



## What Might Kids Do, If They Believe Anything Is Possible?

What will I get from this?	How much time do I need?
Ways to cultivate growth mindset in ourselves and in kids	10–15 minutes

You may have already heard of Growth Mindset. This popular term comes from psychologist Carol Dweck’s influential research showing how kids’ mindsets influence achievement—specifically that **kids’ achievement can be improved when they possess the belief that intelligence and ability can be developed.** Having a growth mindset helps kids change how they think about themselves, how they behave, and **what they believe is possible!**

But, what does a growth mindset really look like, and what can parents and coaches do to foster a growth mindset in kids?

## Step 1: Understand what a growth mindset is—and what it isn’t.

Growth Mindset is a habit—one of the **16 Habits of Success**—that you can develop, practice, and improve. Having a growth mindset means believing abilities and knowledge grow and evolve with effort and support over time. It means knowing that when we can’t do something, **we just can’t do it yet.** When we’re demonstrating a growth mindset, we’re choosing to be patient with ourselves, trying multiple strategies to overcome obstacles, and continuing our efforts in the face of adversity, even when we might want to give up.

[According to Dweck,](#) **Growth Mindset is about more than just effort.** It’s also about changing strategies when our efforts fail—knowing that by changing our approach we might have more success. Effort without progress is just spinning wheels. So praise kids’ efforts as means to an end (learning!) not as the end itself.



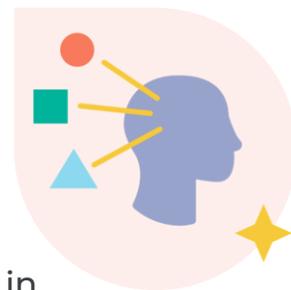
It's important to understand that **each and every one of us possesses a combination of fixed and growth mindsets, within and across all of the areas of our lives.** For example, a kid might spend hours at a batting cage, practicing to improve their swing, but in another situation, the same kid might think, I'm not a good writer or I'm not good at math. Acquiring a growth mindset often means transferring the habit from one situation to another.

**Think about yourself.** How do you react when you face challenges, mistakes, or shortcomings? Does it differ depending on the situation? Recognize the thoughts and actions where your fixed mindset appears (e.g., "This bread is terrible! I'm so bad at baking.") and try to improve your behaviors, so kids can see a model of how setbacks can be helpful rather than harmful (e.g., "The bread didn't turn out, but I learned something I can use the next time. I'm going to try again.")

## Step 2: Understand your kid's mindset in different situations.

Before you can help a kid shift toward a growth mindset in all areas, you need to understand their mindset in different situations. Here's an activity you can do to evaluate your kid's mindsets:

- 1 Think about your kid's behaviors within a specific context or environment, such as a single subject in school, like math or reading; a specific activity, like a sport or hobby; or a particular habit, like self-regulation or time management.
- 2 Think about their behaviors in a second situation, perhaps one where they're noticeably more or less successful or happy. Now, with that in mind, use the chart on the next page to evaluate their mindsets.



	Fixed Mindset	Combination	Growth Mindset
They say things that indicate a belief that needing to try hard on something is a sign of less talent or intelligence, or that “I can’t do this” is a permanent state—vs. “I can’t do this yet.”	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
They’re easily discouraged by critical feedback, and see it as a sign of failure. They respond to critical feedback by stopping or avoiding work—rather than by taking action to improve.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
They prefer working on easier versus harder things because it makes them feel smarter.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
They have uneven progress in different subjects—for example they’re very far behind or ahead in one subject —suggesting that they mostly work on subjects that feel easier.	Mostly true	Somewhat true	Not true

- 3 Compare the outcomes. It’s important to understand what kind of mindset they demonstrate in each situation. How do different situations compare? To what extent does the environment support a growth mindset?

Now, you are probably wondering, “**How do I foster a growth mindset where it’s missing?**” Wouldn’t it be great if we could just say, “This year you’re going to have a growth mindset!” and it will be so?

If only it were so easy!

