



Martin Smith, LMFT

## *Children Benefit from a Growth Mindset*

*This time of year, we parents are focused on how to support our children as they begin school. We know that our kids will inevitably face obstacles, setbacks, criticisms, and that their roads will not always be smooth; however, watching them negotiate rocky paths can be difficult. While we may not have full control over which challenges our kids will face, what we can do is help them develop a mindset for how to approach and manage them.*

In her book *Mindset*, Carol Dweck, Ph.D. encourages parents to remember the inherent value in challenging experiences. Rather than interpreting perceived failures as a fixed character trait, Dweck reminds us that talents and abilities can actually be developed through challenges. She encourages us as parents to help our children view taking risks, facing challenges, and risking failure as helpful things that are an important part of their development. We can support this process by creating a context in which a growth mindset can flourish. Here are some thoughts for how:

### **REACT TO SETBACKS AND FAILURES AS EXPERIENCES THAT ENHANCE LEARNING**

Help kids ask themselves: What is this setback teaching me? What should I do next? Where can I get support? Kids need to know that through hard work, good strategies, and good use of resources, they can be better learners and grow from setbacks. Remind them that challenges provide opportunity for growth.

### **CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AT HOME**

How well children's everyday needs are met has a significant impact on their education and how well they can mentally and physically respond to challenges. Like adults, kids are better able to manage stressful situations when they are rested, well fed, and have consistent homework and activity schedules. Teach them this, so they can make choices about when to try and manage challenging thoughts or projects.

If kids seem to be "spinning" or getting overwhelmed by feelings of stress or failure, help them evaluate if they are hungry, tired, or in need of a break. If they are, encourage them to meet those needs first before dealing with their struggle, and ask them later if that break was helpful. We can help our kids understand cause and effect, so they begin to learn how to care for themselves during trying times.



## WHAT DO WE DO?

*We work every day to strengthen lives.*

*(continued)*

If we want to help our kids develop a growth mindset, we first have to ensure that they are mentally and physically comfortable enough to be receptive to it.

### BE INVOLVED IN YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

We are better positioned as parents to understand situations at school and dynamics our children may be managing when we know the players, and that insight will make it easier to offer guidance. Get to know teachers, friends, activities, and curricula as much as possible. We can show interest and be curious about these things when we are with our kids. Families are busy, and we cannot do everything, but we can do our best to pick and choose important events to attend at school. We can reach out and communicate with teachers, show appreciation for their commitment to our children, and highlight what we see as going well and what is challenging.

As we support our kids in school, we can try to think back and remember our own struggles at that age to bring a level of understanding and empathy to what is going on with our kids. The world has changed a great deal since we were young, but many of the developmental struggles are the same. As Carol Dweck points out, struggle and challenge is how we grow, and one of the best things we can do for our kids at this age is to help them learn that. With each struggle they encounter and then manage, their confidence will grow. And as they age, they will know that they are prepared to meet whatever life brings their way.

Good luck! And if the road gets a little too bumpy and you need support for your child or yourself, we are here.

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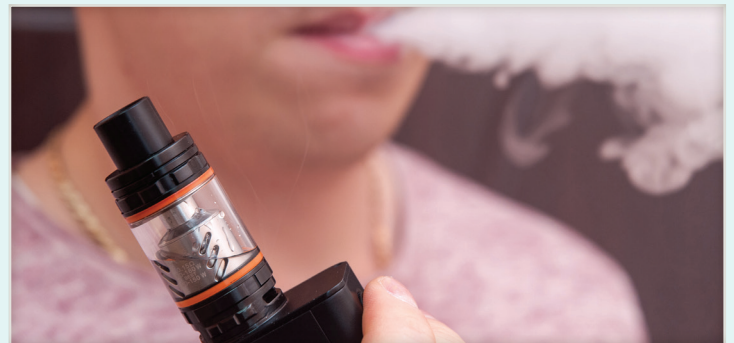
*If you would like to pursue counseling for yourself or your child, be in touch. Call us at 860.521.8035. We take insurance and have evening and Saturday hours.*

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### VISIT THE BASE AT THE WEST HARTFORD TEEN CENTER

Located in the basement of the Elmwood Community Center, THE BASE is open Monday and Friday 2:30-5:00 p.m. and Wednesday 1:00-3:30 p.m. Teen Nights will be held this fall from 7:00-10:00 p.m. on the following dates: October 19, November 30, and December 21. Any West Hartford resident in grades 9-12 is welcome to drop in. Admission is free.



### VAPING IS DANGEROUS—AND ON THE RISE AMONG TEENS

The rate of youth cigarette smoking is at historic lows, but the number of kids using electronic ("e") cigarettes—known as vaping—has increased. E-cigarettes were created to help adult smokers stop smoking. And while they do contain fewer toxic chemicals than regular cigarettes, they still contain nicotine. Many teens believe there are no serious health risks and that they are simply inhaling vaporized, flavored water. NOT TRUE. Nicotine is the primary ingredient in e-cigarettes, and fun-flavored vapors often contain lead, zinc, chromium and nickel. Vaping nicotine is extremely addictive and can cause memory and attention loss, especially in the developing teenage brain. It also leads to greater use of other substances like marijuana and cocaine. Send a clear message to your kids: **DO. NOT. VAPE.**

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