

Moving Towards a Growth Mindset

Mindset

Intervention

5 min. daily

Client

No

Carol Dweck (1999) coined the terms *fixed mindset* and *growth mindset* to describe the underlying beliefs people have about their intelligence and ability. A person with a *fixed mindset* assumes that human qualities, such as intelligence, character and ability, are relatively stable, and cannot be changed in any meaningful way. Success is the affirmation of one's inherent intelligence (Dweck, 1999). Conversely, a person with a *growth mindset* believes that human qualities are malleable and can be improved with effort. In this way, challenges and obstacles are viewed as a natural part of learning (Dweck, 1999).

According to *mindset theory*, holding a *growth mindset* is advantageous. People with *growth mindsets* are more likely to succeed academically because they are more motivated to learn, have a desire for hard work, are less discouraged by difficulty, and use more effective strategies for learning (Cury, Elliott, Da Fonseca, & Moller, 2006; Dweck and Leggett 1988). In contrast, people with *fixed mindsets* are more likely to avoid challenges and be debilitated by failure because they believe they do not have the ability to succeed (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). *Mindsets* can be changed, and *shifting mindsets* can have a profound impact on nearly every aspect of one's life. The key to changing mindsets lies first and foremost in self-awareness.



Author

This intervention was adapted from Carol Dweck's website (<https://mindsetonline.com/changeyourmindset/firststeps/>) by Lucinda Poole (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lucinda_Poole).



Goal

This intervention is designed to help people move towards a growth mindset through noticing fixed mindset elements in oneself and then actively adopting growth-oriented actions.



Advice

- If this is the first instance that your client is looking at his or her thinking styles, they may be confronted by a dominant fixed mindset dialogue. It is important to normalize having a fixed mindset so that clients do not feel in some way defective.
- Praise your client's effort rather than his or her ability. Praising people for their ability suggests that innate talent is the reason for their success (e.g. "Well done! See, I told you that you were clever"), while focusing on the process helps people see how their effort leads to success ("Great job! You must have worked really hard at this"). Praising people for the process and the effort they put forth leads to challenge-seeking and increased performance.

- Inform your client about neuroplasticity research that demonstrates that the brain is malleable—that it grows with effort and experience; with repeated practices, neural networks foster new connections, strengthen existing ones, and build insulation that speeds transmission of impulses (Draganski et al., 2004).
- After completing the Mindset log, the practitioner can evaluate the experiences with the client. Possible questions that can be addressed are: What did you learn by doing this exercise? Is there a pattern of events that trigger a fixed mindset? Why do you think these events cause a fixed mindset to emerge? To which extent were you able to replace thoughts reflecting a fixed mindset with those that characterize a growth mindset? In case you experienced difficulties with adopting a growth mindset perspective, what do you believe caused these difficulties? What do you believe could help to strengthen a growth mindset?



Suggested Readings

Cury, F., Elliot, J., Da Fonseca, D., & Moller, A. (2006). The social-cognitive model of achievement motivation and the 2x2 achievement goal framework. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *90*(4), 666-679.

Draganski, B., Gaser, C., Busch, V., Schuierer, G., Bogdahn, U., & May, A. (2004). Neuroplasticity: changes in grey matter induced by training. *Nature*, *427*(6972), 311-312.

Dweck, C. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House Incorporated.

Dweck, C. (2017). *Mindset: changing the way you think to fulfil your potential*. Hachette UK.

Tool Description

Instructions

The following four steps will help you move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

Step 1: Learn to hear your mindset “voice”

This week, try to become aware of the internal commentary that shows up when you are faced with difficulty, whether you have made a mistake, hit a setback, or received some form of external criticism. Briefly describe the challenging situation and the thoughts that are triggered by this situation in the registration form displayed in figure 1 on page 4. Use the first column to register the situation and the second column to describe the thoughts.

Step 2: Identify whether these thoughts represent a fixed or growth mindset

Your mind might be saying things like “I can’t do this,” “I’m not good enough,” “I’m not smart enough,” and “I failed last time so I will probably fail again.” These types of thoughts come from a fixed mindset.

Step 3: Realise your power to choose

With awareness comes the power to choose. If you noticed fixed mindset commentary, you have the power to choose whether to continue with this mindset or to shift to a growth-oriented one. Mentally shift your perception of your ability and the difficulty in question to reflect a growth mindset. That is, respond to your fixed mindset commentary with growth mindset commentary. For example, “I am having difficulty with this task, but I can learn to master it with time and effort,” “Most successful people have experienced failures along the way” and “The harder I try, the more likely I will be to succeed.” In the fourth column of the registration form on page 4, list one or more thoughts that would characterize a growth mindset.

Step 4: Act in line with your growth mindset

What kind of actions would reflect a growth mindset in this situation? For instance, a growth mindset leads to actions like approaching challenges and obstacles with enthusiasm and curiosity, interpreting failures as learning opportunities, learning from setbacks and trying again, and receiving criticism with an open mind. List one or more actions that reflect a growth mindset in the last column of the registration form on page 4. See if you can take this/these action(s). Just as with learning to ride a bike, the more we practice acting in line with a growth mindset, the more natural it becomes.

Figure 1. Mindset log

Situation	My thoughts after setback or failure	Fixed or growth Mindset?	Thoughts of a growth mindset	Actions of a growth mindset
<i>E.g. I applied for a job and didn't get it.</i>	<i>I'm not good enough. I wasn't impressive enough.</i>	<i>Fixed.</i>	<i>I did my best, and I can learn from my mistakes.</i>	<i>Ask for feedback from interviewer, and use this to prepare for my next job interview.</i>