



Growth Mindset and Learning

Advice for Parents

From September 2015, Great Binfields Primary School staff have been encouraging our children to develop a Growth Mindset as outlined in our Expectations meeting at the beginning of the school year. It is worth emphasising from the outset that a Growth Mindset is not a new course but simply an approach to learning in school and life beyond.

As promised I said I would get together some research and information and relay it to you. I know this has turned out to be a rather large pamphlet but I do hope that you find the following useful.

FIXED OR GROWTH MINDSET?

Research by Developmental Psychologist Dr Carol Dweck of Stanford University points to people having one of two mindsets: Growth and Fixed. A child's belief about intelligence is an important factor in whether they become an effective learner. We all hold beliefs about concepts such as 'intelligence', 'ability' and 'personality', with roughly half of us holding a 'fixed' mindset and the other half a 'growth' mindset.

"In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, 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. In a growth mindset students understand that 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

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 pupils with a fixed mindset who are scared to contribute to class discussion for fear of looking stupid; who take one bad test result of 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 persevere with the same approach to their learning even when it is not working rather than being creative and finding a different solution. Developing a Growth Mindset is designed to remove such barriers to learning as the pupils realise they can grow their ability rather than being told they can.

However, it's not all about Dr Dweck. The school will be taking the advice this leading academic gives, mixing it with further academic research and making it suit the current school, authority and national policies and how we think it will best benefit Great Binfields Primary School pupils.

As you can imagine, a key part of developing such a mindset is in hearing a consistent message from everyone involved. Staff across the school will be using techniques to encourage children to think this way but it is important that the message is heard at home as well. Throughout this booklet therefore, you will find some handy advice on Growth Mindset and how to help your son or daughter consolidate the idea and go onto ever greater success at Great Binfields.

Mindset and Learning

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Those of us with a Fixed Mindset believe that natural ability or talent decides our level of success, even if we have succeeded with very little effort. We avoid challenges that might question our ability and view setbacks as evidence that something is wrong.	Those of us with a Growth Mindset believe that factors such as effort, application and study skills will more accurately determine our level of success. We also enjoy success, but only really if we've had to work for what we perceive to be <i>meaningful</i> success. Setbacks simply give us a new goal to target especially if we get good feedback on how to achieve that goal.



Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
<p>Beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence and ability are fixed. • Nature determines intelligence and ability. • I have an innate ability for some things and an innate disability for other things. • I will always be good at, for example, maths and always be poor at, for example, art. 	<p>Beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence and ability can grow. • Nurture determines intelligence and ability. • 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 grow my talents. • Seek interesting challenges that will stretch and help me to learn.
<p>Attitude to Challenging Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge 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"> • Challenge 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 new insights or 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. • Trying guessing the answers or copy others. • 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. • Try various problem-solving strategies. • Seek advice, support or new strategies.
<p>Mottos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either you're good at something or you're not. • 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. 	<p>Mottos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success comes with practice. • No matter how good you are at something, you can always improve. • If you have to try, you must be learning. • Always try hard; that way you've more chance of more success. • No pain, no gain!

How to use praise to encourage a growth Mindset

Parents and teachers want children to be successful. However, often their helpful comments, examples and motivating techniques send the wrong message to their children. In fact, every word and action sends a message. It tells children how to think about themselves. It can be a fixed mindset message which says: "You have permanent characteristics and I'm judging them." Or it can be a growth mindset message that says: "You are a developing person and I'm interested in your development."

Messages about success

Listen for the messages in the following examples:

- ✓ "You learned that so quickly! You're so smart!"
- ✓ "Look at that drawing. Sara, is he the next Picasso or what?"
- ✓ "You're so brilliant, you got an A without even revising!"

If you're like most parents, you hear these as supportive, esteem-boosting messages. But, listen more closely. These are the messages many children hear:

- × "If I don't learn something quickly, I'm not smart."
- × "I shouldn't try drawing anything hard or they'll see I'm no Picasso."
- × "If I start revising they'll stop thinking I'm brilliant."

Messages about failure

Nine-year-old Libby was on her way to her first gymnastics competition. She was a little nervous about competing but she was good at gymnastics, really loved it and felt confident about doing well. She had even thought about the perfect place in her room to place the trophy she would win.

In the first event, the floor exercises, Libby went first. Although she did a good job, after the next few girls had performed she slid down the scoring table. Libby also did well in the other events, but not well enough to win. By the end of the evening, she had received no trophies and was devastated.

What would you do if you were Libby's parents?

1. Tell Libby that you thought she was the best.
2. Tell her she was robbed of a trophy that was rightfully hers.
3. Re-assure her that gymnastics is not that important.
4. Tell her that she has the ability and will surely win next time
5. Tell her that she didn't deserve to win.



self-
While

There is a strong message in our society about how to boost children's esteem, and a main part of that message is: Protect them from failure! While this may help with the immediate problem of the child's disappointment, it can be harmful in the long run. Why?

