

BONUS CHAPTER:

Raising Limitless Children

**What are some ways you can act as a Limitless model
for your children?**

How can you change your child's Mindset for learning?

How can you create daily habits to unlock their Motivation?

Contrary to what some may believe, kids are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with information.¹ Instead, they are born scientists; testing and experimenting in their worlds as they try to figure out how everything works. Child development researcher Alison Gopnik describes children's behavior as testing their hypotheses against reality, constantly adjusting what they think about the world, and testing again. They're active observers, studying the world around them closely through their parents, siblings, and friends so they can learn how relationships work.

Unfortunately, we've come to believe that we have to actively instruct kids in order to educate them, when the exact opposite is true. When we create environments and facilitate situations that allow them to experiment, they teach themselves.

Having grown up with learning difficulties, one of my passions is teaching our youth about the Mindset, Motivation, and Methods of learning. I was known as the "boy with the broken brain," and the mindset that came with those words deeply affected my ability to learn. It wasn't until I took learning into my own hands and began to teach myself that I saw my true potential. Now, when I teach parents and their children, I love seeing the look on their faces when they realize that learning, instead of being painful, can be inspiring and fun.

1 Tippet, Krista. "Alison Gopnik - The Evolutionary Power of Children and Teenagers." The On Being Project, January 23, 2020. <https://onbeing.org/programs/alison-gopnik-the-evolutionary-power-of-children-and-teenagers/>.

One of my core beliefs is that human potential is one of the only infinite resources we have in the world. The human mind is the ultimate superpower. There is no limit to our creativity, imagination, determination, or ability to think, reason, and learn. And when we're young, our ability to learn and absorb is even greater because our minds are wide open to the world and everything it has to offer. This chapter will give parents the tools to help your child learn and become the hero of their own story.

THEIR BEHAVIOR BEGINS WITH *YOUR* BEHAVIOR

Becoming a parent transforms you. When your child comes into the world, you suddenly have to shuffle priorities and show up in a completely different way than you did before. Where life might have been about you and your goals, it is now about this little person who depends on you entirely, and that requires your behavior to change. As they grow and learn, you need to grow and learn with them.

To that end, the lives we live are the lessons we teach, and when it comes to our children, those lessons and the way we behave becomes the ultimate model for them. Modeling starts from Day One of your child's life, and it gets both easier and harder every day. On the one hand, you learn what they need and how to provide for them in a way that helps them grow. On the other, they will be influenced more by friends, the internet, and the media they watch as they get older. Your influence will naturally diminish, which is why it's important to model good habits early so you can establish healthy behaviors before the rest of the world starts to seep in.

A lack of conscious choice around what we teach our children can have dire consequences. In 1961, psychologist Albert Bandura conducted a now-famous study of aggression in children called the Bobo Doll Experiment. In the study, researchers physically and verbally abused a doll in front of preschool-aged child participants. Then they allowed the children to play with the dolls without instruction as to how to play. The children mimicked what the adults did by attacking the doll in the same way.² This study showed that children learn through observing adult behavior.

2 Nolen, Jeannette L. "Bobo Doll Experiment." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., November 24, 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bobo-doll-experiment>.

You might be thinking that you don't demonstrate violence to your kids, so you're fine. But let's consider a few other examples. Let's say you regularly eat junk food, but you tell your kids not to eat sugary snacks because they're bad for them. Maybe you even do this while drinking an extra-large soda. Perhaps you tell your son to be kind to other people, but then you yell at a store clerk for making a mistake, or at another driver when you're frustrated in traffic. Or you tell your daughter that screen time is bad for her and limit her access to movies or social media but you're always on your phone or laptop. Another example is telling your kids they should read more books when they've never seen you read. See what I mean? These scenarios are just a few of the many ways where the behaviors we model are so much more influential than any we might espouse.

