

STRESS NOT!
MANAGE WELL!

P3 End of Year (EOY) Examination



Key Objectives:

- To share tips on how parents can help their children to manage examination stress
- To share tips for parents to manage their own stress

As parents care a lot for their children and they want the best for them, examination periods can be stressful for parents as well. Therefore, it is crucial for parents to be able to manage their own stress so that they can support their children effectively.

Before we start ...

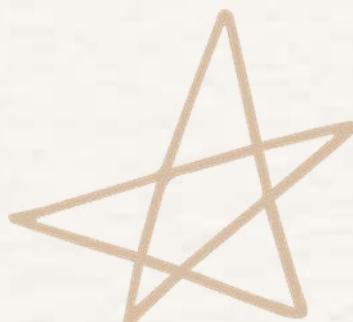
Overview

Areas of Coverage	Slides
Preparation and days leading up to the exams	4 - 21
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Positive and helpful mindset	30 - 41
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Source: CNA/ky

Regardless of Grades:

How does the obsession with grades affect parents and children in Singapore?



In CNA's new documentary **Regardless of Grades**, we follow three Primary 6 students as they prepare for the Primary School Leaving Examination.

In a survey commissioned by CNA covering 1,000 parents of Primary 5 and 6 students, we found that many parents think good PSLE grades are **important to secure enrolment in a secondary school of the child's choice, and because it's a stepping stone to a good future or career.**



Regardless of Grades:

Source: CNA/ky

A social experiment involving Primary Five and Six pupils finds out their biggest source of stress.

Blue cones represent parents, red is for self, yellow is for teachers and green is peer pressure.



"What's eye-opening to me is that our social experiment with Primary 5 and 6 students revealed that parents are a major source of stress for our children, and not just that, even the stress our children impose on themselves seems to stem from parental pressure. That really gave me much to reflect upon."

CNA Video

Timing: 16:40 - 20:25 (Duration: Approx. 3 mins 45 secs)

<https://youtu.be/d5X8pJu2R0s?si=1rguroTJUepBPKDT>

PSLE: WHY ARE WE SO STRESSED?

REGARDLESS OF GRADES



Regardless Of Grades:

Why do parents place so much importance on grades?

Producer:

Source: CNA Insider

"How important are academic grades to you."

Eric Ng (Father of Lyla Ng):

"If I say not important right, then a lot of people won't be happy with me, right?"

Danny Ezry Mohamad Ezanee (Child of Nur Fitriah Mahmud):

"It's so important for me because I want to have a better future. It will help me to have a better job so that I can spend money on my mother and my dad."

Cheryl Lim (Mother of Dylan Patterson):

"Everybody wants success. I want the best for my children. If everybody's doing it, if I'm not doing it, I think I'm setting him up for failure."

CNA Video

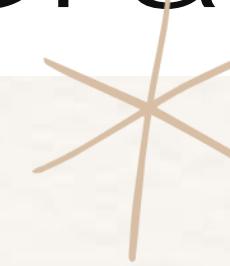
Timing: 44:40 - 45:15 (Duration: Approx. 35 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5X8pJu2R0s>

PSLE: WHY ARE WE SO STRESSED? REGARDLESS OF GRADES



Regardless Of Grades:



How can
parents make it
less stressful?



Caleb:

""...less nagging and probably more encouraging would do the trick."

Host:

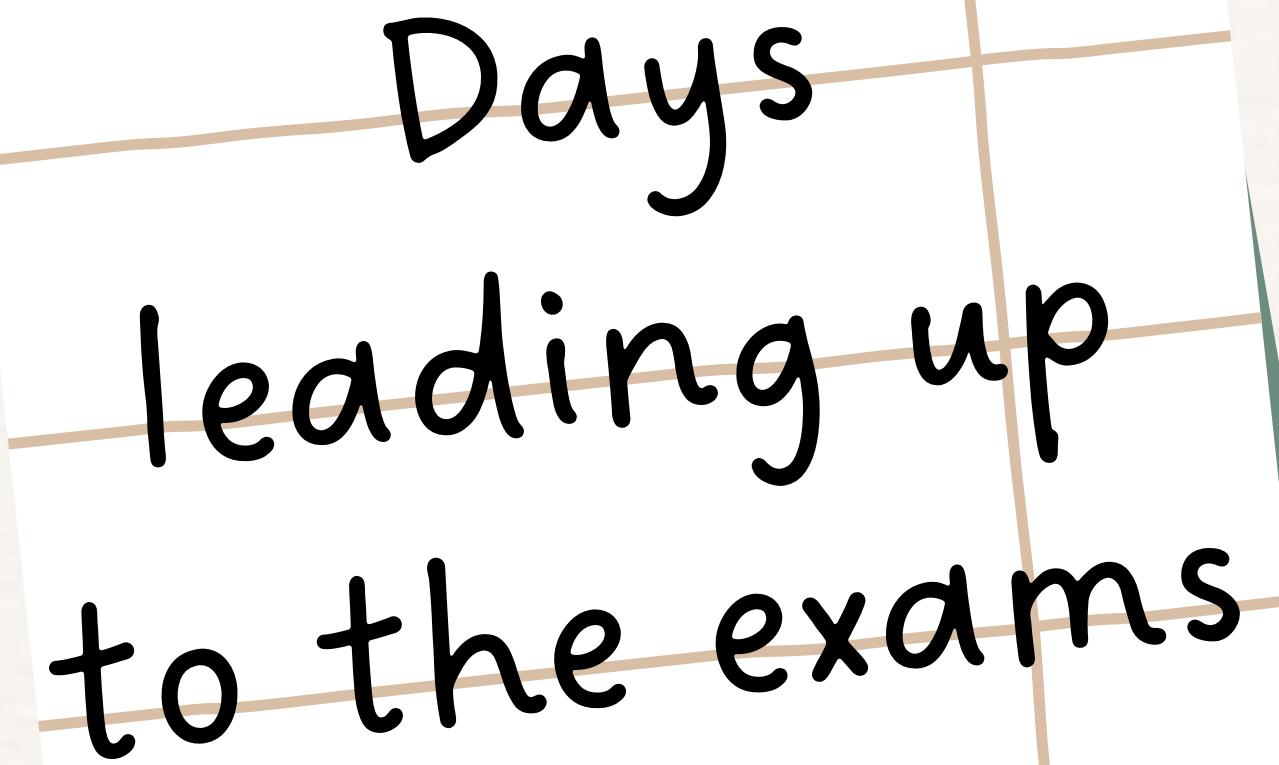
"Tell me the difference between nagging and encouraging."

