

# Employing “Growth Mindset” Concepts in Mentoring to Encourage Effort and Cultivate Perseverance

## Introduction

[The Growth Mindset Toolkit for Mentors](#) offers information, activities, materials, and learning tools to apply the principles of growth mindset to mentoring young adults. This invaluable resource was developed and piloted by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) together with Stanford University’s Project for Education Research that Scales (PERTS) Lab and City Year with the support of the Raikes Foundation.

## What is Growth Mindset?

The concept of “growth mindset” proposes that innate intelligence and talents are not fixed but can be developed with continued effort. Further, the acceptance of this premise increases a person’s capacity for improvement and life-long learning. This was first advanced by leading motivation researcher and Stanford University Professor of Psychology Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., and is now widely accepted among education and developmental experts.

## Why a Growth Mindset Matters for Youth

A growth (vs. a “fixed”) mindset improves grades and test performance, and its far-reaching positive effects extend beyond academics into personal, social and professional behaviors. With its over-arching focus on the process rather than the result, this life-changing approach can help young adults:

- Face challenges and recover from setbacks.
- Find learning opportunities in errors and failure.
- Take risks to reach beyond their obvious capabilities.
- Cope more effectively with conflict and negative experiences.

### MENTOR LESSON

[Take the Growth Mindset Test to examine your assumptions about abilities and intelligence.](#)

## Growth Mindset for Mentors

### Do You Have a “Growth” Mindset?

Embracing a growth mindset yourself is the first step toward delivering its benefits to your mentee. Using the lessons, exercises and strategies in this tool kit, you will soon start adjusting your own views regarding aptitude, learning, success, and failure. And you will begin to see how you can incorporate this concept into your mentee relationship.

- Test your own mindset.
- Is there room for improvement?
- Learn the basics of growth mindset and how mentors can encourage it.

## Model Your New Mindset for Your Mentee

A powerful way to orient youth toward a growth mindset is to emphasize its principles in your own life. Sharing your experience of adopting a growth mindset or your methods for handling other demanding tasks offers valuable examples.

- Discuss challenges you have overcome (learning a new skill, mastering a task), how you approached them, and how they led to improvement.
- Offer relevant personal narratives of applying a growth mindset.
- Reflect on some past accomplishments and on how you achieved them.

### MENTOR LESSON

[Use this Relationship Strategy Box exercise to reflect on how to build a stronger mentoring relationship.](#)

## Meet Your Mentee Halfway – Focus on Their Strong Points to Start

### MENTORING ACTIVITY

**Identify an area in which you and your mentee would each like to improve or a goal you would each like to achieve. Make a deal to work toward your goals together and share your progress.**

Build a rapport with your mentee by learning about their strengths and abilities. Then find ways to build on them and encourage additional effort toward improvement.

- Take a genuine interest in their activities and hobbies.
- Listen to their concerns about mistakes and setbacks.
- Help them analyze problems and sort out solutions.

## Use Growth Mindset Language

Encouragement and feedback are critical, and using the right language with your mentee makes a world of difference. You want to stress the value of mentees' efforts as they work toward their goals and motivate them to continuing trying even when success seems distant.

- Use the proper language for offering praise and encouragement.
- Praise the *process* rather than the *product*.
- Use the magic word "yet."

Youth commonly view goals as unattainable and defeat themselves with such statements as "I'm not good at math" or "I can't catch a fly ball." Adding the word "yet" to the end of such phrases puts them back in charge. It implies that something is achievable while acknowledging that there is still some work to do.

### MENTOR LESSONS

- [Improve your Growth Mindset vocabulary with this exercise.](#)
- [Find the right message for the right situation in this video.](#)

## Offer a Fresh Perspective on Failure

No one gets better at anything without struggling and making some mistakes. Your mentee should come to view the occasional failure as a stepping stone in the learning process, not as a sign that they will never improve. They should see obstacles as challenges to be met, not as disasters to be avoided. Casting these experiences in a positive light emphasizes the importance of problem-solving strategies and perseverance.

- Share some of your own missteps and what you learned from them.
- Analyze mistakes together to find the learning opportunities they hold.
- Honor what your mentee did *right* while getting something wrong.
- Encourage your mentee to ask for advice and support.

## Additional Mentor Resources & Activities

### Seven Common Growth Mindset Scenarios and Responses

This handout provides seven common scenarios that mentors might encounter when supporting a student around academics. It provides examples of responses that can promote a growth mindset and reframe negative thinking.

### Strategy Box

A strategy box is a simple tool that helps youth apply previously successful strategies to new challenges and problems. This can be particularly helpful when youth feel "stuck" or lacking in ability.

### Growth Mindset Lesson Plan

These activities can be used by mentors, teachers, youth workers, and others in group and one-on-one settings. The material is perfect for adults who are looking for ways to talk about growth mindset and convey the concepts in fun and easy-to-understand ways.

### Introduction to Growth Mindset – Graphic Organizer

This graphic organizer is a great way to introduce students to the growth mindset idea and includes a simple pre-lesson and post-lesson survey.

### MENTOR LESSON

[Explore strategies for reframing mistakes and embracing challenges in this video.](#)

### MENTORING ACTIVITY

[Love your mistakes! Take this test with your mentee to analyze a recent error and learn from it.](#)

### MENTORING ACTIVITY

Performers and athletes study their mistakes to improve their technique. Michael Jordan once lost a game-winning jump shot, so he spent hours that evening practicing them. Search with your mentee for other examples to use as inspiration.

## Conclusion

Adopting a growth mindset can help children and young adults in many ways during their early years and throughout their lives. When youth begin to understand that academic ability, social skills and general learning capacity are improvable, a whole array of choices becomes available to them. As a mentor, you have the opportunity to have a lasting positive impact by guiding your mentee with this widely respected and groundbreaking concept.