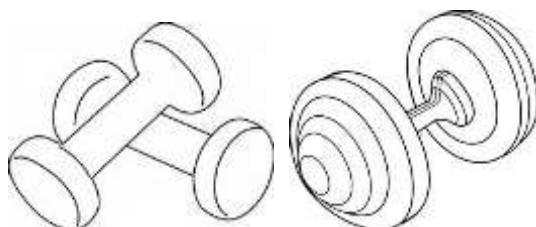


How Watching What You Say Really Can Grow Their Minds!

Here at IVJS, we have recently set out on a path to become a 'growth mindset' school. A number of different methods are being used by staff (in lessons, PSHE days, assemblies, etc) to encourage all students to believe that the brain CAN grow and become 'smarter through continuous effort and hard work'. This concept is gathering huge momentum in educational and psychological research most notably by Carol Dweck.

Essentially, research consistently shows, that the most successful people, in any industry, share a similar 'growth mindset'. This stems from the belief that intelligence is not a 'fixed' trait that one is born with, conversely, it is developed throughout life by the consistent, and constant, application of effort. Those people that plateau early, and not achieve their potential, often have a 'fixed mindset'; they see effort as pointless as they believe they cannot change their intelligence/ability levels. The following table neatly sums up the outcomes of believing in such 'mindsets'.



	Growth Mindset 	Fixed Mindset 
Desire	To push myself, take risks and constantly learn new things. I enjoy a challenge.	To look smart in every situation and to prove myself again and again. I must never fail.
Evaluation of situations	“Will it help me grow?” “Will it help me to overcome challenges?”	“Will I succeed or fail?” “Will it make me look intelligent or stupid?”
Attitude to setbacks	“I failed. I’ll learn from it and move on.” “I’ll try harder next time.”	“I’m a failure.” “I knew I’d fail, I’m an idiot.”
Effort	I embrace challenges and persist when things get tough.	I avoid challenges. I get defensive and give up easily.
Criticism	I try to learn from criticism. “What can I do to improve?”	I ignore criticism. I do things my way.
The success of others	I find lessons and inspiration in other peoples successes.	I feel threatened by the successes of others. If they succeed, I fail.
Result	They achieve ever-higher levels of success.	They plateau early and never reach their full potential.

See it in action:

An excellent talk was given at a recent TED conference which summarises the research of Dweck and how to encourage a ‘growth mindset’.

Go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc>

The importance of praise, and feedback, as a parent:

Through her research, Dweck showed that the type of praise given when a child is successful can have a significant impact on the type of mindset they develop. Simply, the praise used can convey two messages:

- Fixed mindset: “You have permanent characteristics and I’m judging them”
- Growth mindset: “You are a developing person and I’m interested in your development”

These messages can be illustrated further by the below examples:

Messages about success:

Listen for the messages in the following examples:

- ❖ “You learned that so quickly! You’re so smart!”
- ❖ “Look at that drawing. Sara, is he the next Picasso or what?”
- ❖ “You’re so brilliant; you got an A without even revising!”

If you’re like most parents, you hear these as supportive, esteem-boosting messages. But, listen more closely. These are the messages many children hear:

- ❖ “If I don’t learn something quickly, I’m not smart.”
- ❖ “I shouldn’t try drawing anything hard or they’ll see I’m no Picasso.”
- ❖ “If I start revising they’ll stop thinking I’m brilliant.”

Messages about failure:

Nine-year-old Libby was on her way to her first gymnastics competition. She was a little nervous about competing but she was good at gymnastics, really loved it and felt confident about doing well. She had even thought about the perfect place in her room to place the trophy she would win.

In the first event, the floor exercises, Libby went first. Although she did a good job, after the next few girls had performed she slid down the scoring table. Libby also did well in the other events, but not well enough to win. By the end of the evening, she had received no trophies and was devastated.

What would you do if you were Libby's parents?

1. Tell Libby that you thought she was the best.
2. Tell her she was robbed of a trophy that was rightfully hers.
3. Re-assure her that gymnastics is not that important.
4. Tell her that she has the ability and will surely win next time
5. Tell her that she didn't deserve to win.