The greatest gift you can give your child is a model that teaches them the proper Mindset, Motivation, and Methods to live life to their fullest—and that model is you. It's easier for children to learn these habits early than it is to unlearn bad habits later, so unlimiting yourself is just as important as unlimiting your child. You can make an even greater impact by incorporating these lessons in a way that makes them fun.

If you want your children to learn the value of hard work, then you might consider letting them see you at work. When you work from home, show them what you're doing. More importantly, let them see you enjoying it. Apply this to chores as well. Make sure your children see everyone in the home participating in cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking, and laundry. Encourage them to help you complete more difficult chores and allow them to complete easier chores on their own.

When you want your children to learn something new, demonstrate how you would do it. This can be especially powerful if you don't know how to solve the problem. For example, how many of you have struggled to help your kids through common core math problems? Let them teach you what they know, and work through the problems together. Be open to their suggestions and praise them when they succeed in teaching you something. Show them you're open to learning with them. By demonstrating curiosity and having an open attitude, your children are more likely to adopt these same attitudes and beliefs towards learning.³

3 Amy Morin, LCSW and author of "13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do."

This doesn't mean you have to be the perfect model for your children. There is no such thing as perfection. You need to practice what you preach, but it never has to be perfect. Remember, practice makes progress. As long as you're putting in effort each day, being mindful of the explicit and implicit lessons that you're teaching, you'll be doing well with your children.

MINDSET

The first element of the three-part Limitless Model is Mindset. This is the mental attitude or disposition that predetermines your responses to and interpretations of a given situation based on the beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes you hold about yourself and the world around you. All behavior is belief driven. Before you address how to help your children learn, you must first address the underlying beliefs you hold about what is possible for them. Only then can you help them maintain positive beliefs about their potential.

Foster a Growth Mindset

As discussed in Chapter 5, the key to growing and learning is to have a growth mindset—to believe that everyone can learn and change. This is especially important when it comes to your children. “If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy the effort and keep on learning,” says Carol Dweck, the author of *Growth Mindset*.⁴ The words and phrases we use with our children are particularly important to help them foster a growth mindset that's focused on improving and learning.

When one of my teachers called me the “boy with the broken brain,” the label stuck. I believed her, and from then on, every time I struggled to learn, I believed it was hopeless because my brain was broken.

The words we use can unintentionally create limits. I doubt my teacher intended to hurt my feelings or create a limitation, but the

4 Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006).

result was a persistent belief that my abilities were limited, nonetheless. As adults, we have to be very mindful of the words we use about our children, especially in front of them, because our words quickly evolve into their inner dialogue.

This is especially true with how your child learns. Let's say your daughter struggles to learn in a traditional school setting. What words do you use to describe her to yourself? How do you describe the situation to other people, perhaps when she's within earshot? Even if you say words that sound neutral, like "she is learning-challenged," you're applying a label that she may carry into adulthood.

Instead, use words that will help her adopt an identity compatible with the kind of learner you want her to become. If you want her to believe she's capable of learning, use language that indicates that belief. Let her know it's okay to take her time and that she won't always struggle with this particular math problem. Walk her through a time when something was difficult but she succeeded. You can model this by talking about a time when you struggled and worked to overcome that particular challenge. Helping your daughter understand that sometimes learning can be hard but that you believe in her abilities will ensure she doesn't develop limited beliefs.

I want you to take a moment and consider some of the questions you ask and the comments you make to or about your children. Perhaps you're making these statements to try and understand their behavior. Or you're frustrated and are venting. On the surface, these common questions may seem harmless, but they can do a lot of harm. I've captured some common phrases used when talking to children and will show you how to turn them into growth-oriented phrases instead.

"You are so smart!"

When we comment on perceived intelligence, it reinforces the LIE that intelligence is fixed (see page 89). Instead, we want to praise them for the effort they put into the activity so they can better understand the value of their own hard work. You might say something like, "I can see you worked so hard on this! Good job!"⁵

"That's not right. Are you paying attention in class? It seems like you're not even trying."

