

Growth mindset is the BELIEF that people's intelligence and abilities can change and grow. The opposite of this is a fixed mindset, which is the BELIEF that intelligence and abilities cannot change, that we are how we are and there is not much that can be done to change that.

Research has shown that people holding a growth mindset are more likely to persevere when things get difficult, will embrace a challenge and take responsibility when things go wrong, learn from mistakes and apply maximum effort.

Ideally, we would like to foster a growth mindset in children from a very young age to help shape their belief that they can change and grow throughout their lives and not limit their potential. Below are some ideas for helping to shape and foster a growth mindset in young children.

### Use the word 'YET'

If you hear a child say that they cannot do something, or they get frustrated on an activity, reassure them that they just can't do it 'yet', but that with time and more practice, they will get there. Learning something new often takes time, and children have to learn to do things in small steps. Helping them to improve bit by bit rather than expecting them to make giant leaps in their development helps them to stick at things that are difficult.

### Embrace struggle and challenge

It may be tempting to tell a child to give up when they are getting cross or frustrated with something they cannot do. If they can't quite cut something accurately or can't get the picture to look quite how they want it (yet), let them know that struggling is ok and is important for learning. They could have a break and go back to it. Saying things like, 'That's it, struggle, struggle, struggle. You're learning how to do it'. This will normalise mistakes, failure and struggle and help build resilience in children. Modelling mistakes and learning from these yourself is also valuable in helping young children realise that struggling is acceptable and normal.

### Focus on the process

When playing with children it can be tempting for them to focus on the outcome such as winning a game or hitting a ball accurately. Our behaviours and reactions can perpetuate this and increase frustration in children. Ideally, we want to help children to focus on being **their best** and not compare themselves to others. So, from an early age, helping them to focus on what they can do to improve and encouraging them to have another go is important. For example, helping a child to say 'try again' whether they are successful on something or not will help them to focus on the process of trying and improving, rather than giving up.

### Balance instructional play and free play

Children need adults to model how a toy works, or how something is done. They also need opportunities to play and be engrossed in this without adults constantly giving feedback, warnings or commentary. Always commenting and giving feedback can lead to them relying on this and not developing independent learning skills, creativity and a love of learning for its own sake. Showing a child how something is done is also important. It can help bonding and teach them about basic concepts and so build their confidence. Let them then have a go themselves and revert to the concept of struggling and learning taking time when they are trying something they have not yet mastered.



### Mind your language

The use of language is one of the most significant things in helping to develop a growth mindset. And some of it may seem counter intuitive. How often do we praise a child for being clever or brilliant or a natural or talented? Research tells us that this 'trait' based praise can put people in a fixed mindset. They start to believe that they are indeed all of these things and that these are fixed qualities which cannot be changed. A child may then become more concerned with keeping this label than improving and learning. Hence, they may avoid challenges and ignore feedback. One study has shown that children as young as 1-3 years old were influenced by the type of praise given by their parents, with those receiving the trait based praise having more of a fixed mindset at aged 7 years.

The best way of praising a child is by focussing on the process of what they are doing or have done. For example, instead of:

'That's a wonderful drawing, you are such an amazing artist' (fixed, trait based praise), say....

'That is a wonderful drawing. I can see how well you concentrated and thought hard about the colours you used. Tell me more about the drawing' (growth, process based praise)

Focussing on how hard a child has tried, the effort they have put in, the way in which they thought about something, persevered, asked a question, enjoyed the challenge, tried another way of doing something, etc are all far better ways of developing a growth mindset than telling a child how talented they are.

This principle holds true for negative feedback as well. For example, rather than telling a child they are 'naughty' or 'a fussy eater' or 'hyper' or 'a nightmare', put the emphasis on the behaviour which caused a problem in a way that is separate from the child. Seeing the behaviour as part of the developmental and learning process, which is temporary, rather than as something fixed about the child allows for change and avoids the likelihood of a self-fulfilling prophecy.



#### Use resources and role models

Children's books and TV shows are full of messages and characters. Try to identify which ones promote a growth mindset and encourage these over any which send fixed mindset messages. Look for the characters which persevere, work together with others, recover from mistakes and failures, take on challenges and are pleased when others do well. There are also many children's books that promote the growth mindset message, for example: *Dot* and *Ish* by Peter Reynolds, *The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes* by Mark Pett.

#### Talk about the brain

We can talk to children from a young age about how their brain grows and strengthens with challenge and learning from mistakes. It takes times for our brain to make changes and make new neural connections. There are many videos appropriate for young children about the brain. For example, Ned the Neuron clips such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7FdMi03CzI>

Find out more about Growth Mindset:

Twitter @frithsykes – Many links to online clips and books

Frithsykes YouTube channel for videos relating to growth mindset

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVIR5AHkkdxTqktfblC-m4Q>

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# GROWTH MINDSET And Young Children



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