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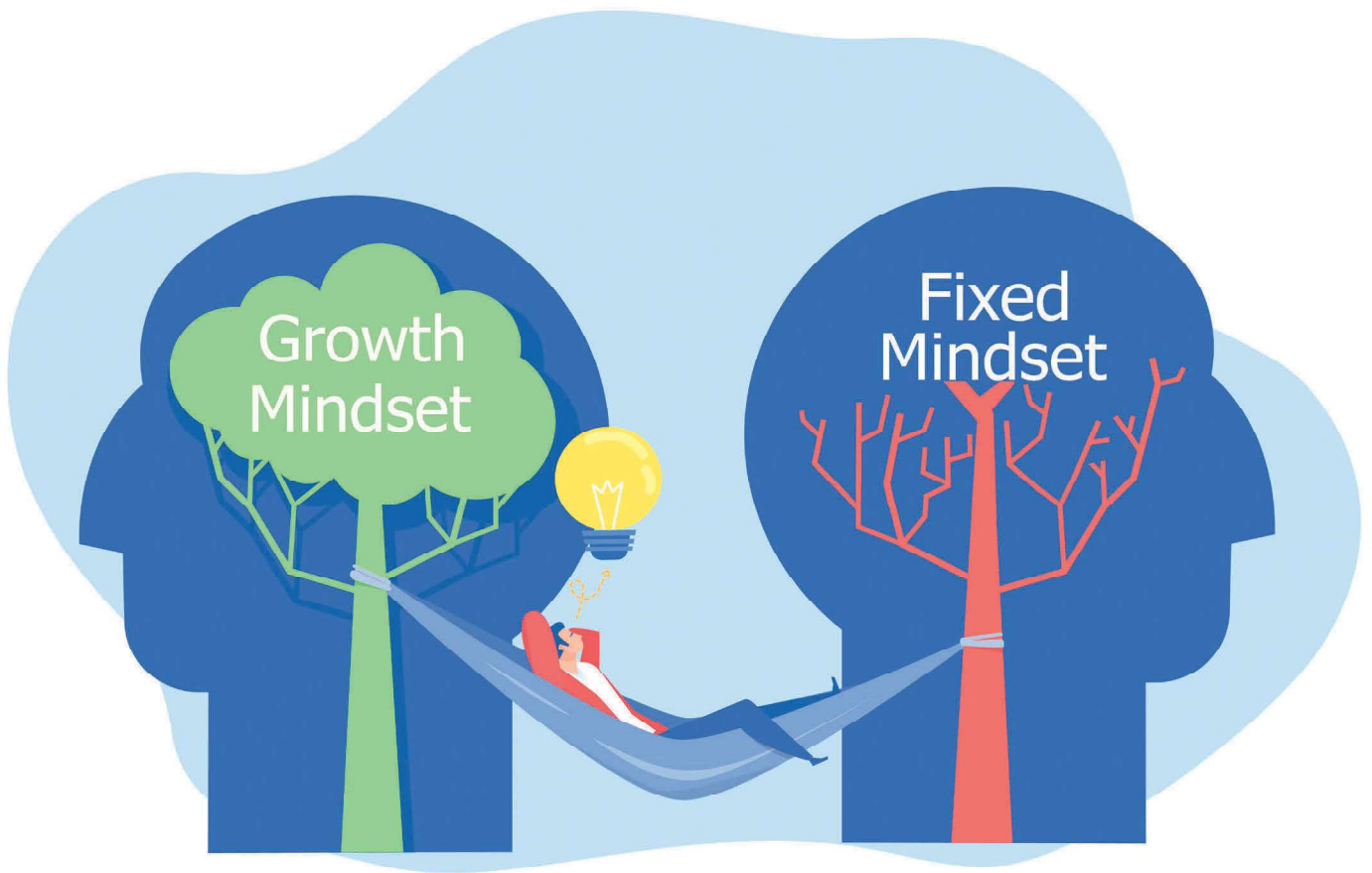
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Growth mindset: what's all the hype?



When scrolling through educational or parenting sites, you're likely to find yourself bombarded by a growth-mindset overload. It. Is. *Everywhere!* But what exactly is a growth mindset? And what's the hype all about? Dalena van der Westhuizen, cognitive development specialist, master brain coach and co-founder and MD of BrainAbility, shares some insights

According to Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Ballantine), there are two kinds of people in this world: those with a “fixed” mindset and those with a “growth” mindset.