Caleb:

"I think it's mostly the tone and the facial expressions."

Ayra:

"If your kids, they don't meet your expectations, don't say 'You never study', don't make it sound like you are disappointed with them."



Days
leading up
to the exams

01

How can I motivate my child to study?

02

How do I know if my child is feeling stressed?

03

What can I do to help my child manage her stress?

04

How can I manage my own stress so that it is not passed on to my child?

Question 01

How can I motivate my child to study?

Status: ● Next Plan ● Ongoing ● Achieved

If your child is...	You can try to...	Status
Procrastinating because she is anxious	Guide her to break down revision into smaller, more achievable tasks.	
Distracted by digital devices	Set ground rules together e.g. 10 mins of play after each task is completed. The key is to be consistent and to lead by example!	

Question 01

How can I motivate my child to study?

Status: ● Next Plan ● Ongoing ● Achieved

If your child is...	You can try to...	Status
Stuck in her revision because she has forgotten concepts learnt previously	Encourage your child to revisit the earlier chapters. If needed, ask her to approach her teachers and/or older siblings (if any and if possible) for help.	
Lethargic and lacks energy to do anything	Guide your child to draw up a schedule which includes time for homework, revision, play, exercise and rest. Recreational activities and rest are key to helping the child de-stress and can boost her mood and energy.	

Question 02

How do I know if my child is feeling stressed?

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing. It is normal to feel stressed during the examination period, just like how you may feel when you have an important deadline coming up. In the right amounts, stress can be a form of extra energy that the body uses to prepare for and overcome challenges. However, too much stress is not good. If your child presents the following signs of stress in combination, extreme or long-lasting forms, it may be an indication of too much stress.

Struggles to pay attention to studies or activities	Tiredness	Stays away from others	Loss of appetite and sleep
Excuses to miss school/class	Rebellious streak	Sulkiness	Spending more time on mobile devices and social media

Question 02

How do I know if my child is feeling stressed?

Some children may fear failure, which further drives up anxiety during examination periods. A fear of failure may be identified through cues such as:

"If I don't do well, I think that I will have no future"

"I am not good enough/ useless/ have no talent"

"Others will think less of me"

Question 03

What can I do to help my child manage her stress?

Know your child's needs and be present

Pay attention to your child and communicate frequently in an open and supportive manner. Continue with your usual conversation topics (e.g. "How was your day?" and "What are you looking forward to this weekend?"), so that your child's mind is not overwhelmed by the upcoming exams.

Provide practical support (such as making sure your child has a healthy diet and adequate sleep) to overcome any hurdles she may be facing.

Question 03

What can I do to help my child manage her stress?

Role model

Share with your child some of your own experiences of dealing with stress, how you managed it and maintained positivity.

Question 03

What can I do to help my child manage her stress?

Reassure

Let your child know that she is loved and accepted regardless of her examination performance.

Recognise that it is normal to feel stressed, anxious and nervous during the examination period.

Provide positive feedback and cheer her on for every effort.

Question 04

How can I manage my own stress so that it is not passed on to my child?

Be mindful of what you say, your reactions, and the body language you display. For example, parents may say, "If you don't do well, you will not have a good future". Parents may use this with the best intentions, to motivate their child to score her best. However, the child may see it as an expectation to score high marks so as not to disappoint their parents.

When communicating with your child, focus on positivity, reassurance and remain calm to keep stress levels low.

Question 04

How can I manage my own stress so that it is not passed on to my child?

To manage your stress or anxiety, you could:

Regulate your emotions (e.g. deep breathing, focusing on your locus of control)

Speak to someone you trust (e.g. spouse, family members, close colleagues)

Ensure sufficient rest, exercise and eat well.

Continue to spend time with your child to bond, e.g. doing household chores or playing a board game together.



During the exam period

01

How can I help my child stay alert?

02

How do I encourage my child, especially if she is discouraged after a paper?

Question 05

How can I help my child stay alert?

Help her get a good night's sleep - Make sure your child gets sufficient rest every night especially during examination period. Studying all night without good sleep can worsen worries.

