

Mindset

By the time we reach adulthood, most of us have formed certain beliefs about our abilities, skills, and talents. But these beliefs can vary wildly, based on our upbringing, values, and personal experiences. And unfortunately as adults, we rarely revisit our assumptions.

Think about the following statements and how much you agree with each (thumbs up/down).

“You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic intelligence.”

“Your intelligence is something about you that you can't change very much.”

Fixed:

People with a fixed mindset think of intelligence as a fixed trait - kind of like eye color. They believe that you're born with a certain amount of intelligence, and you can't do much to change that.

Growth:

People with a growth mindset think of intelligence as something that can be developed - more like a muscle. They understand that when you put in effort and challenge yourself, you can get smarter, just like when you put in effort at the gym and challenge yourself by lifting heavier weights to make your muscles stronger.

How might a fixed mindset in a young person affect the way they approach school?

Fixed Mindset:

The main goal for students with a fixed mindset is to show how smart they are or to hide how unintelligent they are. This makes sense if you think that intelligence is something you either have or you don't have. You want to show that you have it.

Students with a fixed mindset will avoid asking questions when they don't understand something because they want to preserve the image that they are smart or hide that they're not smart.

Students with a fixed mindset view effort negatively. They think, if I have to try, I must not be very smart at this.

Where you'll really see a difference in students with fixed mindset is when they are faced with a challenge or setback. Students with a fixed mindset will give up because they think their setback means they're not smart.

How might a growth mindset in a young person affect the way they approach school?

Growth Mindset:

Students with a growth mindset approach school differently than students with a fixed mindset. They have different goals in school. The main goal with students with a growth mindset is to learn.

So students with a growth mindset will ask questions when they don't understand something because that's how they'll learn. Students with a growth mindset view effort as the way that you learn, the way that you get smarter.

Given that students with a growth mindset try harder in school, especially in the face of a challenge, it's no surprise that they do better in school.

Students with a growth mindset actually like challenges. Challenges are an opportunity to learn, to develop their intelligence.

What does this mean for us as mentors?

Foster growth mindset!

One powerful word

Take a minute to think about three things that you cannot do. These can be work-related, health-related, or even related to how you interact with others and build relationships (share).

Think about some of the statements you might hear from your mentee (share).

- I don't know how to do this assignment.
- I am not good at math.
- I don't have the grades to get into college.
- I can't kick the soccer ball from the corner.

So here is that powerful word: **YET**. Take a look at those mentee statements again. They all sound much better and less intimidating with the simple addition of the word "yet" at the end.

Yet implies that something is achievable. Yet puts a person back in charge of their destiny. Yet hints that there is work to be done in order to get to the desired place.

"Yet" can make things sound less fatalistic and more optimistic. Yet equals possibility - without it, those statements, and the person who believes them, are set in stone.

Moving beyond "yet"

So always follow up a "yet" statement with a phrase like this: "Let's figure out what we need to do to get there." This lets your mentee know that there are steps to be taken and ideas that can be tried, while also letting them know that they have your support for the journey.

Hand out worksheet.

Impact of Growth Mindset:

- Youth with a growth mindset do better in school and other areas of life that require perseverance, self-reflection, and good decision making.
- Retain their confidence when faced with challenges
- Are more open to taking risks and going beyond their abilities
- Are more resilient when they make a mistake or suffer a setback
- Emphasize learning and their development more than "showing off"
- Cheat less, as they are more interested in improving than the final result