5 "How Parents Can Instill a Growth Mindset at Home." Growth Mindset For Parents | Growth Mindset Parenting. Accessed May 18, 2020. <https://www.mindsetworks.com/parents/growth-mindset-parenting>.

This statement has the potential to reinforce several LIEs: mistakes are failures, your child is not good enough, and that they're not capable of learning. It's important to acknowledge that maybe they don't understand the topic yet, or it might be boring for them. Ask them what strategies they might use to try to better understand or remember the topic. Use the opportunity of boredom as a gateway to their own creativity and ask them how they can make the subject more interesting. Ask "How can we make this subject playful?" By doing this, you're focusing less on the problem and more on what they might do to improve the situation.⁶

"What's wrong with you?"

"When a trusted adult—a person upon whom the child is dependent for everything—indicates that something is wrong with the child, a child will internalize this and believe it. They will ask themselves what is wrong with them—and they won't be able to find the answer," explains Karyl McBride, Ph.D., L.M.F.T., a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. This causes them to come up with sources of this "wrongness" on their own, and in their limited emotional and cognitive experience, it can be something as broad as "I'm not good enough," or "I'm a bad person."

As you can imagine, these kinds of beliefs can become ingrained at a young age and take a lifetime of work to eradicate. As parents, we need to realize that there is no right or wrong when it comes to early learning and development. Even though your child's experience may not seem to be the norm, it doesn't mean that it's wrong. It almost certainly means that we need to practice kindness and patience so they have the room to explore and learn at their own pace.

"You'll never be any different."

"[Adults] love to rattle off quips like you'll never, you won't, you can't, you always," says Daniel Patterson, author of *The Assertive Parent* and founder of the Patterson Perspective. Using negative statements suggests a state of permanence for your child and makes them feel that they are either incapable of or are not expected to improve. Obviously, this is a LIE. No child's state is permanent; they are ever-changing and ever-growing, and we can help them by shaping how they value effort and progress.

6 Ibid.

You might try adding “yet” to the end of a sentence. For example, let’s say your child says, “I’m not good at math,” after they do poorly on a test. You can acknowledge their frustration and the room for growth by saying, “You’re not good at math *yet*, but with effort and a different approach, you will get better.”

“You did great on your test, but why can’t you do that all the time?”

If someone gave you a compliment and then immediately followed it with a “but,” will you remember the compliment or the contradiction? More than likely, you’ll forget whatever positive words were said. Your child will have the same experience. If you follow your compliment with negative questions pointing out the aspects of their performance that you didn’t like, you will take away any pride or self-esteem boost they might have gained from the accomplishment. Instead, tell them, “You did great on your test! What did you do differently this time?” There is always something positive to focus on and encourage.

Foster Their Natural Love of Learning

Children are naturally curious. At around the age of 2 or 3, they start asking “why” repeatedly. Even though this constant questioning can sometimes be an annoyance to their parents, it’s actually so they can get a better grasp on their world. This type of curiosity demonstrates a natural love of learning. So, why does learning in a more formal setting seem so hard sometimes?

While it might feel frustrating to see them lose interest in school, there are a few tactics you can use to get them reinterested in learning or help ensure they never lose interest in the first place.

Let learning be fun. When we help our children learn, we tend to focus on specific topics and units of education. It’s how we were taught, which makes it the easiest way for us to teach. However, unlike adults, children don’t divide the world into little compartments. Rather, they see their environment as a whole, so the experience of learning is integrated and connected. This makes it natural for them to jump from subject to subject and interest to interest as they learn. Instead of forcing them to learn a discipline in which they don’t have a natural interest, allow them to let curiosity lead them.

