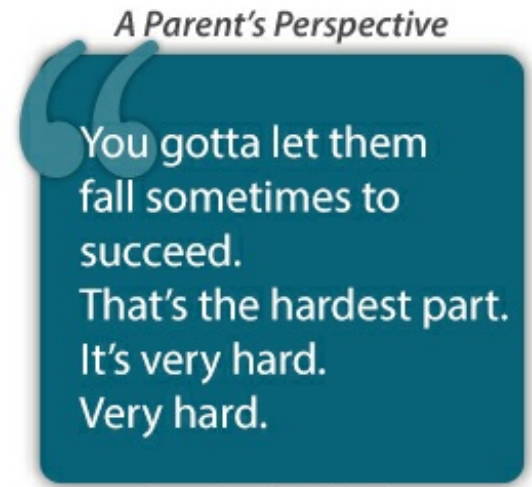


How Challenging Growth Works

Overview

As parents, we challenge our kids to grow through everyday activities and interactions that are part of family life. Here are some points to keep in mind about how the process works:

- Challenging growth rests on **clear limits, rules, and boundaries**. These limits help our kids learn to make choices with safe boundaries. How our kids respond to these limits helps us know when they may be ready to expand their responsibilities.³
- Sometimes our kids grow by **pushing against these limits**. They do this by testing, arguing, and struggling with us when they seek more freedom or challenges.¹ Depending on what's at stake and where our kids are developmentally, we may . . .
 - Hold firm because of our values and priorities;
 - Revise the limits based on their feedback and growth; or
 - Find ways for them to experience challenge while respecting the limits.



From a Search Institute focus group with parents (2013)

Explore these ideas by visiting the [Share Power](#) section.

- Challenges are most likely to trigger growth or learning when they **fit with our kids' interests and abilities**. Here's how it works:¹

If Challenge Is		Interest/Ability Is		The Likely Result Is
Low	+	Low	=	Apathy
Low	+	High	=	Boredom
High	+	Low	=	Anxiety
High	+	High	=	Growth

- **Not all growth challenges are planned or even desired**. Our kids grow through the frustrations, conflicts, struggles, and tragedies. They learn that **setbacks that are part of life**. Each of these can become a "teachable moment" through which we learn, grow, stumble, and succeed.
- **We can't "make" our kids grow** by challenging them. To grow, they must take responsibility and action themselves.¹ We can set rules and limits, inspire and stretch them, and set the expectation for them. But **it's their job to focus** and take steps to achieve their goals.² We can't learn and grow for them.

- **Sometimes our kids will fail.** For many different reasons, they won't complete a task or achieve a goal. How we respond to that failure makes a huge difference:
 - *If we ridicule, belittle, or shame them*, it undermines their self-confidence and motivation. It makes them less likely to try again or take on new challenges.
 - *If we see failure as part of learning*, they are often motivated to try again. It's important to provide a lot of care and emotional support to work through their disappointments. In the process, they develop more self-confidence and better decision-making skills.
 - *Seeing failure as part of learning is a feature of a Growth Mindset.* Explore key idea by visiting the [Increase Effort](#) section.
- Challenging growth can become **a constant, mutually-reinforcing cycle**.

Similarly, when we notice and challenge them to grow around their own interests and abilities, **we are responding to their own initiative and motivation**. That responsiveness builds their self-confidence and motivation to keep challenging themselves. It also encourages us to keep challenging them to grow in these areas.⁴

- If, for example, our kids are doing well in school, we expect them to keep doing well. That expectation affects their own effort and expectations of themselves, and the growth continues.
- However, if our kids aren't doing well, we expect less of them. That, in turn, leads them to expect less of themselves. So they don't work as hard. Breaking that cycle can be a difficult—but critical—challenge.
- **We continue to learn, grow, and adapt throughout life.** We will try new things, work on getting better at things that matter to us, or actively deal with the difficulties we face. The attitudes, skills, and habits we develop as kids can set us on a path for lifelong growth and learning.

Next Steps

- [Take the quiz](#) to explore the ways you challenge your kids to grow.
- [Learn about](#) how families in the United States challenge growth.

Research Sources

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