



What Having a Growth Mindset Actually Means for Teens

For teenagers going through a period of immense growth and change, developing a growth mindset can be hugely beneficial. A growth mindset is the belief that your abilities and intelligence can be improved with effort and the right strategies. It's the understanding that you can get smarter and more capable over time. This contrasts with a fixed mindset, where you believe your talents and abilities are set in stone. Teens with growth mindsets are more likely to:

Embrace Challenges

Teens with fixed mindsets tend to avoid challenges because they're worried about failing or looking incapable. But teens with growth mindsets see challenges as opportunities to improve and grow. When they fail or struggle, they don't see it as a reflection on their self-worth. They see it as helpful feedback to improve. Teens with growth mindsets aren't afraid to take on challenges, try new things, and venture out of their comfort zones.



Persist in the Face of Setbacks

Setbacks and failure are inevitable parts of life. Teens with fixed mindsets are more likely to give up or avoid situations where they might struggle. But teens with growth mindsets persist through setbacks because they believe their abilities can be developed through effort. They're motivated to learn from mistakes and keep working to master new skills.

Effort Over Outcomes

Teens with growth mindsets value the process of learning and improvement over any particular outcome. While success feels good, they realize it's the consistent effort over time that leads to achievement. Teens with fixed mindsets, however, see effort as meaningless because they believe abilities are innate.

Focus on Long-Term Goals

A growth mindset helps teens set long-term development goals rather than short-term performance goals. Teens with growth mindsets are able to imagine their future, expanded capabilities, and they're willing to work hard toward those goals, knowing abilities can grow over time. Teens with fixed mindsets only focus on immediate validation through grades, scores, or awards.

Openness to Feedback

Constructive criticism can be hard to hear at any age. But teens with growth mindsets are able to view feedback as helpful insight for improvement rather than a judgment on their worth. Hearing "you can do better" matters less when you believe you can get better over time. Teens with fixed mindsets, however, take critical feedback personally.

Willingness to Take Risks

Teens with growth mindsets aren't afraid to make mistakes or do things differently. Their focus on learning and improvement makes them more willing to take risks and experiment. Teens with fixed mindsets play it safe to avoid looking incapable or untalented.

Enjoyment of Learning

Learning is rewarding in itself when you believe abilities can be developed. Teens with growth mindsets genuinely enjoy the process of acquiring new skills and knowledge, while



teens with fixed mindsets only enjoy the validation of high marks and accolades.

How Teens Can Develop Growth Mindsets

Praising Effort Over Outcomes

Parents and teachers can reinforce growth mindsets by focusing praise and recognition on teens' effort, improvement, persistence, and willingness to try new strategies. Rather than praising innate talent or easy success, commend teens for pushing themselves and not giving up when work gets difficult.

Trying New Things

Fixed mindsets limit possibilities by assuming innate levels of talent before they're tested. Teens can expand their capabilities by exploring new areas they previously avoided for fear of failure. Art, music, writing, sports, and academics all offer endless room for teens to experience growth.

Learning From Successful People

Reading biographies of highly accomplished people across different domains can inspire teens with examples of growth and improvement over time. Most experts weren't child prodigies. They developed high capabilities through tremendous sustained effort.

Setting Development Goals

Teens should set specific, measurable goals focused on learning and improvement rather than test scores or rankings: Read 3 books on coding. Increase free throw percentage by 10%. Learn to play 2 new songs on the guitar. Developing skills through effort builds a growth mindset.

Managing Negative Self-Talk

Teens prone to fixed mindset thoughts like "I'm just not good at this" can combat the negativity by questioning the thought's validity. Is it really true you're not good at math? Or have you just not put in the time and effort to improve at it yet?

Trying Different Learning Strategies

There are countless ways to learn and improve at anything. When stalled in development, teens should try new approaches like different study techniques, exercises, training methods, or problem-solving strategies. Exploring different learning processes can reveal untapped potential.

Replacing the Word “Failing” with “Learning”

The word “failing” has harsh finality, evoking judgment when we fall short. But the word “learning” embraces the ongoing process of growth that highly accomplished people engage in lifelong.

Modeling the Hard Work

Parents and teachers can reinforce the value of effort by modeling it in their own learning. Verbalizing thought processes when problem solving in real time shows teens the incremental struggle behind achievement.

Exploring Their Interests

Helping teens discover their passions fuels the motivation and effort required to excel. Introduce teens to new activities, tools, and fields of knowledge to unlock interest. Passion makes the work and failures along the way feel worthwhile.

Appreciating Qualities Beyond Talent

Our culture fixates on talent, but attributes like creativity, empathy, integrity, and courage better predict achievement and well-being. Parents and teachers can teach teens many wonderful qualities matter more than inborn talent.

Cultivating Grit

Grit is passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Teens can develop grit by exploring interests, learning to manage negativity, and setting increasingly challenging goals they doggedly pursue. Grit outshines talent over time.



Owning Setbacks

Teens often reflexively blame setbacks on external factors to protect self-esteem. While unpleasant, teens can grow by taking responsibility when they fall short. Self-compassion, rather than self-judgment, allows objectively identifying areas for improvement.

Letting Go of Outcome Expectations

Teens fixated on particular grades or test scores encourage a fixed mindset. Parents and teachers can teach teens to enjoy learning for its own sake and stay focused on effort rather than arbitrary markers of validation.

A growth mindset opens up a world of possibility and passion for lifelong learning. While no single strategy creates a growth mindset, teens can develop one through incremental steps exploring interests, embracing challenges, modeling grit, and celebrating qualities beyond inborn talent. With a growth mindset, teens can fulfill their tremendous expanding potential.