Discipline and self-control are important for development. But it's equally important that kids have unstructured free time to explore their interests. This will help them make crucial connections between subjects and interests that are not easy to make in more formal study settings. "They make their own paths into the unknown, paths that we would never think of making for them," says John Holt, author of *How Children Learn*.⁷

Know that learning comes in phases. Watching your child become frustrated with learning is hard—for them and for you. They're already aware of what you and their teachers expect of them, and are seeking praise for success they've had before. Knowing a task is possible, that other kids have done it—or that they've even done it before—but can't figure it out in the moment, can make them fear your disappointment.⁸ And you may feel frustrated, discouraged, or worried if you think that your child is learning slowly or appears to be falling behind instead of progressing forward.

Learning is a process. It can take weeks, months, or years for adults to learn new topics, so why wouldn't it take some time for children to learn, too? Just because they struggle to put a puzzle together one day doesn't mean they won't get better the next. Similarly, just because they put it together in minutes, doesn't mean they won't struggle the next time the same puzzle is put in front of them. Learn to appreciate the phases, and don't get hung up on their performance on any given day.

Talk with your kids, not at them. As adults, it's easy to make the mistake of thinking that we have all the answers and know what we need to tell kids to get them to understand. We tend to over-explain things, but it's by observation and experimentation that kids learn best. It's easy to take a string of words and believe we can make them exemplify a concept, a physical object, or a human experience. This is an illusion. Nothing but directly experiencing and interacting with the world will help children learn, and explanations may get in the way of their own explorations.⁹

7 Holt, John. *How Children Learn*, P. 224. 50th Anniversary Edition. Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2017.

8 Holt, John. *How Children Learn*, P. 45. 50th Anniversary Edition. Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2017.

9 Ibid.

Think about the last time someone explained something to you. Was it dry? Condescending? Boring? Instead of telling a child why something happens, have a conversation with them about what they're learning. Ask them what they think, and have them share their experience of the process. Let them ask questions, and when you run into an area where you don't have the answers, look them up together.

Encourage them when they fail. Failure is an inevitable part of life and learning. In fact, there is no failure, really. Not when you can turn every mistake into a learning lesson. Help your kids walk through what happened so they can see the lesson in their failures or mess-ups and learn from them. Try to make it fun by finding the humor in the situation—especially if the humor is hard to find—and coming up with fun ways to improve. Ask them what didn't work and how they can improve next time.

This is another way to model behavior. When you mess up, cut yourself the same slack. Allow them to see your mistake, maybe even let them help you figure out the solution. If you handle failure with little to no grace, your kids will likely follow suit. But if you can model the idea that mistakes are simply a part of life, they will learn how to bounce back and overcome obstacles in any situation.

Find out what kind of learner they are. In Chapter 15, I share a test that helps you identify what kind of learner you are: visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. Understanding VAK learning styles can help you identify how your child likes to learn. You can adapt the questions and help your children take the test, or you can answer on their behalf based on what you know about their learning style and habits.

Scoring high as a Visual learner means your child learns by looking at charts, illustrations, videos, etc. Scoring high as an Auditory learner means your child learns better through listening. Consider incorporating podcasts, stories, and short lectures into their learning. Scoring high as a Kinesthetic learner means your child prefers to learn through physical interaction, meaning they like the hands-on approach. Activities like science experiments and cooking work well for a Kinesthetic learner.

When you know what kind of learner your child is, you can tailor your teaching and learning time to fit their preferred way of learning. Encourage holistic learning and strengthen the weak points

by introducing them in smaller, doable increments that won't overwhelm them. When they struggle with the other methods of learning, you'll know how to adjust to help them.

When it comes to Mindset, the greatest gift—and the greatest challenge—is to help your kids believe in themselves, their capabilities, and that anything is possible for them if they work hard. If you take an open, experimental approach towards their learning and help them see that everything in life starts from their minds, they will develop a mindset and process that is limitless.

MOTIVATION

Your level of motivation is directly tied to your drive, purpose, and energy, which allow you to take action. As I described in Part III of *Limitless*, most people think motivation is something you *have*. Instead, it's something you *do*. And if you use the right process, you can sustain motivation.

