

Growth Mindset Handbook for Parents

Fixed or Growth Mindset?

At St Paul's, we are encouraging pupils to develop a Growth Mindset. It is worth emphasising from the outset that Growth Mindset is not a new curriculum but simply an approach to learning in school and life beyond. Research by Developmental Psychologist Dr Carol Dweck of Stanford University points to people having one of, or a combination of, two mindsets: Growth and Fixed. A child's belief about intelligence is an important factor in whether they become an effective learner.

"In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence and their talents are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. With a growth mindset students understand their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it."

Dweck

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
<p>Beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence and ability are fixed • I have an innate ability for some things and an innate disability for other things • "I will always be good at Maths, and always be poor at Art." 	<p>Beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence and ability can grow • If I apply myself more, seek help, take risks, change my strategy, then I've got a good chance of learning anything and thus growing my intelligence and talent.
<p>Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prove myself • To succeed, especially with little effort, as this proves that I am clever and/or able • Avoid failure of any sort, as this proves I have low ability levels 	<p>Priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve myself • To learn through challenge, as this will help me to develop • Seek interesting challenges that will stretch me and help me learn
<p>Attitude to Challenging Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges should be avoided • Difficulties will mean I am not as clever as I thought • Failure means I'm stupid or incapable 	<p>Attitude to Challenging Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges will help me learn • Difficulties are an inevitable part of the learning process • Failure means I need to adapt my strategies
<p>I apply myself when there is.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An opportunity to show off my strengths • A good chance of getting everything right • Very little risk of failure 	<p>I apply myself when there is.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An opportunity to learn more skills. • Enough challenge to stretch me • An opportunity to try something new
<p>Response to challenge or failure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blame myself or, to protect my ego, someone else • Feel inferior or incapable • Seek ego-boosting distractions 	<p>Response to challenge or failure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no blame – I just want to know how to do it better next time • Feel inspired to have a go • Seek advice, support or new strategies
<p>Mottos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you're really good at something, you shouldn't need to try • If you have to try, you must be stupid • Don't try too hard; that way you've got an excuse if things go wrong • No pain, no pain! 	<p>Mottos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success comes with application • No matter how good you are at something, you can always improve • If you have to try, you must be learning • No pain, no gain!

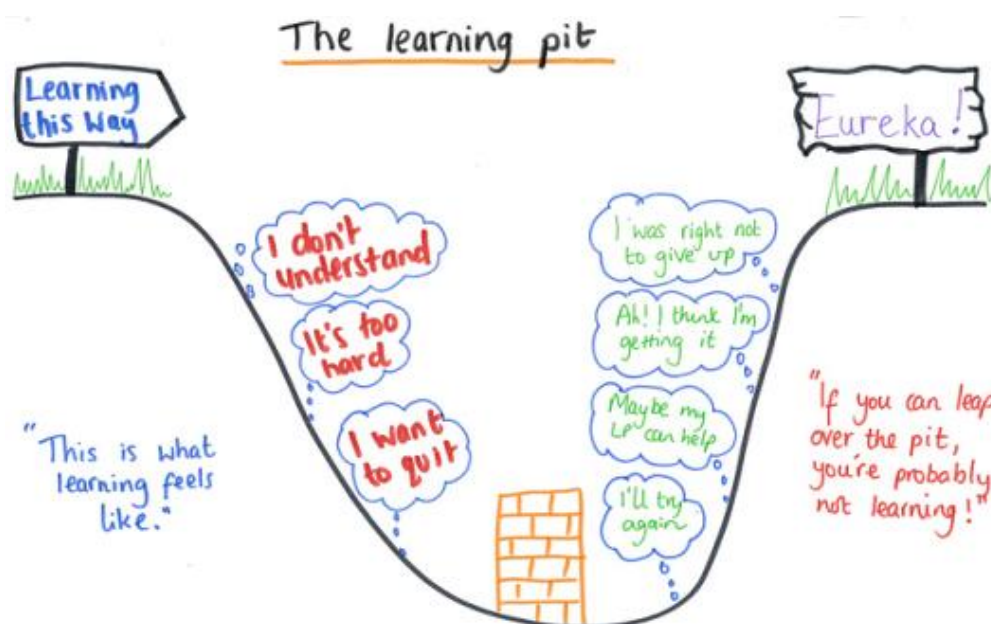
Although most people will undoubtedly have a mixture of these mindsets in different aspects of their life, Dweck's research highlights very important evidence that most teaching professionals would instantly recognise in their class. From a practical point of view, staff would recognise children with a fixed mindset who are scared to contribute to class discussion for fear of looking stupid; who take one bad test result as a sign that they cannot do the subject, are going to fail and therefore give up; who will not try anything new for fear of getting it wrong; who will continue with the same approach to their learning even when it is not working rather than being creative and finding a different solution. The 'brittle bright' are those children who can think, 'If you believe I'm smart when I'm fast and perfect, I'd better not take on anything challenging' when in fact some of the best learning comes from learning from mistakes and the process of how to develop from there. Developing a Growth Mindset is designed to remove such barriers to learning as the children realise they can grow their ability.

