

Are the Children Well?



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COALITION

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Grit Revisited Helping Children Transform Destructive Struggle Into Productive Struggle

by Stephanie Meegan

"Our daughter is **overwhelmed**. Coursework is harder and, in spite of her **stepped-up effort**, her grades are slipping."

"Teachers are concerned that our son is **not performing up to his ability**, but we know he's **trying hard**. We've seen his frustrations mount and we're worried he's going to give up."

How do YOU move through struggles?

When your best efforts are not producing the desired results, how do you get unstuck? What do you do when faced with obstacles and setbacks? Do you seek help, try a different tool or strategy? Do you explore models of thought or action that others have used successfully? What enables you to think outside the box and develop a *Plan B*?

Through trial and error, and life experiences, most adults have learned to overcome mistakes, setbacks and failures. We have also figured out **when to persist** and **when to let go** and **consider other options**.

Our kids are expected to master these life skills, too, but much earlier in their development. Some young people can work through learning frustrations, **but how can we (teachers and parents) support those who are struggling and discouraged?**



Here are 5 suggestions for transforming Destructive Struggle into **Productive Struggle**:

1. Recognize Destructive Struggle:

Imagine a job where your supervisor expects you to be more effective and productive. But it is unclear how you can acquire the additional training, tools and resources necessary to do better. **Grit alone will not improve performance** - not as long as you continue doing the same things in the same way.

Often, when striving to achieve, children are told to **try harder** or **study more**. But what if the approaches, tools and strategies they're using **aren't working**? Instead of urging effort alone and implying that the struggle is due to a lack of grit, adults need to encourage young people **to try again, but try differently**.

And it is the responsibility of educators and parents to actively engage with individual children to discover what does work for them based on their learning styles and strengths.

2. Ask the Right Questions:

Try asking questions about process steps, skills, and concepts. Help children recall the tools and strategies that have been successful for them in the past. Questions like the following can generate clues about what young people need to get unstuck, less confused and more willing to **try again differently**. (And these questions can be applied to any skill a child is trying to master—school related or not.)

- ⇒ **What have you tried so far?**
- ⇒ **What steps did you use?**
- ⇒ **Are there any words or ideas that are confusing for you?**
- ⇒ **When you worked through a similar challenge successfully, what did you do?**
- ⇒ **Can you explain or show what you understand so far?**
- ⇒ **Can you identify where or when things got muddled?"**

3. Identify Children's Struggle

Strategies: In the classroom, teachers can ask students to brainstorm **Struggle Strategies** they have found useful for tackling school work challenges—and parents can do this at home too. What "work arounds" do they try when they get bogged down or baffled? What do they do when a task seems overwhelming?

Sharing strategies helps children realize that **everyone** grapples when learning new things. Try to capture their ideas **in their own words** so the list is free from terms that have not yet been introduced (e.g., rubric, manipulatives).

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"Perhaps the **most common misconception** is simply equating the **growth mindset** with **effort**. Certainly, effort is key for students' achievement, but it's not the only thing. Students need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they're stuck. They need this repertoire of approaches—not just sheer effort—to learn and improve."

Carol S. Dweck, Stanford University
Department of Psychology **Growth
Mindset Revisited**

Grit Revisited... (continued)

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For academically focused tasks, their brainstormed list might include ideas like these:

One of my Struggle Strategies is to ...

- Review the directions again
- Get clarification of ideas, terms, instructions that confuse me
- Check the steps I should follow and the questions I need to answer
- Get help to figure out where I went off-track
- Reread what is supposed to be included or covered, review the rubric for the report or project
- Ask to see models or samples of work, reports, projects
- Explore resources I can use (books, graphs, diagrams, charts, manipulatives, models, maps, online sources)
- Ask for help from classmates, teacher or another “expert other” (aide, librarian, parent, peer or adult tutor)
- Try an approach, tool or strategy that worked for me in the past
- Use a clock, my calendar and sticky note reminders to complete and pass in my work on time



4. Share and Reinforce Struggle

Strategies: The child-generated **Struggle Strategies** (see sidebar) can be posted in the classroom or at home if created as a family activity, and augmented over time. If the list was created as a classroom activity, make the students’ **Struggle Strategies** accessible outside of class. That way parents can also encourage children to use their **Struggle Strategies** when needed.