The formula is: Motivation = Purpose x Energy x S³.

When you teach your children to combine purpose, energy, and small simple steps (S³), you get motivation that sustains itself over time.

It can be hard enough to stay motivated as an adult, so how do we teach our children to stay motivated—especially if they struggle to see the value of what they're learning in school? By applying the motivation formula to everything you teach, you can help your child unlock the ability to be limitless in any area of their life.

Purpose. As adults, we know that feeling a sense of purpose drives us to act. But how do we instill purpose in kids? It's not enough to say, "You must do this math homework because you need a good grade." There is no purpose there.

"The bottom line is that you can't motivate another person to care. Your role, rather, is to inspire and influence," says Debbie Pincus, MS, LMHC, and creator of *Calm Parent AM + PM*. As we said above, kids respond to inspiration and curiosity. They don't respond well to being forced to care. If you've ever taken your child to an event in which they have no interest hoping they'd be engaged, then you've experienced this firsthand—it doesn't work. They only care about what they care about. Even if they muster up the energy to try to please you, they won't retain or learn as much as if they were actively interested.

The goal here is not to define what's important *for* them, but to help them define what's important *to* them. If you're reading this, you're probably the kind of parent who wants their child to succeed. You likely want them to go to school, do their homework, excel in their extracurricular activities, perhaps even extending these goals to getting a scholarship, going to college, and being successful. Maybe some of these elements are a little different depending on your scenario, but they probably fall into that general trajectory. Consider what it would be like to be the kind of parent who teaches their kids to be self-motivated. Where they do all those things—not because they want to please you, but because they intrinsically want to succeed for themselves.

If you're trying to motivate them into doing something because you've defined that specific behavior or activity as success, your best options are to, "push, punish, beg, nag, bribe, reward, and cajole," says Dr. Pincus. In other words, it's going to be difficult to accomplish. However, if you want them to feel intrinsically motivated, you have to ask different questions. This requires you to investigate and creatively explore what your child finds deeply interesting and motivating.¹⁰ Pincus suggests you ask yourself the following questions:

- ✦ What has motivated my child in the past?
- ✦ What does he or she really want?
- ✦ What questions can I ask that will help them discover and explore their interests?
- ✦ What are their goals and ambitions?

The key is to be able to step far enough back to see your child as a separate person with their own preferences, desires, wants and needs, which are often different from what we want for them as parents. Ask them to answer these questions, too, and listen closely to what they say. Even if you disagree, it's important that you respect what they share.¹¹

Energy. When we lack the right energy, if we're tired or suffer from brain fog, or if we haven't gotten enough exercise, it's difficult

10 Pincus, Debbie. *The Calm Parent* AM and PM. Legacy Publishing Company, 2013.

11 Ibid.

for us to focus. The same is true for kids. If they don't have energy, it's hard for them to find motivation to learn. Having the right energy is a product of many different factors which I discussed in the book. Below, I've adapted some kid-specific guidance on food, schedules, and sleep.

Food. In Chapter 8, I share the ten most important brain foods. Those apply to your children, too, so I recommend reviewing them again. Here, I want to mention one food that is detrimental to optimal brain performance for everyone—including children—and that's sugar.

The typical American eats about seventeen teaspoons of *added* sugar, meaning sugars that don't naturally occur in food. You'll find added sugars in juice, crackers, fruit roll-ups, syrup, cereal, and just about anything that's marketed to kids. For context, the daily recommended limit for men is nine teaspoons, and for women, it's six. Children should only have about two to three teaspoons of added sugar per day, depending on age and caloric intake.¹²

The effect of too much sugar is hard on both adults and children. With children in particular, a Cleveland Clinic study found that children who ate a lot of added sugar early in life were more likely to struggle with thinking abilities, including verbal skills and memory. Interestingly, the same study found that eating fruit with natural sugar was associated with better verbal intelligence and motor skills.¹³

It's best to avoid feeding your child sugary foods. I know how hard it is to feed a kid a well-balanced diet, particularly if they are a picky eater, so I don't say this lightly. Saying no to all sugar isn't required. If you only limit your child's intake of added sugars, you'll be helping them focus and concentrate both in school and when they study on their own. Don't beat yourself up if you allow them to eat it occasionally. The important thing is to focus on being mindful of its effects and prevent it from becoming a regular part of the daily diet.