Fuel her up - start your child's day with a nutritious breakfast, and pack health snacks for ongoing energy throughout the day.

Calm her nerves - Practise deep breathing with your child; it can slow down a racing pulse and mind and help her stay positive.

Question 06

How do I encourage my child, especially if she is discouraged after a paper?

Give her a big hug, before talking about it.

Avoid being dismissive or disapproving, and steer the conversation away from what might deepen her worries - the difficulty level of the examination, discussion on examination questions and how her peers found the examination.

Question 06

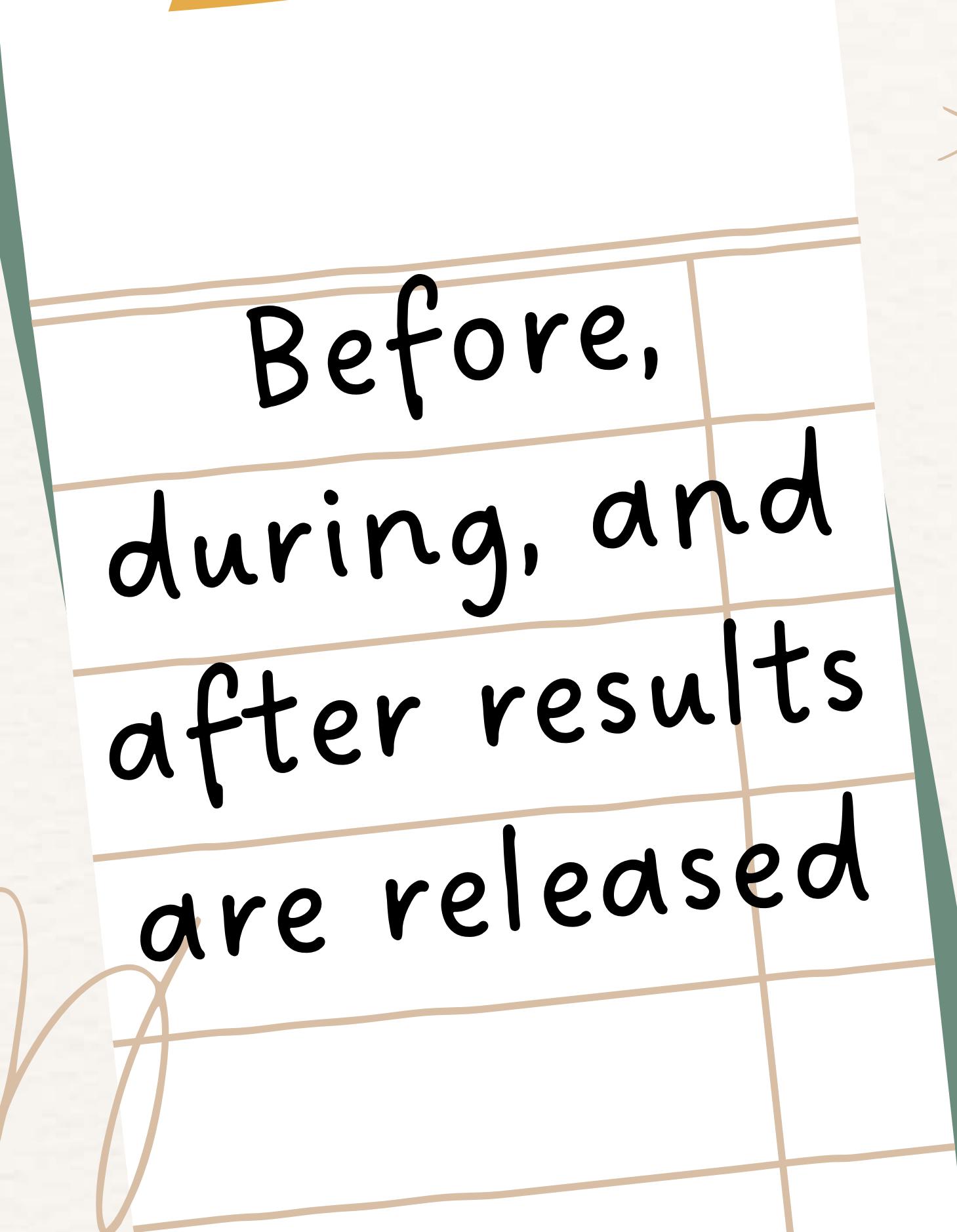
How do I encourage my child, especially if she is discouraged after a paper?

Begin the conversation with how your child is feeling and guide her to learn from the experience.

I noticed that you're feeling upset/tired (after revision/the exam), do you want to tell me about it?

How are you feeling about the exam? What was good about it? What was not so good about it?

Let your child know that making mistakes is part of learning and encourage her to persevere even though it may be challenging.



Before,
during, and
after results
are released

01

Does it call for a celebration?

02

How can I have a conversation with my child about her performance or results?

Question 07

Does it call for a celebration?

Celebrate the effort, not the results.

If your child has put in her best effort, appreciate your **child's hard work and praise her effort. You can also show** it through a simple gesture. E.g. have a nice meal together at the end of the examinations, before the results release, to let your child know that you are celebrating her effort.

Question 08

How can I have a conversation with my child about her performance or results?

