

## Helping Students Take Small Steps Towards Positive Changes

By **Keren Kreitzer, School Psychologist**

Great accomplishments and long-term goals are not achieved overnight. Success is usually the result of hard work, deliberate practice, persistence, and trial-and-error learning. This often takes time, with many small steps creating a positive direction along the way. The resulting path can be filled with obstacles that may hinder or delay progress but, with persistence, don't halt it altogether. We can reinforce persistence by recognizing and celebrating children's small steps towards achieving positive outcomes.

### **Small Steps to a Growth- Mindset**

In particular, children need praise for their hard work and persistence in daily activities. By recognizing hard work, effort, and process oriented-learning, rather than just a "natural" ability, we teach a growth-mindset. A growth-mindset is when students see that they can develop or grow their abilities or intelligence, rather than a fixed-mindset where students' see their abilities and intelligence as fixed traits that they cannot change. We know from extensive research that children flourish when praised for effort and hard work rather than ability and when they perceive intelligence as a growth process. As parents and educators, we also can help guide students identify interests, make short- and long-term goals, and encourage them to take on challenges and persevere when things get tough.

### **Celebrating Small Steps at School**

This year to help foster a growth-mindset, students and staff at Stevens Forest Elementary School will be participating in the National School Psychology Awareness Week, November 14-18, 2016, the theme of which is "**Small Steps Change Lives.**"

### **Take Small Steps at Home**

There are many ways families can help children make positive changes in small increments. As parents and caregivers, you can:

1. Praise attempts, as well as success, and make sure that you focus on the effort or hard work put into the success.
2. Emphasize that learning and growing requires trying new things and that success comes from small steps to a long-term goal.

3. Encourage goal setting and mapping out a plan for achieving the goals. Talk with your child about steps they have taken, what worked and what didn't, what they might do next
4. Help your child internalize a sense that they can achieve by reinforcing the skills already developed and encouraging them to try new challenges.
5. Help your child identify their strengths and interests and learn new skills.
6. Create an environment at home that allows your child to explore building (playing with blocks, helping with projects, and more), drawing (crayons, finger paints, paper), and music (on the radio, with children's instruments, or through formal training through school or community resources). This may help to identify special interests.
7. Emphasize the importance of deliberate practice of a new or old skill for further development, and that talent is developed over time through skillful practice.
8. Help your child work through setbacks, or lack of self-confidence, by helping to identify negative thoughts that may suggest concerns about his or her ability to be successful. As a parent, you can help children see what the small steps are and how persisting and overcoming obstacles is a part of succeeding. Help your child realize that setbacks are not permanent or all-encompassing.
9. Demonstrate, through your own behaviors, how to identify and achieve long-term goals by thinking aloud, creating a pathway of short-term goals, and using problem solving and decision making skills along the way.
10. Help your child develop positive relationships with peers and adults and model respectful, caring behaviors with others.
11. Encourage your child to participate in community activities that may help them to develop positive behaviors, such as being grateful. In particular, volunteer activities may encourage the development of positive behaviors. Consider participating in community events yourself as role model.
12. Seek out support systems available in the community to help your child learn new skills and thrive, such as tutoring or mentoring programs.

### **Let's Work Together**

As the school psychologist at **Stevens Forest Elementary School**, I look forward working with you and other families at to encourage all of our children, whether at home or at school, to see and take small steps to achieve their best. Please feel free to contact me with questions, concerns or suggestions related to you child's interests, strengths and skills, struggles so that we can partner to help them continue along a path of positive changes to reach their potential in school, in life and as a member of the community. I can best be reached by [keren\\_kreitzer@hcpss.org](mailto:keren_kreitzer@hcpss.org) or 410 313-6900

## **About School Psychologists**

School psychologists are members of school staff that support students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach. School psychologists apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally by providing direct support and interventions to students, such as individualized learning and behavioral assessments to identify students' strengths and needs, academic and behavioral interventions, counseling, and social skills training. We also consult with teachers, families, and other educators to improve support strategies and school-wide practices and policies. We are in a unique position to ensure students success every day, including both small and bigger accomplishments. More information is available at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)