

The Mindsets

Mindset is a simple idea discovered by world-renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck through decades of research on achievement and success. Dr Dweck identified two mindsets people can have: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset.

In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like intelligence or talent, are fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them, and believe that their success, or lack of it, is down to factors beyond their control.

In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.

We all have fixed and growth mindsets about different aspects of our lives. The mindset we hold in any area has a great influence on how successful we will be in pursuit of accomplishment and ultimately whether we will achieve our personal best.

Mindsets and Challenge

With regards to challenge, if someone holds a fixed mindset about something it is likely to result in them avoiding challenges and not taking a risk or stretch themselves in that area. This is due to a fear of failure and means they are unlikely to learn and improve. Staying within our comfort zones will enable us to become excellent at the things we can already do, but will not allow progress to happen.

Conversely, when someone holds a growth mindset about something, they seek out challenges, embrace them and tackle them knowing that being outside of their comfort zone and being stretched will result in a learning opportunity and growth. They are not concerned about protecting any image that they may have about their talents or abilities. Their focus is on learning and improvement. Challenges, by their very nature are difficult and are likely to result in mistakes and failures. In a growth mindset however, failure is not a threat or something to be feared, but an opportunity to learn, develop and grow.

CHALLENGE-O-METER



The Challenge-o-meter

The challenge-o-meter can be used at home and school to help identify how challenging something is. The picture of the challenge-o-meter shows levels of challenge on a 1-10 coloured scale. The red zone would be outside of one's comfort zone, where struggle and new learning is happening. We would not want children to be off the top of the scale at an 11 or 12, as this is likely to be inducing stress. Being at lower numbers on the scale is still part of the learning process. When something becomes easier it still needs to be practised in order for it to become automatic or instinctive. This is when mastery is within reach. It may be repetitive and boring when it gets to a level 1,2 or 3 on the challenge-o-meter, but that does not mean that it does not still need to be practised. Having a variety of levels of challenge in a child's life will help to keep motivation high and help to make the learning process visible.

Displaying a challenge-o-meter at home can prompt discussions about challenge with your child. It may be that something is easy and you can ask them what makes that particular skill or activity at a low number. Try to help them see that this is probably where they have had more opportunity to practise and have already experienced the struggle.

When they appear to be resistant to trying something new or seem reluctant to have a go at something they may find difficult, remind them of the high numbers on the challenge-o-meter and what thoughts may be going through their heads. See if they could talk back to themselves with a growth mindset if they seem to be dwelling on more fixed types of thinking. Helping them to remember times when they have been at a high level of challenge, experienced failure and overcome this to achieve success can be powerful in overcoming new learning situations.

Use the challenge-o-meter to talk about the following with your child:

- Different levels of challenge
- Failure and learning from mistakes
- Taking risks
- What they can hear themselves say when faced with challenges
- How practice helps decrease the level of challenge
- We cannot learn new things well without being challenged
- Where do they think certain role models have been on the challenge-o-meter – why do they think that?

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