Don't compare

Steer the conversation away from the highest or lowest score in class, how many marks your child's classmates received, etc.

Regardless of the outcome, it is important for your child to know that you love her, and that her grades don't define her.

Question 08

How can I have a conversation with my child about her performance or results?

Get your child to own her learning - Focus on getting your child to learn from the experience, instead of what cannot be changed.

"Your effort for Math paid off! What was it that worked well this time?"

"You did not manage to achieve your goal for English, what could be the reasons?"

With your support, she can develop a love of learning and the resilience to view challenges and failures as opportunities to improve.

How I overcame the fear of seeing my child fail

Does nagging make things worse?

Can I embrace 'productive failure'?

Schoolbag parent writer Eveline Gan reflects
on how her reactions to her daughter's
struggles made things worse for her child -
and how she made things right.



When my firstborn came home from school with homework full of errors, something about the red-inked crosses on her worksheets triggered my whirlwind of emotions - concern, irritation and annoyance. She was in Primary 2 then.

A peek into her homework folder revealed worksheets full of careless mistakes and corrections. Annoyed, I cried out, "So many wrong answers! Are you paying attention in class?"

Later, I recall making a trip to a bookstore, grabbing assessment books and other enrichment materials that I thought might help her. I started a routine of sitting beside her while she did her school assignments.

Subsequently, her worksheets returned with more ticks than crosses, along with cheery "Good job!" stickers from her teachers.

I was pleased. I thought my efforts paid off. How mistaken I was.

With age and more experience, I realised that I had fallen into the parenting trap of repeating the perfectionistic ways in which I had been brought up.

Raised to be academically driven in a strict environment, I have all the stereotypical tendencies of a firstborn child wired for perfection. Being extremely adverse to mistakes meant that I seldom cut myself slack and took badly to what I perceived as failure.



Once, I broke down and wailed in front of the whole class when I scored “only” 65 marks for a spelling test. I knew what awaited me back home - dark clouds from my mother for days.

To be fair, there is nothing wrong with striving for excellence. My mother, who came from a humble background and had forged a better life for herself by studying hard, wanted the same outcome for me, via the only way she knew.

But when the dogged pursuit of success leaves no room for error, are we telling our children that there is no alternative? What about our ability to bounce back from failure, adapt to challenges, and find ways to improve ourselves?