If we consider the five possible reactions from a mindset point of view:

The *first* (you thought she was the best) is insincere. She was not the best – you know it, and she does too. This offers her no recipe for how to recover, or how to improve. The *second* (she was robbed) places blame on others, when in fact the problem was mostly with her performance, not the judges. Do you want her to grow up blaming others for her deficiencies? The *third* (reassure her that gymnastics doesn't really matter) teaches her to devalue something if she doesn't do well in it right away. The *fourth* (she has the ability) may be the most dangerous message of all. Does ability automatically take you where you want to go? If Libby didn't win this competition, why should she win the next one?

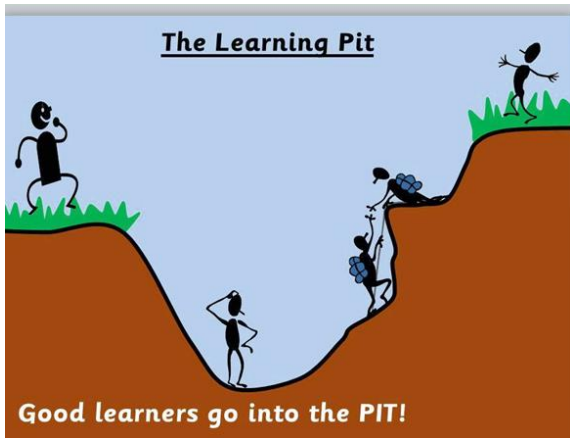


The *last* opinion (tell her that she didn't deserve to win) seems hardhearted under the circumstances. You wouldn't quite say it that way. However, that's largely what her growth-minded father told her.

Here's what he actually said: "Libby, I know how you feel. It's so disappointing to have your hopes up and to perform your best but not to win. But you know, you haven't really earned it yet. There were many girls there who have been in gymnastics longer than you and who've worked a lot harder than you. If this is something you really want, then it's something you'll really have to work for." He also let Libby know that if she wanted to do gymnastics purely for fun, that was just fine. But if she wanted to excel in the competitions, more was required and that she should ask her coaches for guidance.

Libby took this to heart, spending much more time repeating and perfecting her routines, especially the ones she was weakest in. At the next meeting there were eighty girls from all over the area. Libby won five medals for the individual events and was the overall champion of the competition, for which she received a large trophy.

In essence, her father had not only told her the truth, but also taught her how to learn from her failures, to do what it takes to succeed in the future and where to seek help to improve. He sympathised deeply with her disappointment, but he did not give her a phoney boost that would only lead to further disappointment.



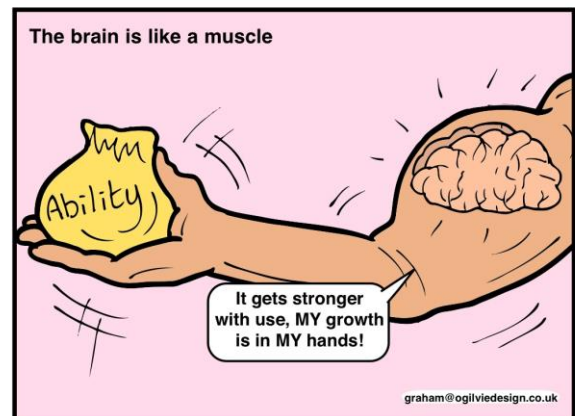
We are now in the process of getting our older children to pop thought bubbles on either side of the pit so they develop further understanding of what it could feel like when you are in the pit.

Constructive criticism

'Constructive' means helping the child to fix something, build a better product or do a better job. Often a lot of the criticism a child receives is not helpful at all, but full of judgement about a child. Here is an example:

Billy rushed through his homework, missing several questions and answering the others in a short, careless way. His mother lost her temper: "Is *this* your homework? You are either thick or irresponsible. Which is it?" The feedback managed to question her son's intelligence and character at the same time and imply that the defects were permanent. How could the mother have expressed her frustration and disappointment in a more constructive manner? Here are some ways:

- ✓ "Billy, it really makes me upset when you don't do a proper job. When do you think you can complete this?"
- ✓ "Billy, is there something you didn't understand in the task? Would you like me to go over it with you?"
- ✓ "Son, I feel disappointed when I see you missing a chance to learn. Can you think of a way to do this that would help you to learn more?"



