

What Is Self-Efficacy? (Elementary)

Think of a time when you wanted to do or learn something but felt like it was too hard. Maybe it was sounding out words, playing a sport, or learning math, but you felt like you just wouldn't be able to learn it. You felt frustrated and wanted to give up. You might have thought, "I'm bad at this" or "I'll never be able to do that well." When you feel this way, you need to increase your self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is believing that you can learn hard things. When you have strong self-efficacy, you believe you can do something difficult. You understand that it might be hard at first, but as you practice and put in lots of effort, you'll get better.

When you have strong self-efficacy, you know there are things you can do and say to yourself that will help you keep trying and learning. When we learn about self-efficacy, we learn strategies to help us believe we can do hard things.

The next time you try to learn something really hard and you lack confidence, remember that you can take steps to increase your belief in yourself through self-efficacy.

Focus on My Effort (Elementary)

Can you remember a time when you were frustrated because you couldn't do something? Have you ever made excuses when you didn't want to put in the effort? You're not alone ... We all have!

Believing you can do hard things starts with ***focusing on your effort***. Effort means trying really hard and using a lot of energy or thinking really hard and using a lot of brain power to do something. The energy can come from our bodies working hard or from our brains working hard.

Do you know what it feels like when you use a lot of effort—that feeling you get when your body or your brain tries really hard? Sometimes, when learning gets hard, we stop using effort and give up. Instead, we should stay focused on our effort. Improving our self-efficacy—or confidence in ourselves—starts with putting in effort and trying really hard.

The next time you start to feel frustrated or think you can't do something, remember to just ***focus on your effort*** to build confidence in yourself.

Try Again (Elementary)

When learning gets hard, one strategy you can use is to tell yourself to ***try again***. When you tell yourself to ***try again***, you are improving your belief in yourself.

Let's say you want to learn to ride a bike. The first thing you need to do is try really hard and ***focus on your effort***, but what can you do to keep trying when you fall off? Riding a bike can be difficult, and you probably won't learn it on the first try. You'll probably fall, and you'll need to ***try again*** ... and again ... and again. Eventually, you'll be able to ride a bike. And even when you can ride, there might be new things you want to learn, like riding your bike up and down curbs.

You'll keep learning and ***trying again*** for each new skill you learn. And your ability will grow with your effort. You learn hard things at school, at home, and at practice. You can ***try again*** anytime you're learning something hard.

When you put forth effort and ***try again***, you're building stronger self-efficacy, or confidence in yourself. When you are learning something really hard, remember to just ***try again***.

Calm Myself (Elementary)

Have you ever felt nervous or scared when you were about to do something? Maybe you had to sing a song or play a musical instrument in front of others, or maybe you got really nervous when you had to read out loud at school. When you feel nervous, upset, or scared, you can practice the strategy ***calm myself*** by sitting quietly and taking deep breaths. When you are trying to learn something that is really hard and you start to feel your heart beat really fast or your palms get sweaty and your fingers feel shaky, this is your body's way of telling you that you are experiencing emotions. When you start to experience these signals, remember to use the strategy ***calm myself***.

You can practice this now by breathing deeply and counting to 4. As you breathe in, raise your arms above you to form a rainbow and count to 4 slowly. As you breathe out, lower your arms slowly, counting to 4. Let's do it together: breathe in, 1, 2, 3, 4; breathe out, 1, 2, 3, 4; breathe in, 1, 2, 3, 4; breathe out, 1, 2, 3, 4; breathe in, 1, 2, 3, 4; breathe out, 1, 2, 3, 4. How are you feeling now? What has changed with your body and your mind? I'm guessing that you feel calmer.

Your rainbows will help you keep trying and not give up. Using the strategy ***calm myself*** will help you believe you can do hard things and build stronger self-efficacy! The next time you feel frustrated or scared, use the strategy ***calm myself*** to build your self-efficacy.

Say, “I Haven’t Learned It Yet” (Elementary)

What’s something that’s easy for you to do? Maybe you find reading a book easy or scoring a basket in basketball easy. You might even find playing a musical instrument or a video game easy. We all have things we’ve learned to do that now seem easy. We also have things that we’re just starting to learn and that we find hard to do. When we’re working on something hard, it doesn’t mean we can’t learn to do it; it means we have to build our self-efficacy—or confidence in ourselves—so that we can keep trying until we learn it. We all get frustrated when we’re learning hard things, but when we say things like “I can’t,” it keeps us from putting forth the effort. Saying “I can’t” could also cause us to give up.

When there’s something hard you need to learn or do, tell yourself you haven’t learned to do it YET. What’s something you’d like to learn but haven’t? To keep building your self-efficacy, change the way you think about hard things and say to yourself **“I haven’t learned it YET.”** Instead of saying “I can’t read,” say “I haven’t learned to read YET.” Instead of saying “I’m not good at playing soccer,” say “I haven’t learned to pass the soccer ball YET.”

Just because you can’t do something now doesn’t mean you can’t learn it. You ARE going to put in the effort to learn—you just haven’t learned it YET. Practice makes progress. When you are working on learning something new and it seems really hard, remind yourself that you just haven’t learned it YET!

Exercise My Brain (Elementary)

Your brain is capable of amazing things. It is growing and changing every day. You can grow your brain by exercising it and making it stronger. You ***exercise your brain*** when you practice something, make mistakes, and think about those mistakes to help you improve the next time you practice. When you practice and consider how to get better, you're growing pathways in your brain, and it's getting stronger. You're ***exercising your brain!***

Your brain is like a muscle, and when you put in a lot of effort to practice or learn something new, you can actually strengthen the connections between neurons in your brain. What do you do to strengthen your arm muscles? You might lift heavy objects over and over again or do a lot of push-ups until the muscles in your arms get stronger. The same is true of your brain—when you put in lots of effort and practice, you're growing the neuropathways in your brain, like growing muscle.