When striving for excellence backfires

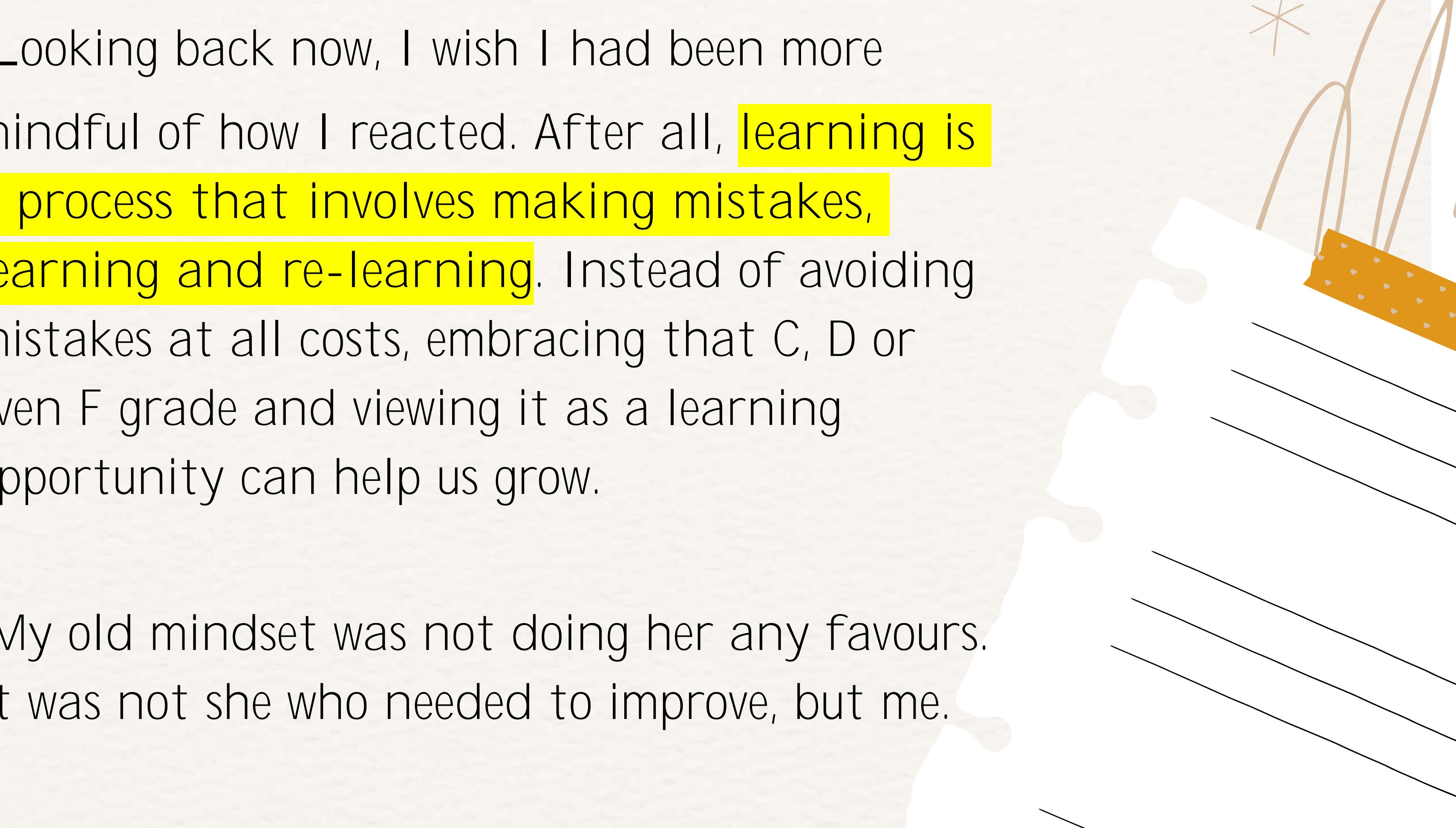
Schoolbag | 28 Dec 2023

The way I had responded to my firstborn's learning struggles impacted how she viewed failure - it wasn't for the better and there was no saving grace. Excellence was the be all and end all. My sharp criticisms, all bearing edges that hurt, ate away her self-esteem and motivation.

Instead of being more motivated, my daughter began dragging her feet to complete her homework. She was afraid to make mistakes. When something went awry, she would berate herself for being "dumb". She gave up easily when she was stumped by a problem sum and needed to be spoon-fed the answer - less chance of her messing up.

She expressed self-guilt of not doing "more" to avoid mistakes. She was only eight years old then, but already showing all the red flags of anxiety that came with chasing after perfection.

Looking back now, I wish I had been more mindful of how I reacted. After all, learning is a process that involves making mistakes, learning and re-learning. Instead of avoiding mistakes at all costs, embracing that C, D or even F grade and viewing it as a learning opportunity can help us grow.

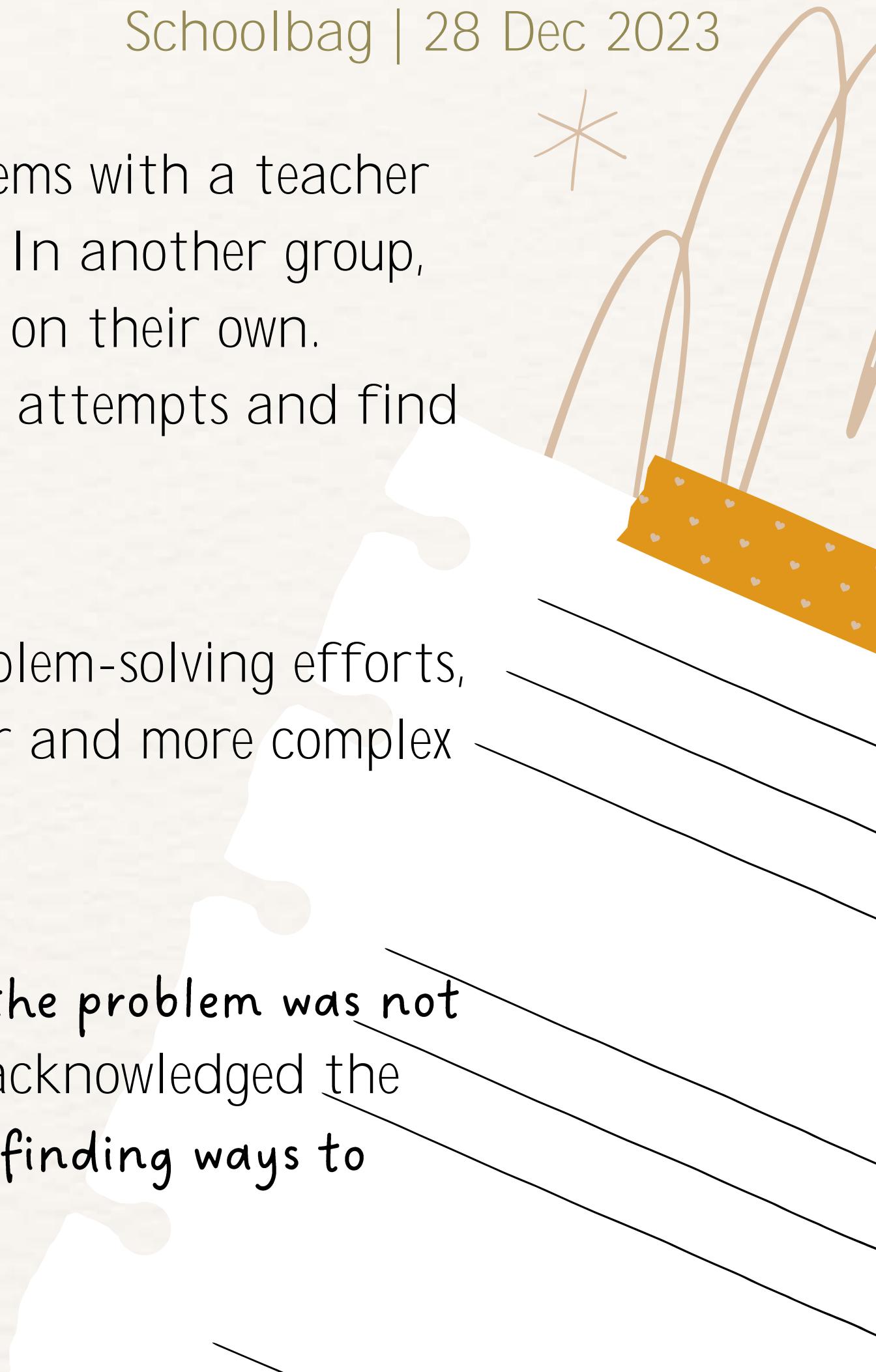


My old mindset was not doing her any favours. It was not she who needed to improve, but me.

