

Growth Mindset Activities

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Adapted from Brock, A. & Hundley, H. (2017). The growth mindset playbook: A teacher's guide to promoting student success. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press.

Mindset Assessment/Introduction to Fixed and Growth Mindsets

Activity Information

Time needed: 10-15 minutes

Topic: Fixed and Growth Mindsets

Supplies: Copies of assessment, link to mindset Ted Talk

Directions

Hand out copies of the mindset assessment, without telling students what the purpose or goal of the assessment is. Have students read over the statements and check the ones that most closely match or describe their beliefs about themselves.

Once finished, explain to students that this assessment presents fixed and growth mindset ways of thinking. Briefly review mindsets, then show video:

[Growth Mindset Ted Talk: \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc)

Then review the questions. The odd-numbered statements are common attitudes of individuals with a fixed mindset, while the even-numbered statements are common of individuals with a growth mindset. It's important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, the purpose of the assessment is to begin to understand your own mindset in different situations. It is likely that we are a mix of the mindsets: for some situations we have a fixed mindset and for others we have a growth mindset. Regardless of where you are, this is the message we want you to focus on: Your ability to grow and change depends on the amount of work you are willing to do.

Review the following examples of fixed and growth mindsets for five common areas defined by Dr. Dweck. Put up a blank copy of the table and have students suggest what they think may be a fixed or a growth mindset for each category, then review answers given below.

Situation	Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Challenges	Challenges are avoided to maintain the appearance of intelligence and capability	Challenges are embraced, demonstrating a desire to learn and grow
Obstacles	Giving up in the face of obstacles and setbacks is a common response in the fixed mindset	Showing grit and resilience in the face of obstacles and setbacks is a common response in the growth mindset
Effort	Putting in effort is viewed as a negative trait: if you're good at it, you shouldn't have to try hard	Putting in effort and working hard are critical to paving the way to achievement and success
Criticism	Negative feedback, regardless of how constructive, is ignored. It's often viewed as a personal attack	Criticism isn't a personal attack, it's a tool for providing important feedback that can aid in learning and growth
Success of Others	The success of others is viewed as a threat and evokes feelings of insecurity and vulnerability	The success of other people can be a source of inspiration and education

Adapted from The Growth Mindset Playbook: A Teacher's Guide to Promoting Student Success; Annie Brock and Heather Hundley

Mindset Quiz Worksheet

Read the following statements. Put a check next to the statements that best describe your beliefs.

1. _____ There are some things I am just not good at.
2. _____ I don't mind failing. It's a good chance to learn.
3. _____ When others do better than me, it makes me feel inferior.
4. _____ I like trying new things, even if it means getting out of my comfort zone.
5. _____ It makes me feel successful when I show others I'm good at things.
6. _____ When other people succeed, I feel inspired.
7. _____ I feel good when I can do something others around me cannot.
8. _____ It is possible to change how intelligent you are.
9. _____ I think people are born with a certain amount of intelligence and they can't do much to change that.
10. _____ Feeling frustrated makes me want to try harder.

Our Changing Brains

Activity Information

Time needed: 10-15 minutes

Topic: Fixed and Growth Mindsets – how they relate to learning

Supplies: Paper, Pencil, chalk, book(s), sticky notes, stopwatch/timer

Directions

Before class – set up stations around the room for students to rotate through. Stations described below:

1. Drawing shapes: On a section of the chalkboard, make a list of shapes for students to draw and give to sections labeled Dominant and non-dominant. Have students draw the shapes with their dominant hand and non-dominant hand. Shapes for students to draw: circle, square, triangle, diamond, heart, star.
2. Name Game: Have copies of the “Name Game” page. Tell students they will be doing a race against themselves. They will start on the column that matches their dominant hand (right hand, right column; left hand, left column). They will have one minute to sign their name as many times as they can with their dominant hand. Time one minute and see how many times each student was able to write their name. Now, have them switch hands and columns. Time students again for one minute to see how many times they can write their name with their non-dominant hand.
3. Flipping pages: have one or more books on a table. For each book, have a page number identified for students to find. First, they must open and turn the pages only with their dominant hand. Then, they repeat the task with their non-dominant hand (have a different page number selected for each hand per book). This is a good station to have students do together if needed.
4. Ball in a cup: Have 1-3 paper cups lined up along the backside of a table, with a small ball(s) on the other end. Have students try to throw the balls into the cups with their dominant hand, then repeat with their non-dominant hand.

When students have gone through all stations, pass out sticky notes. Have them identify how they felt when they had to engage in tasks with their non-dominant hand (one word per sticky note). Put all sticky notes together at the front of the room. (alternative: use a word cloud generator). Ask students: Is there a time you have felt this way when learning something new? (give further prompts related to school or work if needed)

Now ask students: What do you think would happen if you kept practicing these tasks with your non-dominant hand? (Hopefully they say “You’ll get better” or something similar) Say: Right! You could improve over time with practice! This ability for the brain to change, make new connections, and learn new things is called brain plasticity. Right now, doing things with your non-dominant hand feels (insert words given by students here), but if you were to

keep doing it and practice, it would become easier because your brain would get used to doing it that way. People used to think our brain couldn't change much, especially once we stopped growing. But scientists have learned that our brains are changing all the time. When you work hard on something or practice really hard, you get better at it. Can you think of something you weren't very good at doing, but then got better? (Possible examples: Spelling, math, riding a bike, swimming, playing a sport)

Say: That's right! With hard work and effort, we can train our brains to get better at doing anything, including things at school like math, science, spelling and other new subjects. Remember when we've talked about a growth mindset – the belief that with hard work and effort, you can improve at anything? Well, our brains are what make that true! When we start working on a new skill, sport, subject in school or task at work, our brains get to work right away, making connections and figuring out the new thing we're doing. The next time you are working on something new, like at your internships, and it feels (insert words from class), just remember that is your brain at work.

