

## Section 5: The Growth Mindset



Over 30 years ago, Carol Dweck and her colleagues became interested in students' attitudes about failure. They noticed that some students rebounded while other students seemed devastated by even the smallest setbacks. After studying the behaviour of thousands of children, Dr. Dweck coined the terms fixed mind-set and growth mind-set to describe the underlying beliefs people have about learning and intelligence. When students believe they can get smarter, they understand that effort makes them stronger. Therefore they put in extra time and effort, and that leads to higher achievement.

Recent advances in neuroscience have shown us that the brain is far more malleable than we ever knew. Research on **brain plasticity** has shown how connectivity between neurons can change with experience. With practice, neural networks grow new connections, strengthen existing ones, and build insulation that speeds transmission of impulses. These neuroscientific discoveries have shown us that we can increase our neural growth by the actions we take, such as using good strategies, asking questions, practicing, and following good nutrition and sleep habits.

At the same time that these neuroscientific discoveries were gaining traction, researchers began to understand the link between mind-sets and achievement. It turns out, if you believe your brain can grow, you behave differently. So the researchers asked, "Can we change mind-sets? And if so, how?" This began a series of interventions and studies that prove we can indeed change a person's mind-set from fixed to growth, and when we do, it leads to increased motivation and achievement.

In addition to teaching students about malleable intelligence, researchers started noticing that teacher practice has a big impact on student mindset, and the feedback that teachers give their students can either encourage a child to choose a challenge and increase achievement or look for an easy way out. For example, studies on different kinds of praise have shown that telling children they are smart encourages a fixed mindset, whereas praising hard work and effort cultivates a growth mindset. When students have a growth mindset, they take on challenges and learn from them, therefore increasing their abilities and achievement

## How to Develop a Growth Mindset

There is no set way on to develop a growth mindset in students. Areas that may act as a good starting point include:

- **Types of Praise** – praising the process, their effort and individual development over the result, Encouraging your students to ask for and act on feedback. Encouraging a sense of curiosity
- **Level of Expectation** – having high, challenging but realistic expectations of their performance and communicating this to your students. This can also help to fight against Imposter Syndrome. (As if at any moment, everyone else is going to realise that you've bluffed your way to your current position? Research into impostor syndrome shows that it is characterised by feelings of anxiety – thinking that you are not as talented as others believe, that your success is down to luck and that one day soon your lack of ability is going to be exposed in front of everyone).
- **Positive Group Norms** – creating a growth culture that values learning, education and development
- **Helpful Self-Talk** – Teaching students to manage how they talk to themselves and to do so in a positive, helpful and energised way.



This link takes you to a YouTube video on Growth mindset:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUWn\\_TJTrnU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUWn_TJTrnU)



## 25 Ways to Develop a Growth Mindset

### 1. Acknowledge and embrace imperfections.

Hiding from your weaknesses means you'll never overcome them.

### 2. View challenges as opportunities.

Having a growth mindset means relishing opportunities for self-improvement.

### 3. Try different learning tactics.

There's no one-size-fits-all model for learning. What works for one person may not work for you.

**4. Follow the research on brain plasticity.**

The brain isn't fixed; the mind shouldn't be either.

**5. Replace the word "failing" with the word "learning."**

When you make a mistake or fall short of a goal, you haven't failed; you've learned.

**6. Stop seeking approval.**

When you prioritise approval over learning, you sacrifice your own potential for growth.

**7. Value the process over the end result.**

Intelligent people enjoy the learning process, and don't mind when it continues beyond an expected time frame.

**8. Cultivate a sense of purpose.**

Dweck's research also showed that students with a growth mindset had a greater sense of purpose. Keep the big picture in mind.

**9. Celebrate growth with others.**

If you truly appreciate growth, you'll want to share your progress with others.

**10. Emphasise growth over speed.**

Learning fast isn't the same as learning well, and learning well sometimes requires allowing time for mistakes.

**11. Reward actions, not traits.**

Tell students when they're doing something smart, not just being smart.

**12. Redefine "genius."**

The myth's been busted: genius requires hard work, not talent alone.

**13. Portray criticism as positive.**

You don't have to use that hackneyed term, "constructive criticism," but you do have to believe in the concept.

**14. Dissociate improvement from failure.**

Stop assuming that "room for improvement" translates into failure.

**15. Provide regular opportunities for reflection.**

Let students reflect on their learning at least once a day.

**16. Place effort before talent.**

Hard work should always be rewarded before inherent skill.

**17. Highlight the relationship between learning and "brain training."** The brain is like a muscle that needs to be worked out, just like the body.

**18. Cultivate grit.**

Students with that extra bit of determination will be more likely to seek approval from themselves rather than others.

**19. Abandon the image.**

“Naturally smart” sounds just about as believable as “spontaneous generation.” You won’t achieve the image if you’re not ready for the work.

**20. Use the word “yet.”**

Dweck says “not yet” has become one of her favourite phrases. Whenever you see students struggling with a task, just tell them they haven’t mastered it yet.

**21. Learn from other people’s mistakes.**

It’s not always wise to compare yourself to others, but it is important to realise that humans share the same weaknesses.

**22. Make a new goal for every goal accomplished.**

You’ll never be done learning. Just because your midterm exam is over doesn’t mean you should stop being interested in a subject. Growth-minded people know how to constantly create new goals to keep themselves stimulated.

**23. Take risks in the company of others.**

Stop trying to save face all the time and just let yourself goof up now and then. It will make it easier to take risks in the future.

**24. Think realistically about time and effort.**

It takes time to learn. Don’t expect to master every topic under the sun in one sitting.

**25. Take ownership over your attitude.**

Once you develop a growth mindset, own it. Acknowledge yourself as someone who possesses a growth mentality and be proud to let it guide you throughout your educational career.

Rather than awarding feedback such as “You are so smart” or “You did a great job getting an A,” encourage higher introspection with prompts. Ask questions about students’ processes (“What made you decide to try that method?”), how they can work to improve (“What do you think you can do differently next time?”), and what they took away from their mistakes (“When X occurred, how did you feel and what did you learn from it?”). By providing the opportunity for self-evaluation, students will discover more about their ability to work through to a solution, and will pick up self-talk approaches and questions to ask themselves down the road.

When we as educators are faced with a challenge or make a mistake, we can talk through the situation with students and demonstrate the path to learning, helping students make necessary connections in real-life situations. For example, if we waited too long to reserve a common learning space for a particular class period, we can explain the situation to students and ask for input on how to resolve the issue. Students may suggest combining with another group, adjusting the lesson to fit another space, or some other creative solution. While this is a process that we could go through ourselves, involving students helps them recognize that everyone makes mistakes and it is important to work through challenges in order to make progress.

These links will take you websites that explore the Growth mind-set

<https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/develop-a-growth-mindset/>

<https://www.prodigygame.com/blog/growth-mindset-in-students/>