Changing the way I view failure

The first step I took to break away from old patterns was to change my mindset. I reminded myself that spilled milk happens all the time, it is a part of life. But how I respond when my child “messes up” makes a huge difference in how she navigates and bounces back from failure.

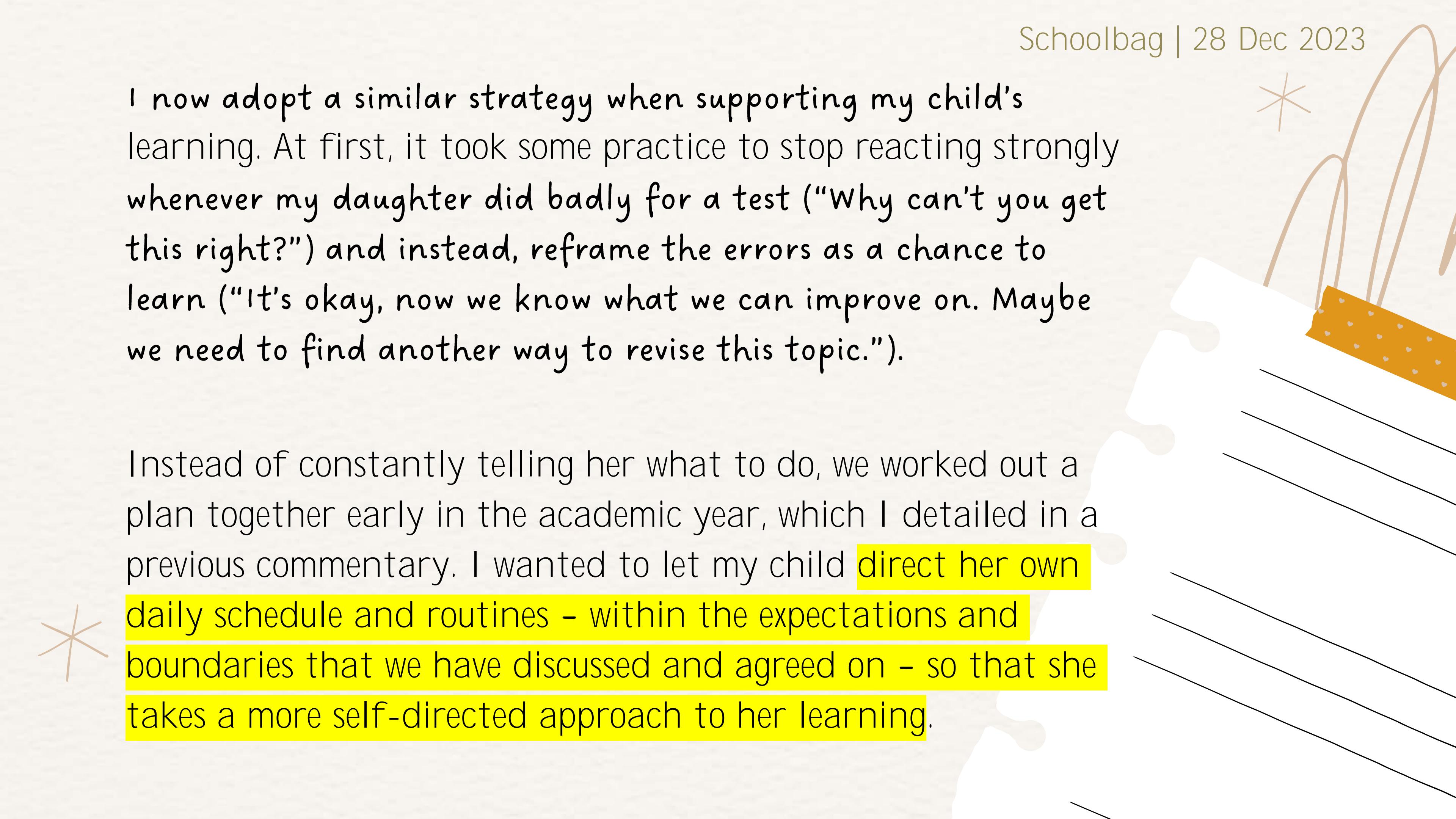
An online search would yield a multitude of research papers that support this. In a Singapore study published in the Journal of the Learning Sciences in 2012, researchers identified the value of “productive failure” during the learning process.



One group of students were asked to solve complex Maths problems with a teacher providing direct instructional support at every step of the way. In another group, students were left to collaboratively solve the complex problems on their own. Towards the end, the teacher stepped in to analyse their failed attempts and find a solution.

While the second group was seemingly unsuccessful in their problem-solving efforts, they outperformed the direct instruction group on both simpler and more complex problems during a test.

