

Parent Workshop – Growth Mindset

What is a growth mindset?

The beliefs children have about intelligence, effort, and struggle impact the choices they make about learning.

People tend to hold one of two different beliefs about intelligence:

Children with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can be developed. These students see school as a place to develop their abilities and think of challenges as opportunities to grow.

Children with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is fixed at birth and doesn't change or changes very little with practice. These students see school as a place where their abilities are evaluated, they focus on looking smart over learning, and they interpret mistakes as a sign that they lack talent.

Which mindset is 'right'?

The brain changes and develops throughout life – a process called neuroplasticity. Certain experiences cause new connections in the brain to form or strengthen, making the brain smarter by literally rewiring it.

London taxi drivers have to give their brains a workout when they navigate the complicated streets of London. Research suggests this has an impact on the brain. The part of the brain responsible for spatial awareness is bigger in taxi drivers compared to other Londoners. And the longer a person has been a taxi driver, the bigger that part of the brain.

How mindset affects learning

Children who understand that the brain can get smarter—who have a growth mindset—do better in school because they have an empowering perspective on learning. They focus on improvement and see effort as a way to build their abilities. They see failure as a natural part of the learning process. In contrast, students who have a fixed mindset—those who believe that intelligence is fixed—tend to focus on judgment. They're more concerned with proving that they are smart or hiding that they're not. And that means they tend to avoid situations in which they might fail or might have to work hard.

Many studies show that children who have a growth mindset respond differently in challenging situations and do better in school over time.

Three ways parents can instill a growth mindset

The way parents talk about ability and learning can have powerful effects on their children's beliefs. Below are three ways parents can instill a growth mindset. And remember, developing a growth mindset in yourself and in your kids is a process that takes time. Have a growth mindset about developing a growth mindset!

Recognize your own mindset: Be mindful of your own thinking and of the messages you send with your words and actions.

Praise the process: Praising kids for being smart suggests that innate talent is the reason for success, while focusing on the process helps them see how their effort leads to success.

Model learning from failure: When parents talk positively about making mistakes, kids start to think of mistakes as a natural part of the learning process.

Model making mistakes

Modelling a growth mindset means being willing to try hard even when failure is likely because that's how growth happens. For example, parents should try to get excited when their children make mistakes because these mistakes can reveal important conceptual gaps that should be filled. When adults get excited about the learning that mistakes can facilitate, children start to think of mistakes as a natural part of the learning process. This leads to a few important changes in learning behaviour:

- Children stop avoiding challenging work just because it could mean making more mistakes.
- Children become less likely to try to "sweep mistakes under the rug" because they stop thinking of them as something to be ashamed of.

Make mistakes in front of your kids, have a positive reaction to those mistakes, and openly reflect on what could be learned from the mistake. Try to show that it's all about learning, not about being right.

Use growth mindset language

Everyone falls into fixed mindset thinking sometimes. The first step toward fostering a growth mindset in our children is to become aware of language that signals one mindset or the other.

Here are some questions to think about:

How often do you notice and praise effort, strategies, and progress?

What thoughts did you have this week when your child struggled? How could you frame their struggle in a growth mindset way by helping them understand that this is when their brain is growing most?

What thoughts did you have when your child excelled? How could you frame their success in a growth mindset way, e.g., by talking about the process that went into their success?

When you hear or provide praise, ask yourself "What is being praised?" Is it effort, strategy, persistence, focus, and improvement, or does it sound more like a fixed trait or ability?

When you or your child makes a mistake, ask yourself "How does my reaction influence my child's future behaviour?" Does it encourage learning and growth, or does it encourage them to avoid challenges in the future?

Explain how practice rewires the brain

Numerous studies now show that people become more likely to adopt a growth mindset if they learn about the scientific evidence for the brain's ability to rewire itself through practice. One way to foster a growth mindset in your child is to share this evidence with them.