There is a strong message in our society about how to boost children's self-esteem, and a main part of that message is: Protect them from failure! While this may help with the immediate problem of the child's disappointment, it can be harmful in the long run. Why?

If we consider the five possible reactions from a mindset point of view:

The first (you thought she was the best) is insincere. She was not the best – you know it, and she does too. This offers her no recipe for how to recover, or how to improve. The second (she was robbed) places blame on others, when in fact the problem was mostly with her performance, not the judges. Do you want her to grow up blaming others for her deficiencies? The third (reassure her that gymnastics doesn't really matter) teaches her to devalue something if she doesn't do well in it right away. The fourth (she has the ability) may be the most dangerous message of all. Does ability automatically take you where you want to go? If Libby didn't win this competition, why should she win the next one?

The last opinion (tell her that she didn't deserve to win) seems hardhearted under the circumstances. You wouldn't quite say it that way. However, that's largely what her growth-minded father told her.

Here's what he actually said: "Libby, I know how you feel. It's so disappointing to have your hopes up and to perform your best but not to win. But you know, you haven't really earned it yet. There were many girls there who have been in gymnastics longer than you and who've worked a lot harder than you. If this is something you really want, then it's something you'll really have to work for." He also let Libby know that if she wanted to do gymnastics purely for fun, that was just fine. But if she wanted to excel in the competitions, more was required and that she should ask her coaches for guidance.

Libby took this to heart, spending much more time repeating and perfecting her routines, especially the ones she was weakest in. At the next meeting there were eighty girls from all over the area. Libby won five medals for the individual events and was the overall champion of the competition, for which she received a large trophy. In essence, her father had not only told her the truth, but also taught her how to learn from her failures, to do what it takes to succeed in the future and where to seek help to improve. He sympathised deeply with her disappointment, but he did not give her a phoney boost that would only lead to further disappointment.

Turn your language around!

As can be seen, the wording of praise has a powerful effect. Use the following table as a quick reference guide to ensure you are giving as much 'growth' praise as possible.

FIXED MINDSET - Praise	GROWTH MINDSET - Praise
"Great result – you're really smart at ... " " Challenge any 'FIXED' mindset language you hear. "I'm no good at this... "...YET!"	"Wow, great result. You clearly tried really hard and your extra effort has paid off."
You learned that so quickly – you are so smart."	"A good start, now try something even more challenging to really help you improve"
"You are such a talented musician / athlete / mathematician."	"The amount of work and effort you put into being a musician / athlete / mathematician means you are making excellent progress – well done."
"Don't worry about that last test – you have the ability and will do better next time"	"In the last test it's clear you did not spend enough time on revision – what are you going to do different for the next test?" OR child tries REALLY hard but still no success: "You put so much effort in, which is fantastic. Keep going - lets work together, find some new ideas and work out what you don't understand"
"You got an A – I'm so proud of your grade"	"You really studied for your English test, and your improvement shows. Good idea to read the material several times, and testing yourself. That definitely worked!"
"Fantastic – you're getting As (or Bs) with no effort!"	"Clearly that was too easy. Try an even more challenging paper/question/task you could learn from"
"Don't worry, not everyone can be good at Maths – I never was. You have other talents – focus on what you're better at"	"You haven't quite mastered that topic in Maths, yet. Keep working hard, speak to your teacher, practise even more and you will definitely improve"
Challenge any 'FIXED' mindset language you hear.	
"I'm no good at this..."	"...YET!"

Books: -

Mindset: How you can fulfil your potential – Carol Dweck (2012)

Bounce: The myth of talent and the Power of Practice – Matthew Syed (2011)

Growth Mindset Pocketbook—Barry Hymer & Mike Gershon (2014)

Growth Mindset Websites:

Mindset works: www.mindsetworks.com

Growth Mindsets and why it matters presentation:

http://whatkidscando.org/resources/spec_growthmindset.html

Youtube videos:

Why you need to fail: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhxcFGuKOys>

TED full presentation on The Power of Belief – Mindset and success:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc> - Carol Dweck: Discovering the importance of mindsets:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jDvd-nCEYc> - Carol Dweck: The effect of praise on mindsets:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTXrV0_3UjY - Carol Dweck: Teaching a Growth Mindset:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXhbtCcmsyQ>