

Magic Words: Grow Your Brain Bigger

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 story is based on research by Carol Dweck: praising a child’s **effort and strategies** builds a growth mindset, while praising their **intelligence** (“you’re so smart”) can make kids avoid challenges and fear mistakes.

Try these simple swaps

- Instead of “You’re so smart” → “**You worked so hard on that.**”
- Instead of “You’re a natural” → “**I love how you tried lots of ways.**”
- Instead of “That was easy for you” → “**You kept going when it got tricky.**”
- When they’re stuck → “**Mistakes help your brain grow. What could you try next?**”

This is a practice tool for building skills, not therapy, counseling, or a clinical service.



For grown-ups: want to practice these words? Try [Magic Words: A Grown-Up’s Turn](#), a 5-minute practice made just for you.

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

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