoop or off the mat. Talk about how your child feels when they step outside that space. Does it feel a bit frightening? That’s ok. What can they do when they are stuck in the “comfort zone” versus being outside of it?
- 3. Emphasize that your family views mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.** Help your children take on new challenges that might not come easily at first. Let them know that if they don’t succeed right away, that only means they are stretching themselves in new ways – which is great!
- 4. Celebrate effort and growth.** Children and teens may be more willing to try new things when their parents notice and praise times when they extend themselves. Tell your children you are proud of them when they overcome a challenge – no matter how big or small.
- 5. If your children need a confidence boost, remind them of times in the past when they’ve done something hard.**

Together, education staff and parents can help students send themselves new types of messages. This can build their self-esteem and their resilience (which means their ability to deal with difficulties and bounce back when things have gone off-course).

Possible questions that parents and educators can discuss ...

- ▶ Do we think the children and teens in our school tell themselves more positive or negative stories about their abilities? Why?
- ▶ What can we all do to help students reframe their thinking and recognize and celebrate their talents? How can we help them feel confident that they can take on challenges and accept mistakes as learning opportunities, not failures?
- ▶ How can we show students it is possible to tell ourselves optimistic stories about our lives and our futures?

