



BEING A TRAUMA INFORMED COMMUNITY

GROWTH MINDSET

WHAT IT IS AND HOW YOU CAN USE IT TO HELP CHILDREN THRIVE

Children who have experienced trauma often have a 'fixed' mindset where they believe they **can't** learn new things. But, with the right support and understanding, carers can help children change their view and build a 'growth' mindset.

What is a growth mindset?

Having a growth mindset means you **believe** you can learn and develop **new** skills and abilities if you put in effort and keep trying until you achieve success – you see challenges as a **normal** part of the learning process and efforts along the way are to be **applauded**.

Impacts of trauma

Children who have experienced trauma tend to have **low self-esteem** and **little sense of self-worth** because of their experiences of being rejected, ignored or abandoned. In the past, they may not have received praise for their efforts or encouragement to persevere and so they may not see the **value** of trying or putting in effort to achieve something.

Their stress response system (fight, flight, freeze) also tends to be constantly 'on' because they fear for their safety and want to protect themselves. When children are overwhelmed and stressed, there is little space left in their brain for learning and they can view mistakes as failures, become easily frustrated and quickly give up. This is why learning any new skills can be **more stressful and challenging** for children who have experienced trauma.

Foster a growth mindset

A child's mindset **can** be changed, and carers can help do this. By showing children you believe **everyone** can learn, develop skills and make a difference **no matter their life's experiences**, you will help shift their low expectations of themselves to a more positive growth mindset.



Use these tips to help children build a growth mindset:

- ✓ Check your own mindset – is it fixed or open?
- ✓ Use simple YouTube videos and pictures to explain growth versus fixed mindsets.
- ✓ Share a time you did not succeed immediately but kept trying and later achieved something.
- ✓ Share stories of famous people who did not give up – Michael Jordan getting cut from his team, Thomas Edison trying over 10,000 times before inventing the electric lightbulb, Harry Potter creator J K Rowling being rejected by 12 major publishers.
- ✓ Be mindful of the child's abilities so tasks are achievable – not so hard they are beyond what the child is capable of.
- ✓ Set realistic and practical goals with the child – this week's goal is to read two pages of this chapter, you can do this by reading one paragraph a day after dinner.
- ✓ Explain setbacks and mistakes are actually a way of learning and making progress.
- ✓ Encourage the child to think of alternative methods and solutions.
- ✓ Let the child know it is okay to ask for help – family, peers, teachers, coaches
- ✓ Be mindful of your language and harness the power of 'yet' – Say 'You can't do it yet' not 'You can't do it'.
- ✓ Praise the child's efforts to accomplish a task, and be specific:
 - ✗ Instead of: 'Good work, you got an A!'.
 - ✓ Say: 'Wow! You worked really hard to get that score'.
 - ✗ Instead of 'You're a smart student'.
 - ✓ Say: 'I can see you tried different strategies to solve that problem. Good job'.
 - ✗ Instead of: 'You're a very good child'.
 - ✓ Say: 'You always clean up after meals and put away your plates. Thank you, that's great.'

Note: The terms 'child' and 'children' also refer to 'young person' and 'young people'.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Sources:

- > Dweck, C. 2017. *Mindset changing the way you think to fulfil your potential*.
- > Symmes, A. 2019. *How to foster growth mindset in trauma-informed classrooms*. <https://freespiritpublishingblog.com/2019/04/02/how-to-foster-growth-mindset-in-trauma-informed-classrooms>
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