

## WHS Parent Night: Motivating Teenagers

### Growth Mindset: What Does It Mean For Me?

It's one thing to have pundits spouting their opinions about scientific issues. It's another thing to understand how these views apply to you. For twenty years, my research has shown that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life. It can determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you commit to and accomplish the things you value. How does this happen? How can a simple belief have the power to transform your psychology and, as a result, your life?

Believing that your qualities are carved in stone—the **fixed mindset**—creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character, well then you'd better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn't do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristics...I've seen so many people with this one consuming goal of proving themselves—in the classroom, in their careers, and in their relationships. Every situation calls for a confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character. Every situation is evaluated: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be accepted or rejected? Will I feel like a winner or a loser? But doesn't our society value intelligence, personality and character? Isn't it normal to want these traits? Yes, but...

There's another mindset in which these traits are not simply a hand you're dealt and have to live with, always trying to convince yourself and others that you have a royal flush when you're secretly worried it's a pair of tens. In this mindset, the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development. This **growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts**. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

Do people with this mindset believe that anyone can be anything, that anyone with proper motivation or education can become Einstein or Beethoven? No, but they believe that a person's true potential is unknown (and unknowable), that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil, and training.

Did you know that Darwin and Tolstoy were considered ordinary children? That Ben Hogan, one of the greatest golfers of all time, was completely uncoordinated and graceless as a child? That the photographer Cindy Sherman, who has been on virtually every list of the most important artists of the 20th century, failed her first photography course? That Geraldine Page, one of our greatest actresses, was advised to give it up for lack of talent?

You can see how the **belief that cherished qualities can be developed creates a passion for learning**. Why waste time proving over and over how great you are, when you could be getting better? Why hide deficiencies instead of overcoming them? Why look for friends or partners who will just shore up your self-esteem instead of ones who will also challenge you to grow? And why seek out the tried and true, instead of experiences that will stretch you? **The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset.** This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives.

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***What is Talent—and How Important Is It? What Lies Behind Great Achievement? What Stops People From Pursuing Their Dreams? How To Boost Achievement (and Fulfillment) Through Mindset***

Benjamin Barber, an eminent sociologist, once said, “I don’t divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures... I divide the world into the learners and nonlearners.”

What on earth would make someone a nonlearner? Everyone is born with an intense drive to learn. Infants stretch their skills daily. Not just ordinary skills, but the most difficult tasks of a lifetime, like learning to walk and talk. They never decide it’s too hard or not worth the effort. Babies don’t worry about making mistakes or humiliating themselves. They walk, they fall, they get up. They just barge forward. **What could put an end to this exuberant learning? The fixed mindset...**

In the fixed mindset it’s not enough just to succeed. It’s not enough just to look smart and talented. You have to be pretty much flawless. And you have to be flawless right away... After all, if you have it you have it, and if you don’t you don’t...

This desire to think of yourself as perfect is often called CEO disease. In Mindset, I explore several CEO who had bad, even fatal, cases of this disease.

Beyond how traumatic a setback can be in the fixed mindset, this mindset gives you no good recipe for overcoming it. If failure means you lack competence or potential—that you are a failure – where do you go from there? Are you like Bernard Loiseau or Jim Marshall? Both of them had big setbacks, but only one of them survived. In Mindset, you’ll find out why.

### **The Truth About Ability and Achievement**

Try to picture Thomas Edison as vividly as you can. Think about where he is and what he’s doing. Is he alone? I asked people and they always said things like this:

*“He’s in New Jersey. He’s standing in a white coat in a lab-type room. He’s leaning over a light bulb. Suddenly, it works! [Is he alone?] Yes. He’s kind of a reclusive guy who likes to tinker on his own.”*

In truth, the record shows quite a different fellow, working in quite a different way. Edison was not a loner. For the invention of the light bulb, he had 30 assistants, including well-trained scientists, often working around the clock in a corporate funded state-of-the-art laboratory! It did not happen suddenly. The light bulb has become the symbol for that single moment when the brilliant solution strikes, but there was no single moment of invention. In fact, the light bulb was not one invention, but a whole network of time-consuming inventions each requiring one or more chemists, mathematicians, physicists, engineers, and glass blowers.