[Dweck acknowledged the temptation](#), but said, “**The path to a growth mindset is a journey, not a proclamation.**”

## Step 3: Start the journey to growth mindset.

You now understand what a growth mindset is, and you have a general idea of the kind of mindset your kid has in different contexts. The steps below will help you support them in developing the habit where it isn't currently present.

### First, teach kids about the brain science behind growth mindset.

**Don't just tell kids to have a growth mindset**, or ask them to say they have one. Share the fact that [brain science](#) has proven that learning causes physical changes to our brains, and those changes can lead to further growth. Then, let kids make their own decisions. You haven't told them what to believe—you've shown them the science.

Try this: Have a conversation with your kids about talent and ability. Do they think people either have it or don't? What attributes do they think are important for success? Then, have them read this "[Introduction to Brainology](#)" from [www.mindsetkit.org](http://www.mindsetkit.org). When they're finished, return to the earlier conversation. Ask them to apply what they learned to their ideas on talent and ability. Has anything changed?

The term [neuroplasticity](#) refers to the brain's ability to change its structure in response to experience throughout an individual's life. Neuroplasticity provides the science underpinning the growth mindset.



## Next, revisit the way you offer feedback and encouragement.

Emphasize the process of learning, so that when kids reach the moment of struggle, they're able to rely on what they know to be effective—the process of learning—to help them push through challenges.

### Praise Success

- ✦ **Do say:** “Great job! You worked so hard at this!”
- ✦ **Do say:** “I can see the improvement in your work since \_\_\_\_\_.”
- **Don't say:** You're so good at this!
- **Don't say:** I told you you were smart!

### Offer Encouragement

- ✦ **Do say:** “Just because this is hard doesn't mean you can't do it; it just means you're learning. Keep working and the connections in your brain will get stronger.”
- **Don't say:** Not everyone is good at this. Just try to get it done on time.
- **Don't say:** Don't worry—you're good at other things.

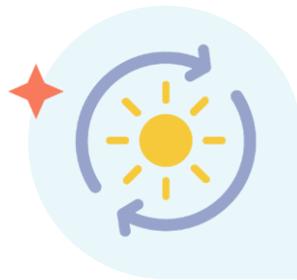
### Provide Critical Feedback

- ✦ **Do say:** “I believe you can reach that goal, but you're not there yet. Let's think about strategies to help you get there. “
- **Don't say:** I guess you're just not as good at this thing. But you're good at that thing!



**Lastly, encourage transfer from one situation to another.**

**Remind kids of other situations in which they demonstrated a growth mindset** to overcome challenges. Prompt them to think about how they used that belief in themselves in a different way. For example, you might say, “Yes, you’re struggling with this new type of math problem, but think about when you were trying to learn that new dance move. You kept at it and used different strategies. How can you do something similar here?”



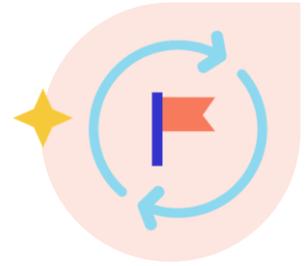
Remind kids of the **five power behaviors** we described in [an earlier \*Grow\*](#). These behaviors can help them continue making progress in challenging situations. Having multiple strategies nurtures a growth mindset as well!



## A HABIT OF SUCCESS:

### Growth Mindset

Believing that abilities and knowledge grow and evolve with effort and support over time.



#### ★ What It Looks Like

- Try more than one approach and/or attempt the same task, sometimes involving a sense of struggle.
- Use my existing and newly discovered resources to re-engage with a task.
- Shift thoughts from “I can’t” to “I can”. For example, “I will be able to when...”. Have an “I can” or an “I will be able to when...” mentality.
- Show patience in the face of a challenging task.
- Focus on mastering new learning and taking on challenges rather than on performing well, or fearing looking bad, or worrying about risks or setbacks.

#### ★ For Example, a Kid...

- ... seeks out the support of a teacher when they are struggling with a math problem to overcome lack of understanding.
- ... approaches their soccer coach to work on defense footwork that has been a challenge.
- ... tries using a new note taking application on their laptop to see if this helps them capture more information during a science class.