People with a growth mindset view intelligence, abilities and talents as learnable and capable of improvement through effort. On the other hand, someone with a fixed mindset views those same traits as inherently stable and unchangeable over time.



Students who embrace a growth mindset are believed to learn more, do so more quickly and view challenges and failures as opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills.

Simply put, a growth mindset is believing that your brain can grow and you can improve your abilities. A fixed mindset is quite the opposite.

It all sounds wonderful and surely has merit. However, there are two problems I have with how growth mindset is often wrongly implemented.

Talking, social posting or putting up posters about mindset isn't the same as changing it. Simply urging your children to adopt a new mindset, changing to a more growth mindset-friendly language or merely focusing on effort and completely forgetting about outcomes are unlikely to change behaviours or improve effective learning.

This is because too often, all the effort goes into signposting the intention to change to a growth mindset, rather than addressing the practicalities of actually implementing and adopting one.

Effort alone is often not enough. In my experience working with children from various backgrounds, ages and abilities, I've noticed that for some youngsters, putting in more effort indeed makes a difference to

their academic results and their mindset. For others, unfortunately, it doesn't.

Most children will start feeling demotivated if they try their best, but still do badly, fail a test or exam, or take hours to complete simple tasks.



Therefore, only focusing on effort and neglecting to dig deeper to find the reason for your child's performance struggle/frustrations is a big mistake. The only way to find a solution to a learning struggle or frustration is to discover the *why* behind it.

If a child never sees rewards from their efforts, there's a significant

risk that they'll be demotivated by applying more effort – because “trying harder” often isn't enough. Misdirected effort can be counter-productive in terms not only of the task, but of your child's mindset and confidence.

So how do you implement a growth mindset? Here are six of the easiest and most practical ways to reinforce a growth mindset on a daily basis:

1. Introduce learning activities by explaining how they're designed to benefit your child.

For example, when you teach your children how to do a learning activity, tell them that talking about what they've learnt helps them own and process the information better and grows more neural connections in the brain.

2. Use specific feedback and helpful vocabulary that guides your children to identify how they achieved success.

We tend to give lots of positive feedback and praise when a child masters a



specific task/skill, but we don't always point out the process followed in order to experience that success. Integrate growth mindset vocabulary into your daily routines and continually point out when your child demonstrates those qualities.

For instance: "This was hard for you, but you persevered and now you've almost got it!" or "You had a setback when your strategy didn't work, but you found resources to help you. You showed a lot of resilience and it paid off!"

3. Model a growth mindset so your children can see it in action on a daily basis. Show your children how to respond constructively to setbacks and failures. Let your children see how you brainstorm solutions and different strategies. Allow your children to see that you're willing to learn and try new things, even when they're hard for you. Let them see that learning new

 FIXED MINDSET	 GROWTH MINDSET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Success comes from talent. > I'm either smart or dumb. > I don't like challenges. > Failure means I can't do it. > Feedback is a personal attack. > If you succeed, I feel threatened. > If something's too hard I give up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Success comes from effort. > I can grow my intelligence. > I embrace challenges as a chance to grow. > Failure means I'm learning. > Feedback helps me grow. > If you succeed, I'm inspired. > I keep trying even when I'm frustrated.

things, taking on challenges and rebounding after making mistakes are all a natural part of life and help train your brain to grow stronger over time.

4. When your children make mistakes, respond in ways



that help them rebound. When we overreact to mistakes or get frustrated with a child's inability to internalise routines/procedures, we undermine our message that learning is a process and failure is a natural part of that process. Remind them: "Each time you practise this, your brain's getting stronger and it will be easier for you to do it the next time."

5. Teach your children about growth mindset/ neuroplasticity through these amazing books. Two of the best children's books on growth mindset are *Your Fantastic Elastic Brain* by Dr JoAnn Deak (Little Pickle Press) and *Making a Splash: A Growth Mindset Children's Book* by Carol E Reiley (Go Brain!).

6. Make growth mindset a habit, not an intervention.

Remember, living a growth mindset is a marathon, not a sprint.