The next time you're struggling to read, write something, or do a math problem, and you begin to feel frustrated, stop and remember that you're ***exercising your brain!***

Learn From My Mistakes (Elementary)

Have you ever felt mad, disappointed, or even embarrassed when you made a mistake? Maybe you said something wrong or chose the wrong answers on a quiz. We all make mistakes, but instead of feeling mad or embarrassed, it's better to think of making mistakes as a normal part of learning.

It's completely normal to make mistakes—we all do it! In fact, mistakes are an important part of learning; making mistakes and learning from them actually helps strengthen your brain.

Imagine trying to draw your first five-pointed star. At first, you probably made mistakes, but when you kept trying, you learned from each mistake and got closer to drawing a star.

Mistakes can occur in the things you do, like your behaviors and the choices you make. Mistakes can also occur when you're learning, such as adding numbers wrong. It's important to think about your mistakes after they occur and to learn from them.

What is a mistake you recently made? The mistake could be related to something you're learning, like a math or writing concept, or it could be related to a behavior or choice you made, such as yelling at another person or being mean.

When you make mistakes, you should accept that they happen, try not to get upset, and instead ***learn from your mistakes***. When you stop and think about your mistakes, it's giving your brain feedback about how to do better. So, the next time you make a mistake, stop and think about what you could ***learn from your mistake*** and ***try again!***

Remember Hard Things I've Done (Elementary)

Have you ever learned to do something that was really hard? Maybe you learned to read a book, ride a bike, or draw an amazing animal. You've learned to do many things that were once very difficult for you. Another strategy for building strong self-efficacy and increasing the belief that you can do hard things is to ***remember the hard things you have done***. When you think about things you've learned and how you learned them, you can use that knowledge to learn new things. This will help you believe you can do hard things.

The next time you're working on learning something very challenging, take a moment and ***remember hard things you have done***. Sometimes when you start to learn something new that's very difficult, you might feel like you'll never learn it, but by ***remembering the hard things you have done***, you are helping yourself believe you can learn new hard things.

Think about some challenging things you've learned to do this year. Now think about how you learned to do them. Did you practice over and over? Did you ask others for help? Did you put in lots of effort even though you were making mistakes? Think about what helped you succeed. Then think about the similarities between those hard things you already learned and hard things you need to learn. Can you do similar things to keep trying and learning? Yes, you can! You can ***remember hard things you have done***. Your ability will grow with your effort, just as it has in the past. The next time you are working on learning something really difficult, think about the hard things you have done before to help you keep learning new and difficult things.

Give and Accept Praise (Elementary)

Do you ever hear your friends say things like “I can’t do this” or “This is too hard”? When your friends say things like that, it means that they don’t feel confident and that they’re having a hard time believing in themselves. You can help your friends by encouraging them and saying things like “You’re working hard and getting better” or “Your practicing has made you better.”

When you ***give praise*** to your friends, it’s important to praise their effort, be specific, and, most of all, be kind. Point out how hard they have been working whenever you can. And mention the specific things they understand better now than when they started.

Don’t compare yourself or your friends to other people—we each need to focus on our own effort and progress. If you’re feeling frustrated, your friends, teachers, or family can help you see your progress and your effort by ***giving praise***. When someone ***gives you praise***, don’t dismiss it. Instead, ***accept the praise*** and express your appreciation. Reflect on how your ongoing practice has led to progress. When you ***give and accept praise***, it helps you be more confident and build stronger self-efficacy. The next time you see your friend working on something really hard, ***give them praise***, and remember to ***accept the praise*** others give you when you are working on something difficult.

Accept Feedback (Elementary)

There are times when your teachers, friends, or family may have ideas about how to help you learn something hard. When other people give you ideas or suggestions about how to get better at something, they're giving you feedback. Even when they're telling you what you did wrong, it can help you improve. When a friend, teacher, or coach tells you something you've done isn't right, try not to get mad. Instead, listen to them and think about the feedback they've given you and how it can help you improve.

Could you draw a good lion on your first try? Could a friend look at your attempt and give you helpful suggestions to improve? Feedback like this can help us see what we're doing right and what we need to change. Often, it gives us ideas on how to improve.

Feedback can let you know when you need to ***try again***. By ***accepting feedback*** and applying it, you become a better learner. If we choose not to listen to feedback, it might take us longer to learn, and we could continue to struggle. When learning gets hard, remember to use feedback others provide so you can improve. When you ***accept feedback*** and use it to get better, you're improving your belief in yourself and building stronger self-efficacy. Then next time someone gives you feedback, remember to listen and think about it to get better!

Watch and Learn From Others (Elementary)

Have you ever learned to do something by watching someone else? Maybe you have an older brother who's great at basketball, and you learned to play basketball by watching him. Or you have a good friend who learned to dance, and you're getting better at dancing yourself by watching her. When you ***watch and learn from others***, you're increasing your belief that you can do hard things.

We can learn from another person's successes as well as their mistakes. To do this, we think about the challenges a person encountered, how they overcame the challenges, and how that led to their successes.

Think about how people you know, such as teachers, friends, or family, have overcome challenges. Then think about how you'll overcome various challenges you'll probably face in the next year. For example, my friend Lucy struggled to read paragraphs and really disliked reading. She got extra help in school and practiced reading at home. Lucy told me that she read a chapter in a Magic Tree House book last night! She was excited about her progress and said she kept practicing until reading got a little easier.

Thinking about how Lucy worked hard to learn to read helps me remember that I can work hard and learn. When we lack confidence in ourselves, ***watching and learning from others*** can help build our self-efficacy. Don't forget to watch and learn from others when you are trying to learn something difficult!