It must be emphasised that the second group's failure to solve the problem was not ignored or sidestepped. After the failed attempts, the teacher acknowledged the students' struggles, analysed the situation and guided them in finding ways to reach a solution.



I now adopt a similar strategy when supporting my child's learning. At first, it took some practice to stop reacting strongly whenever my daughter did badly for a test ("Why can't you get this right?") and instead, reframe the errors as a chance to learn ("It's okay, now we know what we can improve on. Maybe we need to find another way to revise this topic.").

Instead of constantly telling her what to do, we worked out a plan together early in the academic year, which I detailed in a previous commentary. I wanted to let my child direct her own daily schedule and routines - within the expectations and boundaries that we have discussed and agreed on - so that she takes a more self-directed approach to her learning.

Recognising effort and resilience, not intelligence

Another thing I intentionally reined in was the way I dole out compliments. It is not uncommon to applaud a child for being "clever" for aceing a test, for example. But this type of praise can backfire.

In a series of experiments, American psychologist Carol Dweck found that children behaved very differently depending on the kinds of praise they received. Children who were praised for their intelligence, or innate ability, tended to avoid challenges. They were also more likely to give up after experiencing failure.

By contrast, those who were complimented for their effort and persistence were open to taking challenging tasks. They were more willing to learn new strategies to solve a problem.

By focusing on my daughter's efforts ("You must have worked really hard on this topic", "I noticed that you started revising earlier this time round"), I found that she gradually became more persistent and motivated to try again after a failed attempt.

I have made other changes in the way I interact with my firstborn, now 16, but the most important thing I did was to soften the edges of my sharp words with compassion and kindness whenever she flounders.

No one is perfect and the struggles that come with learning something new is normal, I tell her. Most of all, I remind my daughter that my love for her does not depend on her grades. If and when the going gets tough, my shoulder will always be there for her to cry on until she is ready to get back on her feet.



GROWTH MINDSET

@ CHIJ (KATONG) PRIMARY

TERM 1
DARE TO DREAM



TERM 2
I BELIEVE I CAN



WE HAVE THE
GROWTH MINDSET



TERM 3
I GROW FROM
MY MISTAKES

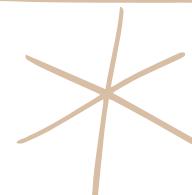
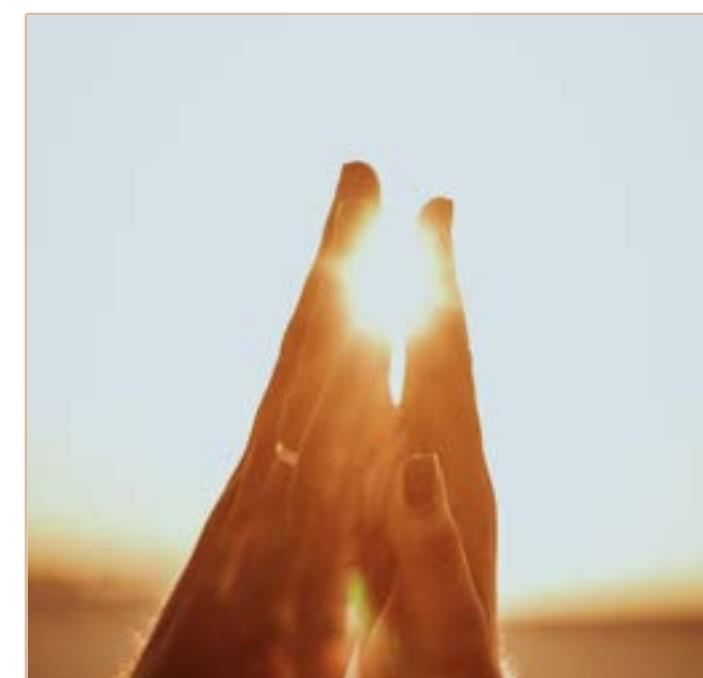
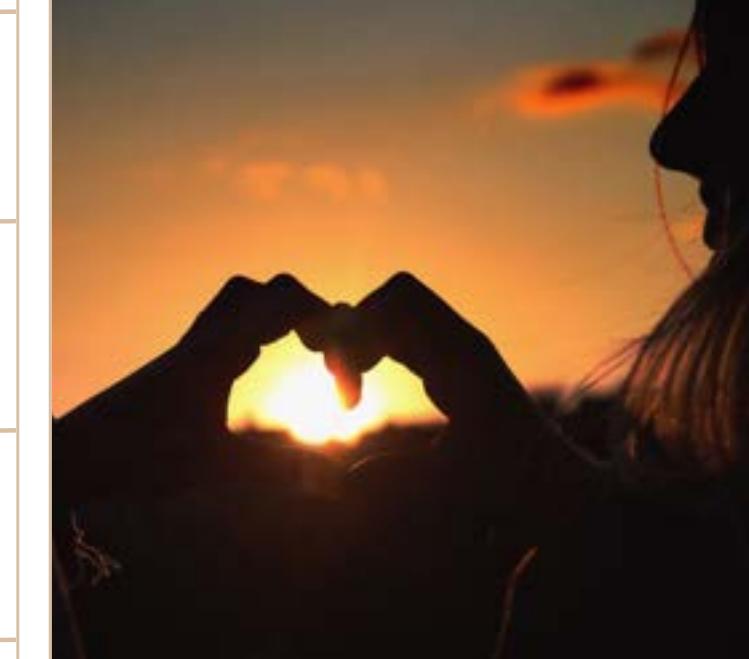


TERM 4
I AM GRATEFUL FOR
MY PAST, PRESENT
& FUTURE



Positive Relationship with Your Child

- Set aside time to connect with your child every day (e.g. after dinner)
- Plan weekend activities.
- Make this your special time together, to share stories or hear her concerns.



