

Growth Mindset

During the course of this year you would have heard us refer to MindMatters and KidsMatter; mental health initiatives adopted by St Mary's College for secondary and primary schools that aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people. It is a framework that provides structure, guidance and support while enabling schools to build their own mental health strategy to suit their unique circumstances. Part of our health strategy involves the Growth Mindset.

In brief, our mindsets are formed by our assumptions about the social world in which we live, and we use them to interpret our experiences. They can be divided into two categories: a **Fixed Mindset** and a **Growth Mindset**.

A Fixed Mindset is, as the name suggests, a belief that you have little or no control over your traits, and that you are stuck with what you've got, whether it be clever, not clever, sporty, or shy. When one has fixed mindset, failure is interpreted as "I lack the ability to succeed. I should give up and try something I have the ability to do."

A Growth Mindset, on the other hand, is a belief that traits are malleable, that they can be controlled or changed, increased or decreased. When one has a growth mindset failure is interpreted as "I am using the wrong strategy to succeed. I need to put in more effort and try a new approach."

This is not about ignoring your child's accomplishments, or having them believe that nothing is ever good enough. It is about acknowledging the effort and work they have put into succeeding whilst sowing the encouraging seed "there is always room for improvement and the best is yet to come."

How can our children be encouraged to develop a Growth Mindset?

A large part of the solution lies in the language we (parents AND teachers) use in our everyday interactions with them.

- Look for opportunities to praise effort and progress. Change your language from. "I knew you'd get a good mark. You're so good at math's" to "You deserve this good result. I know how hard you studied."
- Help them to see a setback as an opportunity rather than a failure "OK, so that wasn't the outcome you were hoping for. What could you do differently for next time?"
- If their achievements seem to be coming with little effort: "Looks like you've got this skill down pat. How about we find you something a bit more challenging?"
- Talk about mistakes in a positive way. Ask "What mistake did you make today that taught you something?" Share your own mistakes and learning curves. Talk about what you've learned in the process.
- When you want to know about your child's day at school ask questions like "What did you learn today?" "What did you try hard at today?" Tell them what you've learned too.

- Teach your child that “Brains can grow stronger.” And that “Intelligence is not fixed.”
- Encourage your child to take on challenges, maybe even something just a bit too hard. Ask them what they have learned from the experience of trying. What can't they do YET? What do they need to practise doing so they can do it next time? Or the time after.

It's really hard to stand by and watch our children fail; to see them sad or upset. So hard in fact that we want to try to stop it from happening. Yet we must let this happen so that they can strengthen their growth mindset “muscles”, develop perseverance and belief in their abilities to work and to try harder.

Mindsets influence our goals, motivation, and achievement across many domains. Fortunately, they are not set in stone. Parents (and teachers) can all help children and adolescents see a setback as a learning opportunity rather than a sign that she or he is a failure. By helping our young people to develop growth mindsets, we can relieve their anxiety, set the stage for achievement, and help them enjoy the journey toward their goals. The earlier you start the better.

Log into <https://www.mindsetworks.com/> and watch University psychologist Dr Carol Dweck's brief Ted Talk on “The Power of Yet.” In fact we hope you will find the whole site very informative.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very safe and restful holiday break. We hope you get the chance to spend some quality time with your children: your greatest gift to them.

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References and further reading:

http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf_mindset_0316.pdf

<http://www.mindmatters.edu.au/about-mindmatters/what-is-mindmatters>

<https://www.mindsetworks.com/>