

# How to Change

## from a Fixed Mindset to a Growth Mindset

### Step 1. Learn to hear your fixed mindset "voice."

As you approach a challenge, that voice might say to you "Are you sure you can do it? Maybe you don't have the talent." "What if you fail—you'll be a failure." "People will laugh at you for thinking you had talent." "If you don't try, you can protect yourself and keep your dignity."

As you hit a setback, the voice might say, "This would have been a snap if you really had talent." "You see, I told you it was a risk. Now you've gone and shown the world how limited you are." "It's not too late to back out, make excuses, and try to regain your dignity."

As you face criticism, you might hear yourself say, "It's not my fault. It was something or someone else's fault." You might feel yourself getting angry at the person who is giving you feedback. "Who do they think they are? I'll put them in their place." The other person might be giving you specific, constructive feedback, but you might be hearing them say "I'm really disappointed in you. I thought you were capable but now I see you're not."

### Step 2. Recognise that you have a choice.

How you interpret challenges, setbacks, and criticism is your choice. You can interpret them in a fixed mindset as signs that your fixed talents or abilities are lacking. Or you can interpret them in a growth mindset as signs that you need to ramp up your strategies and effort, stretch yourself, and expand your abilities. It's up to you.

So as you face challenges, setbacks, and criticism, listen to the fixed mindset voice and...

### Step 3. Talk back to it with a growth mindset voice.

As you approach a challenge:

**THE FIXED-MINDSET** says "Are you sure you can do it? Maybe you don't have the talent."

**THE GROWTH-MINDSET** answers, "I'm not sure I can do it now, but I think I can learn to with time and effort."

**FIXED-MINDSET:** "What if you fail—you'll be a failure"

**GROWTH-MINDSET:** "Most successful people had failures along the way."

**FIXED-MINDSET:** "If you don't try, you can protect yourself and keep your dignity."

**GROWTH-MINDSET:** "If I don't try, I automatically fail. Where's the dignity in that?"

□ **As you hit a setback:**

**FIXED-MINDSET:** "This would have been a snap if you really had talent."

**GROWTH-MINDSET:** "That is so wrong. Basketball wasn't easy for Michael Jordan and science wasn't easy for Thomas Edison. They had a passion and put in tons of effort."

□ **As you face criticism:**

**FIXED-MINDSET:** "It's not my fault. It was something or someone else's fault."

**GROWTH-MINDSET:** "If I don't take responsibility, I can't fix it. Let me listen—however painful it is— and learn whatever I can."

Then...

### Step 4. Take the growth mindset action.

Over time, which voice you heed becomes pretty much your choice. Whether you...

**take on the challenge wholeheartedly,**

**learn from your setbacks and try again**

**hear the criticism and act on it is now in your hands.**

Practice hearing both voices, and practice acting on the growth mindset.

See how you can make it work for you.

There is a strong message in our society about how to boost children's self-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 hard hearted 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, which was just fine. But if she wanted to excel in the competitions, more was required.

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 and do what it takes to succeed in the future. He sympathised deeply with her disappointment, but he did not give her a phoney boost that would only lead to further disappointment.

## 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?"**

# MINDSET AND LEARNING

## A SUMMARY

### FIXED MINDSET

#### BELIEFS

- 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.

#### PRIORITY

- Prove myself.
- To succeed, especially with little effort, as this proves that I am clever and I or able.
- Avoid failure of any sort, as this proves I have low ability levels.

#### ATTITUDE TO CHALLENGING LEARNING

- Challenge should be avoided.
- Difficulties will mean I am not as clever as thought.
- Failure means I'm stupid or incapable.

#### I APPLY MYSELF WHEN THERE IS...

- An opportunity to **show off** my strengths.
- A good chance of getting everything right.
- Very little risk of failure

#### RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE OR FAILURE

- Blame myself or, to protect my ego, someone else.  
Feel inferior.
- Trying guessing the answers or copy others. • Learned helplessness - believe I'm incapable.

#### MOTTOS

- 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.
- No pain, no gain!

### GROWTH MINDSET

#### BELIEFS

- 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.

#### PRIORITY

- **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.

#### ATTITUDE TO CHALLENGING LEARNING

- Challenge will help me learn.
- Difficulties are an inevitable part of the learning process.
- Failure means I need to **adapt** my strategies. I

#### APPLY MYSELF WHEN THERE IS...

- An opportunity to **learn new** insights or skills.
- Enough challenge to stretch me.
- An opportunity to try something new.

#### RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE OR FAILURE

- 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.
- Grit and resilience in the face of difficulty

#### MOTTOS

- 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.**
- 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 aim for their children to be successful. However, often their helpful judgements, 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."

## FIXED

OR

## GROWTH MINDSET

### 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. Long-limbed, flexible and energetic, she was just right for gymnastics, and she loved it. She was a little nervous about competing, but she was good at gymnastics 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, the scoring changed after the first few girls and she lost. 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.