

## What Is Self-Efficacy? (Secondary)

Have you ever wanted to learn something new but felt like it was going to be too difficult? Maybe you wanted to get your learner's permit or learn to graph linear equations, but you just didn't think you would ever be able to do it. You felt overwhelmed 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. Strategies like ***focus on my effort, try again***, and ***calm myself*** will help improve your confidence in yourself.

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 (Secondary)***

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 try to learn something? We all have!

Believing you can do challenging things starts with ***focusing on your effort***. When you put forth effort, you exert physical and mental energy to complete a task. You consider things like:

- How much time have I spent on this?
- Am I focused when I am working, or am I distracted?
- Are there other things I could try in order to make progress?

Last year, I had a low grade in science. I thought I could get better at science by studying every night, but even after a week, I still didn't understand. After thinking about what I could do to get better, I realized that I wasn't focused when I was studying. I kept looking at my phone or thinking about what I was going to do with my friends. I wasn't putting forth much effort.

The next time you need to improve your ability to do something or want to learn something new, ***focus on your effort***. Think about what you can do to improve and how you can stay focused while you are learning.

### ***Try Again (Secondary)***

When was the last time someone told you, “***Try again***”? You’ve probably heard that a lot, but ***trying again*** is more than doing the same thing over and over. When you ***try again***, you think about what you did well and what you could do to improve. When you are learning something difficult, it will take many attempts before you are successful. Each time you try, remember to stop and think about what you did well and what you could try next time. When you tell yourself to ***try again***, you are improving your belief in yourself.

Think back to when you learned to ride a bike. You probably couldn’t do it the first time you tried, but after each fall, you thought about what helped you go further on the bike and what you could do the next time. Maybe you pedaled too slowly the first time, and when you pedaled faster, you were able to stay on the bike longer. You also learned that when you apply the brake, you need to extend your foot so you don’t fall off the bike. Whether you realized it or not, you were thinking about the different actions you could try in order to stay on the bike longer.

Whenever you put forth effort and ***try again***, you are building stronger self-efficacy; you are increasing confidence in yourself. When you are learning something new or trying to get better at something, remember as you are working on it that you will need to ***try again*** and think about what you will do to improve.

## ***Calm Myself (Secondary)***

Have you ever felt nervous or scared when you were about to do something? Maybe you had to give a speech in class or play a solo in the music concert. When you know you are about to do something stressful, your body prepares for the experience by sending you physiological signals, like sweaty palms, a racing heart, or butterflies in your stomach. It is important that you learn to manage your emotional reactions so that they don't get in the way of what you need to do.

Breathing slowly, going for a walk, and taking a break from what you are doing are all techniques you can use to calm the physiological signals your body is sending you.

I always get nervous before a test. My heart races, and I can't focus. I calm myself by closing my eyes and taking a deep breath before I start. Anytime you feel anxious, stressed, or nervous, you can practice ***calming yourself***. ***Calming yourself*** will increase your self-efficacy. You can practice this now by breathing deeply. As you breathe in, raise your arms above your head 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? It feels a little silly to make rainbows with your arms, but we can all do this to help us 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!

### **Say, “I Haven’t Learned It Yet” (Secondary)**

What is something that’s easy for you to do now but wasn’t when you first tried? Maybe it’s a video game or playing a sport. 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 seem difficult.

When you’re working on something challenging, it doesn’t mean you can’t learn to do it. It means that you have to build your self-efficacy, or confidence in yourself, so that you can keep trying until you learn it. It’s easy to get frustrated and feel like giving up. But when you remind yourself that you are still learning—by **saying, “I haven’t learned it yet”**—you understand that with effort and practice you will improve.

The next time you’re learning something new, 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 learning, and say to yourself, **“I haven’t learned it YET.”** Instead of saying “I’m not good at writing,” say “I haven’t mastered essay writing YET.” Instead of saying “I’ll never learn to parallel park,” say “I haven’t learned how to park next to a curb 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 (Secondary)***

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.

The next time you're struggling to understand 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 (Secondary)***

Think about the last time you made a mistake. How did you feel? What did you do? Maybe you made a mistake in front of the whole class when you were trying to solve a math problem, or you played the wrong notes in band practice. You may have felt frustrated or even embarrassed. We all make mistakes, but instead of feeling ashamed or embarrassed, think of mistakes as opportunities to learn.

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.

At the end of English class last week, my teacher announced we were going to have a quiz on a novel we were reading. I was in a hurry to get to basketball practice. I thought I'd written down everything I needed to study, but when I got to class the next day, I realized I'd made a mistake. The quiz was over Chapters 1–3, but I had written down only Chapter 1. I didn't do well on the quiz. I thought about my mistake. I knew that we were having a quiz, and I studied part of what was on the quiz, but if I had taken the time to listen and write things down before rushing to the next activity, I would have gotten a better grade.

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 then try again!

### ***Remember Hard Things I've Done (Secondary)***

Have you ever learned to do something that was really hard? Maybe you learned to drive, wrote a research paper, or drew a beautiful landscape. 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 the actions you took to learn them, you can apply that knowledge toward learning new things. This will help you believe you can do 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 (Secondary)***

Have you ever heard your friends say, “I can’t do this” or “This is too hard”? Maybe you have said those things or felt that way yourself. When we feel overwhelmed, like we can’t learn things, it means we don’t feel confident and we’re having a hard time believing that we can succeed. The next time you hear someone saying, “I can’t do this” or “I will never get better at this,” you can help build their self-efficacy by encouraging them and saying things like “You’re working hard and getting better.”

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

When you ***give praise***, you shouldn’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 specific praise. The next time you are working on something and someone gives you specific praise, express your appreciation. Remember that ***giving and accepting praise*** is an important part of building self-efficacy.

### ***Accept Feedback (Secondary)***

Have you ever had a teacher, friend, or family member give you ideas for how you could improve your ability to do something? When other people provide ideas 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 that something you've done isn't correct, 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.

Last year, I really wanted to improve my time in the 100-meter dash. I was frustrated and didn't feel like I could get any faster. My coach watched me run and said, "You are putting in a lot of effort, which is helping you get faster. Try looking forward when you come out of the starting block instead of looking down." Even though my coach was correcting me, I didn't get mad. I tried looking forward the next time I ran the 100-meter dash, and it helped me improve my time.

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.

### ***Watch and Learn From Others (Secondary)***

Have you ever learned to do something by watching someone else? Maybe you have an older brother, and you learned to play basketball by watching him. Or you have a friend who is great at singing in front of an audience, and you're improving your ability to perform 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 older sister, Lucy, struggled to write lab reports, so she asked her science teacher for help. Her teacher explained that she needed to start the report with the title of the lab and then describe each step in the process, and on her next report she did much better. When I took science the next year, I knew that the format of the lab report was important, because I remembered what Lucy had struggled with and how she had overcome her challenge of writing a good lab report.

Thinking about how Lucy improved her ability to write lab reports helped me be successful in science class too. 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!