12 Parker-pope, Tara. "Make 2020 the Year of Less Sugar." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 30, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/30/well/eat/sugar-diet-healthy.html>.

13 "Cleveland Clinic Study: The Impact of Sugar on Children's Brain Development." Trial Site News, September 3, 2018. <https://www.trialsitenews.com/cleveland-clinic-study-the-impact-of-sugar-on-childrens-brain-development/>

Schedules. Both kids and parents struggle with heavy schedules these days. You can feel obligated to have them participate in every activity that's presented to them or asked of you. It's common to worry that if your children aren't in this after-school study group or a specific gymnastics program or the right extracurricular activity, they won't succeed. You want what's best for your kids. But when you overschedule them or fail to account for what they want—which may be very different from what you want for them—you can cause them to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

"Kids whose time is overly organized don't have time to be kids, and their family doesn't have time to be a family," says pediatrician Deb Lonzer, MD. "They typically don't eat well, sleep well, or make friends properly." Put together, the lack of sleep and proper social connections can lead to a future of depression and anxiety. This can also get in the way of their ability to learn to solve problems and practice good decision-making.¹⁴

As I mentioned earlier, how I schedule my time is based around the idea that I'm either a heck yes or heck no. If I don't feel in alignment with an activity, event, or invitation to a gathering, I tend to say no, because I'm clear about my purpose. If something isn't directly or indirectly tied to my purpose, it usually becomes a distraction.

Instead, I've cultivated JOMO—the joy of missing out. Consider practicing JOMO with your kids. You don't need to say yes to every opportunity that comes your child's way. While you should be open-minded and have the conversation with your child to determine their interest and excitement, don't be over-eager to fill their time with activities. Keeping a limit on organized activities makes room for the unstructured down-time kids need to relax, play, reflect, and connect with family. This helps kids use their imagination and creativity, both of which are vital to learning.

Sleep. Kids need far more sleep than adults. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following hours of sleep according to age:

14 Children's Health Team. "Is Your Child Overscheduled? Kids Need 'Down Time'." Health Essentials from Cleveland Clinic. Health Essentials from Cleveland Clinic, November 19, 2019. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/is-your-child-overscheduled-kids-need-down-time/>.



INFANTS UNDER A YEAR:	12-16 hours
CHILDREN 1-2 YEARS:	11-14 hours
CHILDREN 3-5 YEARS:	10-13 hours
CHILDREN 6-12 YEARS:	9-12 hours
TEENAGERS 13-18 YEARS:	8-10 hours

Kids who get enough sleep have improved attention, behavior, learning, memory, and overall mental and physical health.¹⁵ Studies have shown that kids who don't get the right amount of sleep can eventually develop behavioral and learning problems that last for years. Further, teens who don't get enough sleep are at higher risk for depression and learning problems.¹⁶

You can help your kids wind down at night by turning off any screens at least an hour before bedtime—two hours is even better. The blue light from the screens is stimulating and can keep them awake far beyond their normal bedtime, so turning devices off in favor of a book or quiet family time will help them fall asleep faster. If they protest, help them understand the benefits of sleep. Relate it to something they enjoy, like technology. You could say, “When you sleep, you’re backing up all the information you learned today to clear up space, so you can learn new things tomorrow.”