Other approaches to feedback and questioning:

As a staff, we will be aiming to praise your children for their effort, process and commitment rather than talent or intelligence. Phrases and approaches that staff at Great Binfields Primary School will be aiming to use are:

- "You really worked well to prepare for that assessment and your improvement shows 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"
- "I like way you took on that project. It took a lot of work doing research, thinking about layout before carrying it out. Boy, you're going to learn a lot of things from this which you can use again in the future."
- 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 difficult and long. I admire the way you went about finishing it"

- “That work is really good. Tell me about it and how you did it”
- “*How did you feel when you completed that difficult piece of work?*”
- “I like the effort you put into that piece of work, but let’s work together some more and see if we can figure out what you didn’t understand.”
- “*We all have different learning curves. It may take more time for you to catch up this and be comfortable with this material but if you keep working hard at it, you will.*”
- “Everyone learns in different ways. Let’s keep trying to find the way that works for you.”

Staff will be trying to avoid praise like, “Wow you did that so quickly” or “Look, you didn’t make any mistakes!” This can send the message that speed and perfection are what is prized most. However, speed and perfection can be the enemy of difficult learning. Children 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.

Pupils often worry about failure in school and feel doing poorly in one piece of work means they simply cannot and will never be able to do something. The message to them is that they may not be able to do it YET. A home and school example can display how children label themselves:

	Home	School
Children	Ach, I’m so clumsy	I can’t do this. I’m thick.
Parent/teacher	<i>That’s not what we say when we drop something</i>	<i>That’s not what we say when we find it difficult</i>
Children	What do we say then?	What do we say then?
Parent/teacher	<i>You say, I dropped something, then pick them up.</i>	<i>You say, I find this hard How can I get better at it?</i>
Children	Just like that?	Just like that?
Parent/teacher	<i>Exactly like that.</i>	<i>Exactly like that</i>

Before major assessments, children will inevitably begin to worry. For many, this can manifest itself through worry that they will let themselves down, their parents and their teachers if things don’t go well. They put so much pressure on themselves that it hinders their chance of success. One final example from Dr Dweck: The night before an assessment, parents see how distraught their child is and try to raise her confidence. “Look, you know how smart you are and we know how smart you are. You’ve got this nailed. Now, stop worrying” This seems very supportive but actually increases pressure. An alternative could be, “It must be a terrible thing to feel everyone is evaluating you and you can’t always show what you know. We want you to know that we are not evaluating you. We care about your learning, and we know that you’ve worked hard and learned your stuff. We’re proud that you’ve stuck to it and kept learning.”

Phrases staff will be trying to avoid

Children love praise. They especially love praise about their intelligence and talent. It really gives them a boost and a special feeling... but often only for a short time. The minute they hit a snag, their confidence can be destroyed and motivation hits rock bottom. If success means they are smart, then failure can mean they are dumb.

So does this mean staff will not praise their pupils. Not at all! It just means that we need to try and stay away from certain kinds of praise that only focuses on intelligence and talent rather than effort.

What approaches will the school be taking to develop a Growth Mindset with children ?

- Being very open and frank about the approach. i.e. making everyone aware of what they can achieve by adopting the mindset.
- Using feedback/praise designed to promote and highlight Growth mindset.
- Showing pupils that their brain and body can physically achieve more through training and effort.
- Giving clear and inspirational examples of others who have used their Growth Mindset to great effect.
- The opportunity for pupils to think about and write about their mindset.

What if my son/daughter already has a natural talent, high attainment, considerable success at school yet is fixed mindset?

As mentioned above, about half of society have a Growth mindset while the other half are Fixed and in reality many of us probably have different mindsets in different aspects of our lives. Having a Fixed mindset is not a bad thing and developing a growth mindset is not meant to quash natural talent. Natural talent should always be allowed to flourish. Growth mindset allows pupils to maintain and increase academic achievement while developing a more rounded and *resilient* individual who is willing to try new approaches.

During Dr Dweck's research she asked children when they felt smart.

Fixed mindset students said things like, "It's when I don't make any mistakes", "When I finish fast and it's perfect" and "When something is easy for me, but other peoples can't do it". **Growth mindset** students replied along the lines of, "When it's really hard, and I try really hard, and I can do something I couldn't do before", "When I work on something a long time and I start to figure it out", "I find challenge and interest go hand in hand"

Another interesting quote from Dweck is an observation about Fixed mindset high achievers when she observes that, "Lurking behind the self esteem of the fixed mindset is a simple question: if you're somebody when you're successful, what are you when you are not successful?"

Creativity, resilience and flexibility

Scott Forstall, senior vice president of Apple in charge of iPhone software, talks about his experience of putting together the iPhone development team. He identified a number of the highest flying superstars within various departments at Apple and asked them for a chat. At the start of each interview he warned the recruit that he couldn't reveal details of the project but promised the opportunity, "to make mistakes and struggle, but eventually we may do something that we'll remember the rest of our lives."

