

Coaching our Students and Children

When I coach children, either at ThinkWorkPlay or when volunteering my time with SwingPals, as they hit great shots I say, "good job, you have been working really hard on your game. I'm proud of you". I never say, "wow, you have so much talent" or "you're a natural". As a coach or a parent, what you say may be critical to the success of the child.

Acknowledging their efforts leads them into what Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck, author of "*Mindset - the new Psychology of Success*", calls the growth mindset. In this mindset, children learn to trust in their ability to perform and as a result do not fear making mistakes. On the other hand, if we attribute their success to being talented or being a natural, we leave them with what Dr. Dweck refers to as the fixed mindset. In a fixed mindset, children reject new challenges and the resulting personal growth for fear of exposing their flaws and not meeting self-imposed unrealistic expectations. This inevitably occurs when we attribute their success to talent rather than to hard work and commitment.

Unfortunately, many players develop a fixed mindset early in their playing experiences and it can limit their performance for a lifetime. And this is not limited to golf. To effectively coach our students and children, it is critically important to allow the child to develop a growth mindset. Encourage them to sit with the uncomfortable feelings of failure while at the same time redirecting them to the importance of putting in the time and effort that leads to a growth mindset. Doing so will ultimately help them perform at the highest level and have greater success on the golf course and in life.

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Doug Hodges developed his expertise as a Performance Coach while at the La Costa Resort in Carlsbad, CA. He now coaches at the Heritage Golf Club in Wake Forest and is about to enter his third year as the head coach of the Ravenscroft Varsity Girls Golf program.