

# Learning - effort or ability?

## Introduction

### Opinions about Effort and Ability

As children become older they develop opinions about effort and ability. Some feel that having the right abilities is the most important thing for learning and success. Others have the view that effort will result in success.

## Activity

Think of an activity that requires quite a lot of patience but can be completed successfully by your child – building a stack of cards, threading a large needle or balancing a coin on its end.

- Ask your child to try to complete the activity. Give them encouragement and don't worry if they aren't successful.
- Ask your child whether they think they are good at the activity and whether they are better than other children.
- Also ask your child if they practised a lot could they get better at the task.
- Ask them whether they think practising makes children better at the activity or whether some children are just good at what they do and don't need to practise, e.g. 'if someone is very good at this, do you think that if they practise more they will get even better?'
- Ask about other things, why do other children get good marks – because they are clever? because they work hard? or just luck? Put this in your own words.
- Ask your child what things at school they are best at. Ask them whether this is because they work hard or because they are just good at it. Ask them whether they think if they work harder they could be even better.

Remember, even if you disagree with your child's answers, you will get a better idea of their opinions if you listen in an encouraging way. Also remember that success and ability can be difficult subjects for children (and adults), so make an effort to be supportive and not critical.

### **The explanation**

Success usually is a mixture of effort and ability. However, the way we think about these things can influence the effort we put into doing something. If we think that ability is important, then it makes sense not to put too much effort into what we do. If we think effort is important, then it makes sense to try hard and practise.

Research findings suggest that people who think effort is important work harder at things and are more successful. They also feel better about themselves because they think what they do makes a difference.

- After talking with your child would you like them to have a more positive view of effort? If so here are some ideas.

Remember it takes time to change an opinion so our suggestions are for a long term strategy, you cannot expect immediate change in a few hours or days.

Try to praise effort as much as success "I was really pleased you worked hard and you did so well". In this way your child knows you are interested in their efforts, not just their success. It is sometimes worth saying "Don't worry about the marks, the main thing is that you worked hard and I am sure you'll do better next time".

When you get an opportunity, point out that effort makes a difference. For example, explain that even successful people spend a lot of time practising and working hard to get better. Try to pick people your child is interested in.

If possible talk to your child about occasions when you've worked hard and it has been successful.

Remember that when talking about all these things it is important not to give the impression that effort will always result in success, but to get the message across that it often results in success.