

The Magic Words: A Grown-Up's Turn

From the practice of Elliott McCray, Ed.S., The McCray Learning Lab

What this builds (transformative SEL): Agency (“I can do it”) with a thread of Identity (“Who I am”).

This practice is grounded in **Carol Dweck's mindset research**: praising a child's **effort and strategies** builds a growth mindset, while praising their **intelligence** (“you're so smart”) can push kids to avoid challenges, hide mistakes, and quit early to protect the label. Children praised for effort choose harder challenges and bounce back; children praised for being smart tend to do the opposite. What you praise is what grows.

The swaps, ready to grab

- Instead of “You're so smart” → “**You worked so hard on that.**”
- Instead of “You're a natural” → “**You've really practiced.**”
- Instead of “Good job!” (for everything) → “**Tell me how you did it.**”
- After a mistake → “**What did that mistake teach you?**”

This is a **practice tool for rehearsing skills, not therapy, counseling, or a clinical service**. And it never shames the grown-up: the “you're so smart” instinct comes from love; this is just practice for the words.

Want the kid version? [Open “Magic Words: Grow Your Brain Bigger”](#) and read it with your child: same three words, told from Bloom's side.

Your privacy: if you use the optional “say it” recorder, your voice stays on this device: it is never saved, never uploaded, and it is gone when the page closes.

From The McCray Learning Lab, Elliott McCray, Ed.S.

The McCray Learning Lab

mccraylearninglab.com · Ad-free · private (no accounts, no tracking) · This is a practice tool for rehearsing skills, not therapy, counseling, or a clinical service.