



# Strategies for talking with young children about growth mindsets



ECE resources

A mindset is a person's beliefs about their abilities and attributes. Researcher Carol Dweck has studied the attitudes people hold about their learning ability and has come up with a continuum which has a fixed mindset at one end and a growth mindset at the other. The mindset continuum does not deny differences in capability between people but is founded on the premise that people can increase their intelligence through the right learning strategies and effort.

People with a **fixed mindset** believe that their intelligence and ability are innate and fixed, and there's not much they can do to change it. In contrast, people with a **growth mindset** believe their abilities and intelligence can be developed and improved through perseverance, good strategies and support from others. A growth mindset is more useful for learning because it is positively linked to self-efficacy, help-seeking behaviour and the use of cognitive strategies. Everyone has a mixture of both fixed and growth mindsets, often with different mindsets in different learning areas. The key is to identify when fixed mindset thoughts and actions occur, and to consciously replace them with more growth-oriented thoughts and behaviours.

Here are some strategies that you can use to start introducing the notion of growth mindset to young children and supporting them to develop a growth mindset for themselves:

- Talk about how **problems and challenges are opportunities** to grow their brains, and that tackling challenges will help them to feel strong, happy and excited to learn new things. Create an environment in which everyone is on the look-out for problems and challenges. Brainstorm ideas and create a 'Challenge Board' of things students might practise.
- Talk about trying to **'bounce like a ball'** when they feel challenged, frustrated, or disappointed, instead of 'flopping like a beanbag'<sup>1</sup>. When they flop like a beanbag, that means they think they can't help themselves, and their brains don't grow. When they bounce like a ball, they try to think of some things to try to fix the problem, which grows their brains and gives them a good feeling.
- Use an **'ask three friends' strategy** – promote a range of help-seeking behaviours by encouraging children to help each other before asking for a teacher's assistance.
- **Remind children of other learning successes** they have had when they hit problems and had to think of ideas and try hard, and the feelings they get about that. Use language like 'Remember when you couldn't ... but now you can'.

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## References

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pawlina & Stanford (2011)

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