Small Simple Steps. In Anne Lamott’s classic book, *Bird by Bird*, she tells a story of when her brother was in grade school and was supposed to write a report over the summer. She describes seeing him panicking at the kitchen table because he had procrastinated until a few days before school and hadn’t started to research and write the paper. The report was supposed to describe different species of birds. In response to his panic, his father patiently sat down with him and told him to take it “bird by bird.”

15 Dawkins, Rachel. “The Importance of Sleep for Kids.” Johns Hopkins Newsroom, March 12, 2018. <https://www.hopkinsallchildrens.org/ACH-News/General-News/The-importance-of-sleep-for-kids>.

16 McCarthy, Claire. “4 Ways to Help Your Child Get Enough Sleep.” Harvard Health Blog, September 26, 2017. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/four-ways-to-help-your-child-get-enough-sleep-2017092612472>.

When we teach our kids to take small, simple steps to prevent them from being paralyzed by a sense of overwhelm, we help them see that every project or goal, no matter how big, is manageable—especially when it's broken down into bite-sized chunks.

Let's say your child has a project at school where they have to make a diorama of the Milky Way Galaxy. Before anything is done, help them figure out the composite parts of the project. It might look like this:

First, they would need to study the Milky Way and understand the names of the planets, how many there are, and where they are located relative to each other.

Second, they would need to sketch out or draw their design of the diorama, which will help them get a feel for the size and the materials needed.

Third, they would need to set aside time to find any items around the house and purchase the rest of the supplies needed for the project.

Fourth, they would have to set aside several hours to build the diorama and paint it.

This is a very loose example, and some of these can be broken down into even smaller steps. For example, you might build the diorama one day and then set aside time to paint it on another day.

When you combine purpose, energy, and small, simple steps, you'll have the proper Motivation to keep your child energized and engaged in learning.

METHOD

Methods are the processes for accomplishing a given task. In the context of this book, Method is the process of learning how to learn, which you might also know as meta-learning.

Unfortunately for us, the modern-day school system doesn't typically focus on teaching children how to learn. Instead, they fo-

cus on teaching children to pass standardized tests. My intention is not to place blame on the teachers who work hard to educate our children. Teachers are some of the most caring people and they work hard every day to help our children grow. After my brain injury, I was fortunate that my mother became a teacher to help me—and others like me—learn. But the fact remains, education hasn't evolved enough to prepare our children for the world they will enter as adults. My experience in education is proof positive of that. It took me years, but when I finally mastered a new way of learning, I discovered I could use my brain and excel in school.

As a parent, it's up to you to ensure your child knows how to teach themselves anything. In this section, I'll share some tips to help your child experience meta-learning in focus, study, memory, speed reading, and thinking.

Focus. If you've sat with your child and tried to get them to focus, you know how difficult that can be. Before you get frustrated with them, ask yourself if their energy needs have been met. Did they get enough sleep the night before? Did they have sugar an hour or two before you asked them to sit down and concentrate on the task at hand? If so, you might want to hold off on the activity in favor of something else, like playing outside.

Remember, focus is a function of your awareness. When you're asking your children to focus, you're asking them to keep their attention trained on one spot for an extended period of time. It takes time to develop this practice, and kids have lower levels of concentration. Where you might be able to focus on a given topic or task for 30 minutes to an hour, your child, depending on their age, might only be able to focus for five to ten minutes. Don't force them to focus beyond what they're naturally capable of. This will only cause frustration for both of you and make the task less enjoyable. At the same time, it's natural to want to set some kind of a time goal for a study period. Make it appropriate for their age, where they can make noticeable progress toward the goal, and be flexible if their attention wanes before the time is up.

Studying. When working with older children who need to study and actively learn a given topic, the trick of active recall is just as important as it is for adults. Have your child review the material they've been studying, and then ask them to teach you everything

they remember. Let them teach you as much as they can recall, without interruption. Then ask questions to test their memory. When they've given as much as they can, review the material to see how much they *actually* remembered.

