HELPING STUDENTS WITH LEARNED HELPLESSNESS TO BELIEVE THAT EFFORT ENHANCES SKILLS

by:

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To define learned helplessness, it is the belief that our own behavior does not influence what happens next; that is, behavior does not control outcomes or results. Students with this condition always expect that they will fail in any academic task they have and if they succeed, they will just attribute it to luck and not because of their skills or effort.

As mentors, we need to help learned vulnerable children recognize and focus for the skills and abilities that they already have. We need to help develop in children the belief that ability is incremental, not fixed. We must help them realize that effort increases ability and skills. Tollefson (2000) suggests that we help children see success as improvement. It is imperative that we help them understand that we are successful when we acquire knowledge and skills we did not have before.

This fact is crucial. If we are guilty of this, it is high time to avoid this. We need to stop communicating to children that, in order to succeed in school, they need to perform at a particular level, or they need to perform at the same level than other students. When we help children see success as improvement, as Tollefson recommended, we encourage them to use effort to address their academic difficulties. We train them to focus on strategies and the process of learning, rather than outcomes and achievement.

To abate the negative impact of learned helplessness in children, it is important that we prepare them to focus on strategies and processes to reach their academic goals. We must reinforce the belief that, through effort, they are in control of their own
behavior and that they are in charge of developing their own academic skills. To help a child focus on the learning process, after failure, we can tell him or her, “Maybe you can think of another way of doing this.” This statement focuses on the child’s effort and the learning strategies he or she is using, and not him or herself per se. The effort and strategy are both within the child’s control and are things that he or she can modify. When they discover how worthy they are, how amazing they are, they can start feeling responsible for positive outcomes, and responsible for their own successes in school and in life.

References:

https://numberworksnwords.com/nz/blog/when-children-fail-in-school-understanding-learned-helplessness/#.w3Qu8ugzYaw