Sticking to something and trying many strategies ... struggling means you’re committed to something and are willing to work hard.

Parents around the dinner table and teachers in the classroom should ask,

“Who had a fabulous struggle today?”

- Carol S. Dweck

5. Celebrate Fabulous Struggles:

When we help young people learn how to use **Struggle Strategies**, they gain confidence and expand their sense of self-efficacy.

“True grit” includes the habitual use of **Struggle Strategies** and encourages productive struggle. Over time productive struggles strengthen the **Growth Mindset** within the classroom and the family as young people dare to **try hard differently**.

Most importantly, **Struggle Strategies** can temper overwhelming frustration and discouragement. Then instead of being avoided, struggles can be genuinely celebrated.

Teachers—for a free resource from the Search Institute on **Struggle Strategies and Growth**

Mindset click [HERE](#)

Coalition member Stephanie Meegan, founder of Impact On Youth Educational Services, has provided support, training and other youth, safety and educationally focused services in the US and Canada for 30+ years.

Tri-Town Assets in Action!

Building Personal Power with Optimism

Congratulations to Middleton’s Cameron Fullerton, aged 7, for winning the National Life is Good T-Shirt Design Contest. Cam shared that optimism is a choice for he and his sister, often

Cameron’s winning t-shirt design!



saying, “Stay Positive” when faced with something negative or defeating. **Way to go Cameron!** When kids choose optimism,

they build the **Personal Power Asset** - nurturing a growing sense of having influence in their lives.

Proceeds from the sale of Cameron’s t-shirt go to the Life is Good Kids Foundation.

Detective Kelly Pickering—An Asset Builder in the Community



Coalition Member and School Resource Officer Kelly Pickering was recognized by the Topsfield Police Department for her outstanding efforts in bringing Tri-Town

Council’s program “Hidden In Plain Sight” to the community. The program is designed to educate adults about the signs “hidden in plain sight” that may indicate teen substance use and mental health issues. **Assets** are built through caring relationships. Kelly cares about the health and well-being of our youth!

TTC’s Middle School Youth Day @ DIS!

TTC brought 30 middle schoolers to Danvers Indoor Sports on to make the most of a Sept. early release day! Kids build **Assets** when they are engaged, challenge themselves, meet friends, and are in the company of caring adults!



What is Vaping?

Inhaling the water vapor produced from a battery powered, electronic device which heats a flavored e-liquid contained within the device. The e-liquid may contain varying concentrations of nicotine or only flavoring.

What are the risks?

- ◆ E-liquids (whether containing nicotine or not) contain harmful chemicals; exhaled vapor contains chemicals known to cause cancer
- ◆ Nicotine is highly addictive
- ◆ Nicotine can damage the developing brain
- ◆ Less than 1/2 tsp of nicotine containing e-liquid can be fatal to a toddler
- ◆ Youth who vape are more likely to use other tobacco products in future

DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ Vaping rates among high school youth have increased 900% since 2011
- ◆ Exhaled vapor contains cancer causing chemicals— diacetyl, benzene, and heavy metals—lead, tin and nickel
- ◆ Up until late 2016, vaping products (devices and liquids) were not regulated by the FDA
- ◆ Vaping products are illegal to sell to youth under 18 (21 in some towns), but can be easily purchased online
- ◆ Vaping is a \$2.5 billion dollar industry in US; \$125 million is spent on advertising—much of it geared toward youth
- ◆ 7,700 e-liquid flavorings exist—many appealing to kids including fruity, candy or bubblegum flavorings; 85% of e-cigarette users aged 12 –17 use flavored e-liquids
- ◆ Vaping devices can be used for other drugs like cannabinoids

What Kinds of Vaping Devices are Available?