Also, remember that spaced repetition is important for recall. Help them to plan their studies so they can focus more on information they haven't yet learned or retained. When you space the study intervals out, you effectively help them "workout" their brain and make connections as they learn.

Finally, our emotional state affects the way we learn. If we're in a state of open-minded curiosity, empowerment, or even excitement, learning comes naturally to us. But when we feel defeated or frustrated, as if we can't possibly learn or figure something out, we're not likely to get it. The state with which we approach learning is just as important as the way we learn, or the topic we choose to work with.¹⁷

Memory. In Chapter 13, I discussed using the practice of thinking in pictures to remember word lists. Take this one step further by encouraging your child to create stories with what they learn. To boost memory even more, help them incorporate the knowledge they've already acquired. For example, if you're learning about caterpillars and how they transform into butterflies, you could incorporate the words and actions associated with metamorphosis *and* the words and imagery you learned the week before when you studied trees and plants. In this way, you're helping them build on the knowledge they're acquiring week after week.

Reading. Children learn to read in a number of ways. At first, letters look like squiggles on a page to them, and they may only relate to the pictures and the fact that they've seen those squiggles in other books. Young children like to play with books, opening them and "reading" by flipping through and looking at pages the way an adult would. Sometimes they even talk through them, telling their own stories as they look at each page. They don't think of this as trying to read, or even learning to read. They think of this as the act of reading. Before they can think about letters, words, and their meaning,

17 Holt, John. *How Children Learn*. P. 46. 50th Anniversary Edition. Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2017.

they have to familiarize themselves with the experience and feel of reading.¹⁸ Encourage this behavior by having them read to you and praise them when you see them playing with books.

Teenage children can learn to speed-read, which allows them to study faster and more efficiently. Help them understand the basics of speed reading by encouraging them to forgo subvocalization when they read (see Chapter 14). It will take some practice but helping them realize they don't have to say the word to themselves will help them read faster. And don't forget the simple trick of having them use their finger as they read.

Thinking. First-order thinking gets easier as a child gets older, but it's second-order thinking that helps them make connections between bodies of knowledge and plan for future consequences.

First-order thinking is easy. We engage in this kind of thinking when we look to solve an immediate problem without considering the consequences of that solution. They want to stay up late without considering how they'll feel getting up for school the next morning.

Second-order thinking takes more brain power. This kind of thinking requires us to consider the effect of our actions over time. Second-order thinkers will ask themselves, "And then what?" to get to the heart of the consequence their decision will have over a long period of time.¹⁹

Encourage your kids to use second-order thinking by asking them to think through the consequences of their actions. Ask them, "And then what happens?" when they decide on a course of action, and help them see the pros and cons of any given behavior. Encourage them to think through several steps, and discuss the potential consequences of every hypothetical what-if. The more they practice this higher level thinking process, the more naturally they'll begin to incorporate it into their everyday decision making.

It's never too early—or too late—to start helping your children adopt the Limitless Model. You can take each of the concepts presented in this book into more depth. The book was written as a guideline to get you and your family started on this journey in the

18 Holt, John. *How Children Learn*. P. 131. 50th Anniversary Edition. Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2017.

19 "Second-Order Thinking: What Smart People Use to Outperform." Farnam Street, April 3, 2020. <https://fs.blog/2016/04/second-order-thinking/>.

most comprehensive way. These are the things I wish I knew growing up, and my hope is that other children won't grow up feeling the way I did. As parents, the best thing we can give them are the tools they need to succeed. John Medina, the author of *Brain Rules for Baby* describes it perfectly: "Watching a baby's brain develop feels as if you have a front-row seat to a biological Big Bang. The brain starts out as a single cell in the womb, quiet as a secret. Within a few weeks, it is pumping out nerve cells at the astonishing rate of 8,000 per second. Within a few months, it is on its way to becoming the world's finest thinking machine." To all our limitless children in the world: this is just the beginning.