Name Game Worksheet

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Responding to Fixed Mindset Triggers

Activity Information

Time needed: 10-15 minutes

Topic: Fixed and Growth Mindsets

Supplies: Notecards, Tape, Chalkboard/Poster Board

Directions

Pass out prepared fixed and growth mindset statements on notecards to each student, or pairs of students. Draw a chart on a chalkboard or poster board with one side labeled “Fixed Mindset” and the other labeled “Growth Mindset.” Have students/pairs of students decide where their notecard goes, come up, place it under which label they think is best and describe their reasoning. (Note: It may be helpful to go through an example or two prior to students deciding if needed)

You can use these statements for your cards, or create your own:

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
When I have to ask for help or get called on in class, I get anxious and feel like people will think I’m not smart.	The question I have is likely the same question someone else in class may have. It’s important for me to ask so I can better understand what I am learning.
My teacher gave me a low score on my presentation. I knew I couldn’t do the work because I’m just not creative. There is no way I am revising it for a better score.	My score on my project wasn’t as good as I had hoped. I am going to revise my work and ask for help from my teacher.
I’ve tried to learn my part for the musical, but I just can’t get it. I knew I shouldn’t have tried out. I’m not talented enough to be on stage.	I am struggling to learn my part for the musical. I think I should try a different strategy, such as creating an audio recording so I can listen to my part rather than just reading it.
During my mile run, I came in last. I’m not an athlete and I’ll never meet my personal goal.	I came in last on my mile run today, but I didn’t have to walk and I shaved 2 minutes off of my personal best.
My performance review at work was not as good as I had hoped. I must be bad at my job.	My performance review at work was not as good as I had hoped, but I was able to set some goals on areas I can improve.
I didn’t score as high on the exam as I expected. I’m not going to do well in this class and should drop it.	I didn’t score as high on the exam as I expected. I’m going to try some different strategies for studying and ask my teacher questions if I am still struggling.

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
If I ask questions during training for my new job, my boss will think I can't do the work and I might get fired.	If I ask questions during training for my new job, I'll be sure I understand the information and perform tasks the right way.

Now, encourage students to think of a personal fixed mindset trigger. Encourage the students to write their trigger on a notecard (without their name). Collect the notecards and shuffle, then pass out and have students get into pairs or small groups. Pass notecards back out and have students work together to read the triggers from a growth mindset perspective and brainstorm ideas or ways the trigger could be looked at from a growth mindset. Have students write these ideas on the back of the notecard.

Once finished, have a short group discussion on fixed and growth mindsets, and how people with fixed mindsets respond to new learning, challenges, mistakes effort and struggles. Then review the ideas and strategies each group generated as a large group.

Lay out all notecards with the fixed mindset trigger facing up, and encourage students to take their trigger to review and try to implement the strategies their classmates came up with.

Lesson Extension

Have students identify goals, potential obstacles and action steps for practicing growth mindset strategies when they encounter a common or current fixed mindset trigger.

Planning for Failure

Activity Information

Time needed: 10-15 minutes

Topic: Fixed and Growth Mindsets

Supplies: If/Then Plan worksheet

Directions

Failure most often sends people spiraling into their fixed mindset when they have no plan in place to deal with it. But if you have a plan in place for dealing with obstacles and set-backs, you are more likely to stay in the growth mindset zone and work through the issue. Remember all the soft skills charts we made last semester? This is part of your plan for working through obstacles in that area!!

Developing If/Then plans are a simple way to come up with solutions to failure to help problem solve situations and see struggle as part of the learning process. Here's how if/then plans work: instead of just setting a goal and going for it, you attempt to consider possible obstacles or setbacks you may encounter along the way. Then, develop if/then statements that identify the potential obstacle along with a positive response to it. Here's an example:

Goal: I will earn a solo in the spring choir showcase

If/Then: If I do not earn a solo, I will ask my teacher for ideas on improving.

If/Then: If I do not earn a solo, I will ask for practice advice from students who did

If/Then: If I do not earn a solo, then I will work hard at performing well in my designated part.

Think of at least two goals you have for this semester; at internship, with independent living skills, or with learning/academics. For each goal, think of 3 potential obstacles and come up with an if/then plan to overcome or manage them. Use the If/Then Plan worksheet to write these out. You can continue to work on these with your mentor if needed.

If/Then Plan Worksheet

Example:

Goal: I will ask my internship supervisor for help when I have a question about my tasks

If/Then: If my supervisor is not available, I will ask another co-worker I am comfortable with to get the information I need to finish my task.

If/Then: If no one is available, I will write down my question so I don't forget it/email my supervisor my question and move on to the next task on my list

If/Then: If no one is available and I cannot move on to the next task until my question is answered, I will patiently wait in an appropriate area (near my boss' office, in the break room, etc) until I can get the information I need to complete my task

Goal: _____

If/Then: _____

If/Then: _____

If/Then: _____

Goal: _____

If/Then: _____

If/Then: _____

If/Then: _____
