CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN
CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH

REFERENCES

Developing a growth mindset

This infosheet will help you understand what a growth mindset is, how it differs from a fixed mindset, and how you can foster a growth mindset in post-secondary that will support your learning and well-being.

Growth mindset, coined by Stanford professor Carol Dweck, is defined as "the ability to reframe perceived failures as opportunities to learn and grow."[1] In post-secondary, adopting a growth mindset is understanding that your abilities as a student can grow and improve over time.[2] A growth mindset views failure as a steppingstone to success where you are not discouraged by setbacks, but rather you are willing to learn from your mistakes, persevere, and try again. Individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to have better mental health, greater resilience, and report lower mental health and stress issues in comparison to individuals who do not exhibit a growth mindset.[3]

Having a growth mindset[1,4]:

- **Combats procrastination and imposter syndrome**
- **Improves self-efficacy**
- **Helps you embrace challenges**
- **Reduces feelings of negative emotions**
- **Fosters a resilient attitude**
- **Makes you more willing to try new strategies**

Growth versus fixed mindset

A fixed mindset is not to be confused with a growth mindset. Someone with a fixed mindset believes that their abilities, talent and intelligence are static and cannot grow.

For example, if you're struggling with the contents of your psychology course, someone with a fixed mindset may think "what's the point in studying for this test if I'm going to fail anyway", whereas someone with a growth mindset may think "it's always good to try, I can use this experience to learn."

These mindsets are not a binary concept, but rather a continuum. Research has become more nuanced over the years, and we now understand that the type of mindset you're in can fluctuate depending on situational context and personal triggers.[5] To better understand the differences between the two mindsets, take a look at the chart below.[1,6]

	GROWTH MINDSET	FIXED MINDSET
CHALLENGES	Embraces challenges, believes they are worth the effort	Avoids challenges as intelligence and ability can't be improved
EFFORT	Effort is seen as the path to improvement – intelligence and talent can be grown	Effort is seen as fruitless - you can learn, but you cannot change
CRITICISM	Learns from criticism and improves from both positive and negative feedback	Criticism weighs you into inaction, and you let it define you
SUCCESS OF OTHERS	The success of others is inspiring	The success of others is threatening
OBSTACLES	In the face of setbacks, you persist	Tasks that seem too difficult are okay to give up on

How to practice a growth mindset

Use the word "yet"[1]

Changing your language to include the word 'yet' transforms a sentence from limiting to opportunity; it reminds your brain that learning is a process. For example, "I don't know how to solve this math problem" can be changed to "I don't know how to solve this math problem yet", which adds meaning to the sentence stating that this is a challenge you can overcome with practice and growth.

Build your emotional intelligence skills

Being able to understand the emotions you're feeling and how to manage them is a crucial skill when it comes to developing a growth mindset. For more information, check out our emotional intelligence infosheet here.

Learn to value effort[1]

Being a student in post-secondary can be challenging. Your schedule may be denser, your classes may be hard, and you may not always get everything right. That's okay. Instead of being self-critical in how you adapt to post-secondary life, try reframing these challenges as opportunities for personal learning and growth. Value the effort you are putting in. Focus on the journey over destination, knowing that it will serve as opportunities for growth and learning.

Acknowledge that we have a mixed mindset

Humans have a mixed mindset, meaning that we can fluctuate between the two mindsets. Sometimes we exhibit a growth mindset, and sometimes we exhibit a fixed mindset. An important step towards developing a growth mindset is simply acknowledging that we may sometimes have a fixed mindset for certain situations, and that's okay.