

The Secret to Raising Smart Kids

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Scientific American:

A brilliant student, Jonathan sailed through grade school. He completed his assignments easily and routinely earned As. Jonathan puzzled over why some of his classmates struggled, and his parents told him he had a special gift. In the seventh grade, however, Jonathan suddenly lost interest in school, refusing to do homework or study for tests. As a consequence, his grades plummeted. His parents tried to boost their son's confidence by assuring him that he was very smart. But their attempts failed to motivate Jonathan (who is a composite drawn from several children). Schoolwork, their son maintained, was boring and pointless.

Our society worships talent, and many people assume that possessing superior intelligence or ability—along with confidence in that ability—is a recipe for success. In fact, however, more than 35 years of scientific investigation suggests that an overemphasis on intellect or talent leaves people vulnerable to failure, fearful of challenges and unwilling to remedy their shortcomings.

The result plays out in children like Jonathan, who coast through the early grades under the dangerous notion that no-effort academic achievement defines them as smart or gifted. Such children hold an implicit belief that intelligence is innate and fixed, making striving to learn seem far less important than being (or looking) smart. This belief also makes them see challenges, mistakes and even the need to exert effort as threats to their ego rather than as opportunities to improve. And it causes them to lose confidence and motivation when the work is no longer easy for them.

Read the whole story: [*Scientific American*](#)