

Helping Your Child with Productive Struggle

Watching your child productively struggle can be awkward and difficult, but true growth happens when children learn how to work through their challenges. As a parent, you may have questions about how to support your child through this process at home. Here are a few common questions and their answers.



Why does my child need to productively struggle when learning new concepts?

Research shows that children benefit in the following ways:

- They develop deeper and more useful competencies, including greater conceptual understanding
- They perform better in situations that require more than rote knowledge
- They demonstrate significantly higher recall of facts

How do I know when my child is productively struggling or destructively struggling?

As your child gets used to productively struggling, you'll notice resistance and an insistence on receiving help from you. It can be hard to distinguish when to step in and offer that help or to let them continue and work through the struggle. The chart below will help you visualize the difference between productive struggle and destructive struggle. When struggle becomes destructive, it's time to intervene.

	Destructive struggle	Productive struggle
Leads to...	frustration	understanding
Learning goals feel like...	hazy, out of reach	attainable, worth it
Effort...	feels fruitless	yields results
Students feel...	abandoned	empowered
Creates a sense of...	inadequacy	hope

How can I help my child productively struggle?

It's very important to consider the language you use while helping your child productively struggle. Instead of focusing on the frustrations and roadblocks, try to help your child develop perseverance and resourcefulness. Below you will find examples of the type of words you can use to help your child develop those characteristics.

Don't say...	Try saying...
I was never good at math. This isn't how I learned it. The way I learned it is easier.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● I'm glad I'm getting another chance to learn about this!● This is challenging! Let's look at your work from class today to see how you could work on this problem.● Where can you look for help with this?
You haven't finished yet?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Remember, math isn't about getting a right answer quickly. It's about learning and making connections.● Show me the hardest problem you've worked on so far.● Wow, you've done so much work! Let's talk about what you've done so far and what you can do next.● It sounds like you're feeling frustrated and it looks like this question is difficult. Let's take a note of how we are stuck and we can come back to it.
Let me show you how to do it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Let's think of a question we can write down about this problem that you can ask the teacher tomorrow.● Tell me about how you decided to get started or how you might get started.● When you're working hard, that's when your brain is learning. Let's take another look.
That's the wrong answer!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What do you think you are being asked to figure out?

Where can I go for help?



We are partners in helping your child grow. As you support your child with productive struggle at home, I will be doing the same in the classroom. Please share your successes, questions, and concerns with me as they arise and I will do the same for you!