How can you encourage conversation?

Give her space to speak

- Try to have the conversation when everyone is feeling relaxed.
- Listen attentively, nod, make eye contact, ask questions - these small cues will let her know you are trying to understand.
- Reserve your opinion and advice till later.

"Let us walk together with our children on
this journey and be there for one another."





Create memories and
explore new activities together

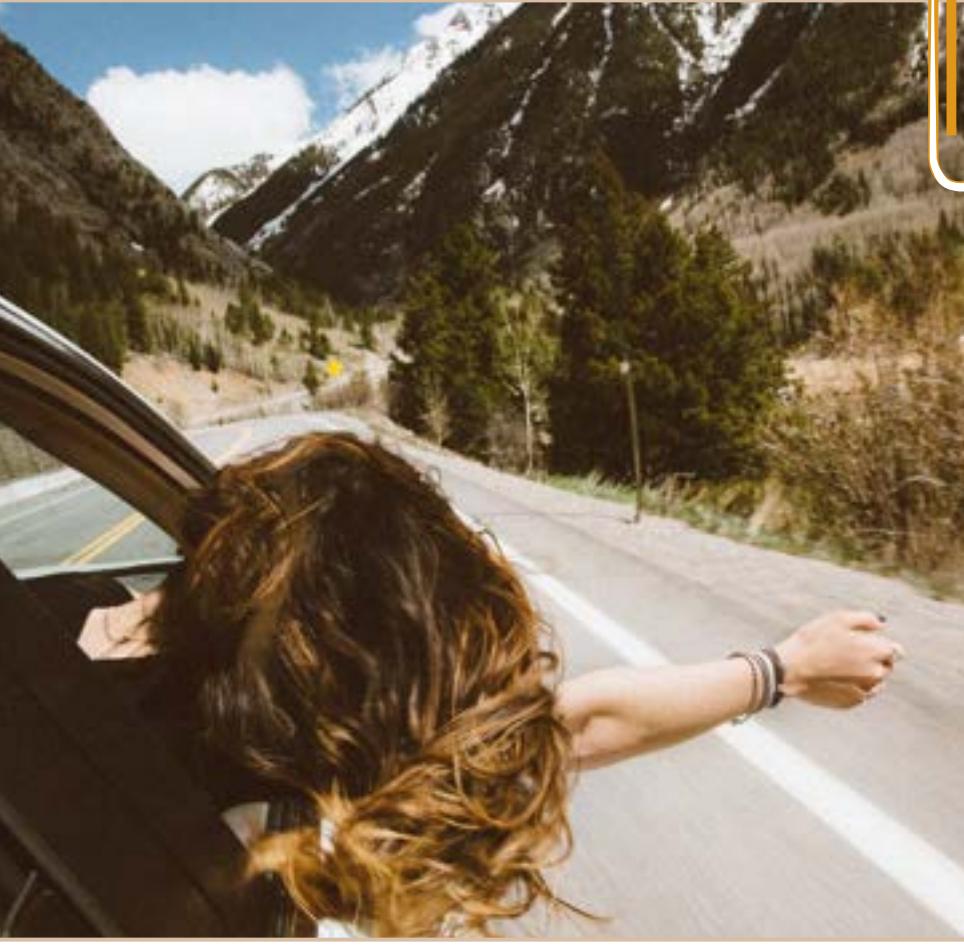
Take walks

Exercise or play sports

Play board games

Write/Draw with her

"Let us walk together with our children on
this journey and be there for one another."

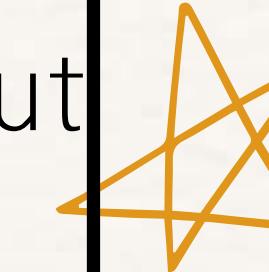


The parenting journey is not an easy one.

Be there for your child, but practise self-care, too.

Look after your own emotions by ensuring you are not feeling stressed or anxious before you check in with your child.

Remember, our emotions can rub off on each other!



Recognise your limits, take breaks, discuss your problems with your loved ones, and protect yours and your child's mental health.



Summary



Examinations are not the be-all
and end-all, but provide the
opportunity for children to assess
how much they have learnt.

Let's see examinations as a way to get feedback for continual improvement, and focus our efforts on guiding our children to nurture self-discipline, perseverance, resilience, time management skills (and more!) in the process of revising for examinations.



Every child is unique, with different
strengths and talents, and
untapped potential. Every child will
flourish in their own way.

Having a growth mindset and the joy of learning!

References

CNA - Regardless of Grades: How does the obsession with grades affect parents and children in Singapore?

MOE Parent Kit - Do's and Don'ts to help you and your child manage examination stress!

MOE Parent Kit - Journeying Through Challenging Times, Together

MOE Schoolbag - How I overcame the fear of seeing my child fail





Thank you!