Source: centeronaddiction.org

	Vape pen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks like a pen • Come in variety of sizes and colors and contain flavored liquid with or without nicotine
 <p><small>Photo credits: www.juulvapor.com</small></p>	Hookah pen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be disposable • Some are rechargeable and can be refilled with e-liquid
 <p><small>Photo credits: www.slimvapepen.com;vaping360.com</small></p>	JUUL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resembles a long USB stick • Small, light, portable • Uses disposable e-liquid “Juul pods” each containing nicotine equivalent to a pack of cigarettes • Inconspicuous
	Vape MODS Personal Vaping Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger devices • Rechargeable • Can be filled with flavored e-liquid containing nicotine or other illicit substances
	E-cigarettes Cig-a-Like Minis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look like cigarettes • Used to deliver varying concentrations of nicotine • Disposable/rechargeable • May emit light when puffed on

What is the norm? Are Tri-Town youth vaping?

Most Masco middle and high school youth are making healthy choices and are **NOT VAPING!**

That's the **NORM**

In other words "Everyone" is **NOT** doing it

94% of Masco MS youth
7 out of 10 Masco HS youth

**CHOOSE
NOT TO
VAPE**

Source: 2016 Masco MS/HS YRBS

However

- Masco 2016 YRBS data shows use of vaping products increases with age, by about 10% each year from the ages of 14-17
- Masco 2016 YRBS data shows more than half of high school youth don't think using e-cigarettes is risky

SO, what can a parent/caregiver do?



**Be informed!
Talk with your teen!**

**Education and communication are the
KEYS to PREVENTION**

For more information about vaping, and other drug and alcohol related resources, go to the **COALITION** tab at www.tritowncouncil.org

Minding the Gap Why Norms Matter



Perception is everything, and so, too, is misperception. The Coalition of TTC uses the **Positive Community Norms** to "mind the gaps"; when a community focuses on promoting its healthy, positive, normative behaviors, positive changes in human behavior result. If we decrease the *perception* of substance use, we decrease *actual* substance use over time.

People tend to behave in ways they think is most typical of and accepted by their peers.

Positive Community Norms which asks us to consider, "What choices are **most of us making?**" And "What choices do we *think* others are making?" Jeff Linkenbach, founder of the **Montana Institute** invites us all to "**mind the gap**" between perceptions and measured realities of normative behaviors in our community.

What are "normative behaviors" or "norms"? Norms are *actual* behaviors and attitudes of the **majority** of people in a community. What **most** do is the norm.

Perceived norms are people's *beliefs* about the norms of peers. **Positive Community Norms** are based on the idea that choices are largely influenced by what we perceive others are doing, thinking and feeling. These perceptions form the basis of what we consider to be "normal" or "typical" behavior, and tend to behave in ways we think is typical of and accepted by peers. Concerns arise when a community's perceptions of *typical* behaviors do not align with reality—**resulting in a gap**. Linkenbach explains, "If people believe that risky behaviors are typical, some individuals are more likely to engage in those behaviors for several reasons."

If we change our perceptions, we change our reality.

- First, people may be more likely to take part in a high risk activity if they misperceive it as the norm.
- Second, those who regularly engage in high risk activities often do so with others and therefore believe "everyone" does it.
- And third, if a bystander believes the risky behavior is the norm, they may fear social disapproval for intervening and therefore be reluctant to intervene to stop the dangerous behavior."

If we change our perceptions, we change our reality.

Simple. Profound. Positive.



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The mission of **Tri-Town Council (TTC)** is to strengthen the social and emotional well being of tri-town youth and reduce and prevent at-risk behavior.

The Coalition, a program of Tri-Town Council, is a community partnership focused on achieving a measurable reduction in youth drug and alcohol use by establishing and maintaining an environment in which youth of all ages are encouraged and choose to be substance-free.