

Family Mindset Activities

What Is a Growth Mindset?

Having a “growth mindset” means understanding that learning requires a lot of **practice**. Sometimes we make mistakes, and then we try again. We *practice* to become good at things. For example, we don’t expect to shoot a basketball into a hoop on the first try. Instead, we learn this skill over time.

When children struggle with tasks, they can feel discouraged. They may say things like, “I can’t do it,” or “I don’t like doing this,” or “This is too hard!” They might show anger or sadness. Building a growth mindset means knowing that making mistakes and struggling to understand are a part of learning.

Here are some ways to help your child build a **growth mindset**:

- Use everyday moments to **build self-confidence** in your child. If you notice them doing something well, tell them. Be specific. Praise your child’s effort and hard work.
- Talk with your child about **something they have learned to do**, such as running. Remind them that they had to learn to crawl, then walk, then walk faster, and then run. Talk about how much time it took to learn to run. Learning takes time.
- If your child is frustrated, encourage them to **try again**. Remind them that we seldom learn how to do something on the first try.
- Encourage practice. If your child says they can’t do something, remind them to **use the word “yet.”** For example, your child might say, “I don’t know how to tie my shoe.” Instead, teach them to say, “I don’t know how to tie my shoe YET, but I will learn!”
- Help your child **learn ways to calm down**. Model the things you do to calm down. For example, if you are stuck in traffic you might say “I’m feeling frustrated by this traffic.” Then take a few deep breaths or turn on some soft music to show your child how you calm down.
- Encourage your child to **think about their emotions** and tell you how they feel. Ask, “How are you feeling?” and “Why do you think you feel this way?” This will help build self-awareness and communication skills.
- As often as possible, allow your child to **make choices**. This can be as simple as choosing what shirt to wear or choosing which of two tasks to do first. Give your child plenty of practice with making small decisions. This will build your child’s skills for making bigger decisions as they grow older.
- Look for characters that are **good models for communication and teamwork** in books, movies, or TV shows. Look for people in your community who are good models for these skills. Point out these examples to your child. Talk about positive communication and teamwork as important parts of strong relationships.

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Activities and Practices Ideas

ONCE UPON A TIME

Tell your child a story about something you learned to do with practice. Begin with “once upon a time...” For example, “Once upon a time, when I was your age, I did not know how to ride a bike...” Describe the steps you took along the way to achieve your goal.

MIRROR, MIRROR

To build your child's understanding of emotions, play this game: Look into a mirror with your child. Make a facial expression (happy, surprised, mad, nervous, confused, excited...) and ask your child to match your expression. Name the emotion, and talk about how that emotion feels.

TEAMWORK TALK

Do something together such as cooking, cleaning up, or building a puzzle. Talk about the importance of teamwork while you work together. After you are finished, talk about the tasks each of you did to help get to the goal.

FIND A WAY

Give your child two or three towels of various sizes. Ask your child, “How can you use these towels to make it across the room without touching the floor?”

Give your child time to figure out that the solution is to lay down a towel and stand on it. Then they can pick up a towel they aren't standing on, place it in front of them, and step on it. By repeating these steps they can reach the other side of the room. This is a fun way to encourage problem-solving. Beware of slippery floors! A room with carpet works best.

I CAN

Talk with your child about a goal they are working on such as being able to write their name. On a piece of paper, write the goal using an “I can” statement. For example, “I can write my name.” Each time your child practices and moves closer to their goal, add a sticker or draw a star under the “I can” statement. Remind them of their progress every day, and congratulate them on their hard work!

CHEETAH, HORSE, AND TURTLE

Have fun practicing self-management skills by playing a game of cheetah, horse, and turtle. Explain that a cheetah is very fast, a horse gallops, and a turtle moves slowly. Call out one of the animals and move like that animal. Keep changing animals, making the changes faster and faster. When you are done, talk about how we can all control our movements.

THANKFUL THINKING

Take time each day to practice gratitude with your child. For example, at bedtime tell your child what you are thankful for. Ask your child to share what they are thankful for. Try to think of new things each night. Even on rough days, we can find something to be thankful for. Expressing gratitude helps your child learn to look for the good.