Only people who immediately jumped at the challenge ended up on the team. He wanted people who valued stretching themselves over being king of their particular hill. People with a growth mindset tend to demonstrate the kind of perseverance and resilience required to convert life's setbacks into future successes. Forstall's team certainly did that.

In England, we have a considerable dropout rate from Further Education and in 2012 the figure reached a staggering 24%. A wide variety of social and economic factors may be responsible for this. However, a recurring theme is for children who leave school having only known success in exams, suddenly find University a challenge and begin to fail for the first time in their academic career. Many fixed mindset students give up and believe they are incapable of turning things around. For many Growth mindset children there will still be challenges and some will also drop out but the mindset to grow and learn from the hard times statistically helps them pull through.

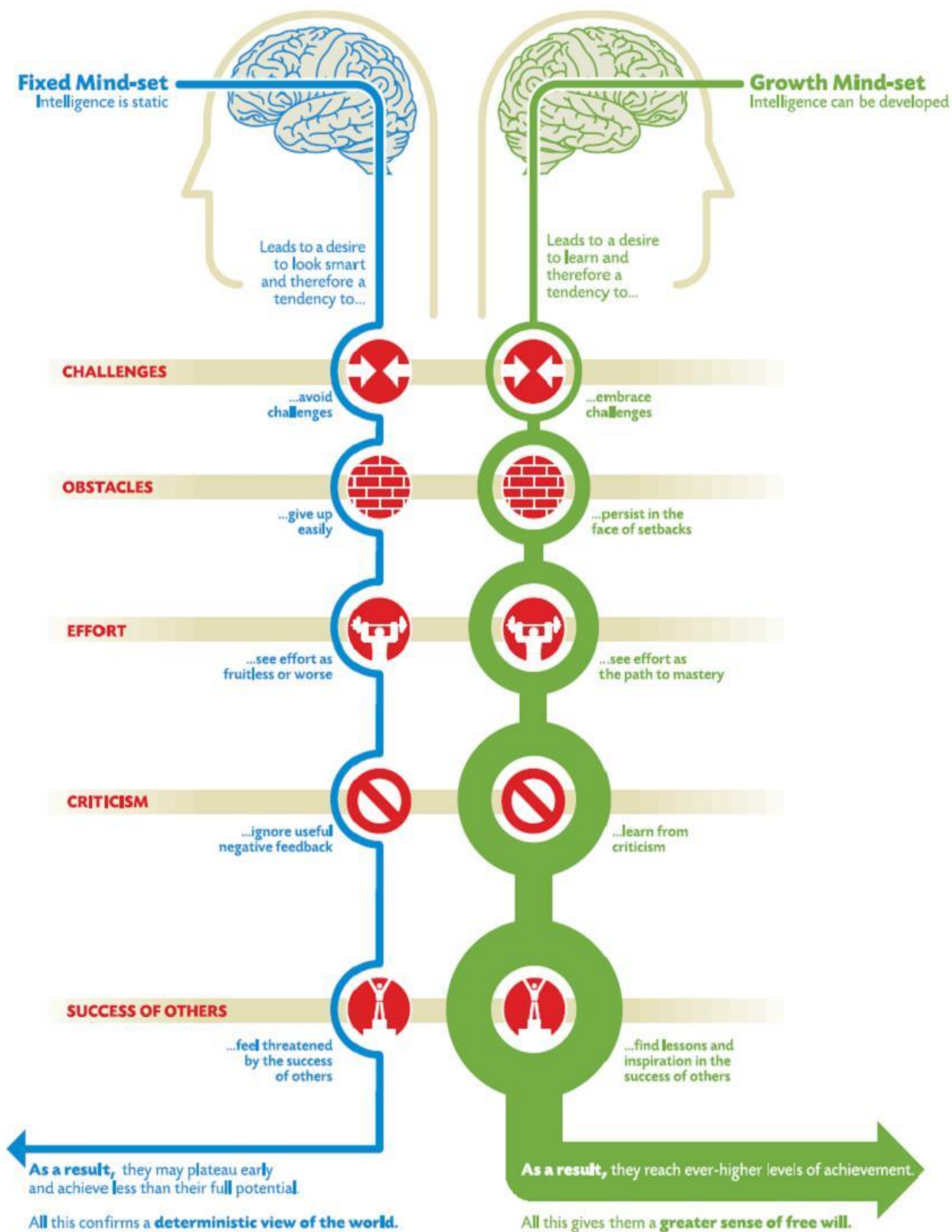
Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard

<http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/>

<http://mindsetonline.com/>

<http://www.mindsetworks.com/>

Dr Carol Dweck's, "Mindset: How you can fulfil your potential" is available in most book shops and online. Chapters 1, 2, 7 and 8 are most suited to children .



GRAPHIC BY NIGEL HOLMES