A key part of developing such a growth mindset is hearing a consistent message from everyone involved. Throughout this booklet, you will find advice on Growth Mindset, how to help children consolidate the idea and go onto ever greater success.

Strategies

We are aiming for all pupils to develop a growth mindset by using the following strategies:

- The use of growth mindset **mottos**
- The right kind of **praise**
- Using **The Learning Pit** as a visual reminder of the process of learning
- Using Growth Mindset **language**
- **Displays** highlighting skills taught and celebrating when children have demonstrated those skills
- 'Great Learners' **assemblies**, in which children are taught 'Brainology' (how the brain works and that it is malleable) and the theory of mindsets
- **Questioning** – the power of 'could' or 'might' to encourage critical thinking.



Tips for developing a Growth Mindset

Nine quick things you can do to help develop a growth mindset in your child:

1. **Help children understand that the brain works like a muscle** that can only grow through hard work, determination, and lots and lots of practice.
2. **Don't tell children they are smart, gifted, or talented**, since this implies that they were born with the knowledge, and does not encourage effort and growth.
3. Let children know when they **demonstrate** a growth mindset.

4. **Embrace failures and mistakes.** Children sometimes learn the most when they fail. Let them know that mistakes are a big part of the learning process. There is nothing like the feeling of struggling through a very difficult problem, only to finally break through and solve it! The harder the problem, the more satisfying it is to find the solution.

5. **Ask open-ended questions to solve a problem or achieve a goal.**

“What do you think will happen if...?” or “Why do you suppose...?” These questions build logical thinking skills and often lead to rich discovery.

6. **The right kind of praise**

Use specific feedback that identifies what the child accomplished. We all use phrases like “You’re brilliant” or “You’re so clever”, but praise like this doesn’t tell your child what they have done well; not just the product of their efforts, but the effort itself – these comments just reinforce a fixed mindset in your child. Instead, praise what they have done specifically.

I know you used to find school work easy and worry that bits are difficult now. But, the truth is you weren’t using your brain to its full power. I’m really excited that you’re stretching yourself now and working to learn hard things.

That homework was really challenging and long. I admire the way you went about finishing it.

I like the way you tried different strategies until you finally got it. You thought of different ways until you got it to work.

7. **Encourage children to take a risk**

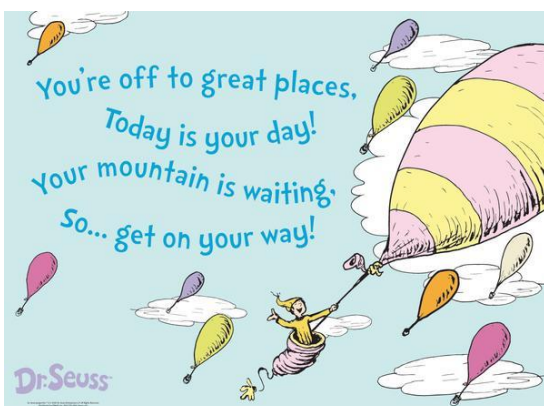
Watch and listen to your child so you can take cues about what else they are ready to tackle. Vygotsky calls this the “zone of proximal development” – when we gently nudge children to use what they know to try something just a bit out of their reach, but yet developmentally appropriate. By offering small but achievable challenges, confidence and persistence emerge.

8. **Be persistent and growth-orientated yourself**

Narrate your thoughts as you try something new or frustrating. Your child may even be able to offer some helpful tips. This allows children to see we all have to work hard to solve problems and we all continue to learn new things. Try to avoid labelling yourself in a fixed mindset way – telling your child “I’m rubbish at Maths” gives them the message that you are either good at Maths or not good at Maths and there is nothing you can do about it. A more growth mindset comment would be “I found Maths tricky at school but if you keep trying and learning from your mistakes, you’ll get there”.

9. **Let your child fail**

This is a tough one! As parents, we all want to protect our children from any distress or discomfort. But if we want our children to develop into independent, resilient and confident people, they have to believe that they can learn from their mistakes and find solutions themselves. Encourage, support and help, but don’t do it for them!



Praise effort, persistence, seeking challenges, setting goals and using creative ways of solving problems

“If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning.” – Carol Dweck