

Mindsets: What are They and Why are They Important?



Mindsets, as originally developed by Carol Dweck, are the terms linked to how people characterize intelligence and their own abilities as well as how they believe they are attained. Dweck, a professor of Psychology at Stanford, began focusing on personality and motivation and how it affects development. She noticed, and was concerned, that many individuals she studied characterized intelligence in a fixed way, that is, that intelligence itself cannot be developed, and as a consequence were not motivated to work through challenges. This breakthrough helped develop her framework for her research on mindsets.

- **Fixed mindset** is the belief that intelligence and abilities are traits that cannot be built upon, “what you got is what you get”
- **Growth mindset**, however, is the belief that a person’s intelligence and abilities can be built upon through hard work. This is the ideal mindset for growth and learning new skills.
- Growth mindset helps people reframe experiences in ways that are more considerate of the process as a whole rather than disjointed steps.
- Growth mindset use minimizes stressful situations by reframing struggle and failure.



How can you help your child build a more positive growth mindset?



- Adults in children's lives play a large role in the development of their own children's mindsets through their own attitudes and behaviors. Modeling desired behavior, such as reframing negative scenarios as positive, has been shown to help children better conceptualize mindsets.

Example: Rather than letting a fixed mindset and the COVID19 shutdown ruin your life, find ways to turn the negative aspects of the scenario into positives, such as more time together as a family.

- Consider your own attitudes and beliefs towards intelligence, focus on prioritizing process over product in your own behaviors and life.

Example: Explore projects with your child that take several days and steps to complete such as paper mache, learning a new song on an instrument, or gardening.

- Demonstrate and vocalize your own struggles and mistakes as well as explain why having those struggles is ok and what you plan to do to overcome them.

Example: "Oh darn I spilled my coffee on the kitchen floor! I better go grab some rags to clean it up!"

- Reframe the feedback you give your children when they are successful by acknowledging the hard work they put into the process rather than the product itself. Help them make the connection between their work and the outcome.

Example: Using phrases like, "Wow, look how hard you worked to make that!" and "You're working hard and it seems like you are having fun too!"

- Helping children break down the activity they are struggling with into steps. Support children through steps they are struggling with, while stepping back and allowing children to complete the other steps themselves.

Example: Your child is struggling to nail two pieces of wood together with a hammer and nails under your supervision. Holding the nail upright, swinging with enough force and swinging the hammer correctly are all skills the child needs to master before they can successfully accomplish their goal. By helping them break their actions into steps and giving them assistance in building those skills children are taught the value of persistence and of the process itself.

- Assist your child in thinking "outside the box." Encourage abstract thought when encountering a problem or exploring the world around you. Stress the importance of listening and exploring every option, especially abstract ones.

Example: Sharing pictures or music with children and asking them what they notice, hear or see. Helping children form open ended questions about things they wonder about using phrases like "I wonder" and "what if".