Yes, Edison was a genius. But he was not always one. His biographer, Paul Israel, sifting through all the available information, thinks he was more or less a regular boy of his time and place. ...What eventually set him apart was his mindset and drive... There are many myths about ability and achievement, especially about the lone, brilliant person suddenly producing amazing things. Chapter 3 of *Mindset* dispels those myths.

### **Parents, Teachers & Coaches**

*Mary Kaye Siebert, Director of Instruction for USD 320*

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*How Praise Can Harm, and How To Use it Well. When, What, and How to Criticize. Why Bright Children (and Talented Athletes) Stop Working and What To Do About It. How To Communicate The Values That Bring Success.*

No parent thinks “I wonder what I can do today to undermine my children, subvert their effort, turn them off learning, and limit their achievement.” Of course not. They think “I would do anything, give anything, to make my children successful.” Yet many of the things they do boomerang. Their helpful judgments, their lessons, their motivating techniques often send the wrong message.

**In fact, every word and action sends a message. It tells children – or students or athletes – how to think about themselves.** It can be a **fixed mindset** message that says: “You have permanent traits and I’m judging them.” Or it can be a **growth mindset** message that says: “You are a developing person and I am interested in your development”...

### **Messages About Success**

Listen for the messages in the following examples:

“You learned that so quickly! You’re so smart!”  
“Look at that drawing. Martha, is he the next Picasso or what?”  
“You’re so brilliant, you got an A without even studying!”

If you’re like most parents, you hear these as supportive, esteem-boosting messages. But listen more closely. See if you can hear another message. It’s the ones that children hear:

“If I don’t learn something quickly, I’m not smart.”  
“I shouldn’t try drawing anything hard or they’ll see I’m no Picasso.”  
“I’d better quit studying or they won’t think I’m brilliant.”

### **Messages About Failure**

Nine-year-old Elizabeth was on her way to her first gymnastics meet. Lanky, flexible, and energetic, she was just right for gymnastics, and she loved it. Of course, she was a little nervous about competing, but she was good at gymnastics and felt confident of doing well. She had even thought about the perfect place in her room to hang the ribbon she would win.

In the first event, the floor exercises, Elizabeth went first. Although she did a nice job, the scoring changed after the first few girls and she lost. Elizabeth also did well in the other events, but not well enough to win. By the end of the evening, she had received no ribbons and was devastated.

What would you do if you were Elizabeth’s parents?

1. Tell Elizabeth you thought she was the best.
2. Tell her she was robbed of a ribbon that was rightfully hers.
3. Reassure her that gymnastics is not that important
4. Tell her she has the ability and will surely win next time.
5. Tell her she didn’t deserve to win.

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There is a strong message in our society about how to boost children's self-esteem, and a main part of that message is: Protect them from failure! While this may help with the immediate problem of a child's disappointment, it can be harmful in the long run. Why?

Let's look at the five possible reactions from a mindset point of view [and listen to the messages:]

- The first (you thought she was the best) is basically insincere. She was not the best – you know it, and she does too. This offers her no recipe for how to recover or how to improve.
- The second (she was robbed) places blame on others, when in fact the problem was mostly with her performance, not the judges. Do you want her to grow up blaming others for her deficiencies?
- The third (reassure her that gymnastics doesn't really matter) teaches her to devalue something if she doesn't do well in it right away. Is this really the message you want to send?
- The fourth (she has the ability) may be the most dangerous message of all. Does ability automatically take you where you want to go? If Elizabeth didn't win this meet, why should she win the next one?
- The last option (tell her she didn't deserve to win) seems hardhearted under the circumstances. And of course you wouldn't say it quite that way. But that's pretty much what her growth-minded father told her. Chapter 7 tells you what he told her and what happened.

**KEY POINT:** You can use messages to help your teenager cultivate a growth mindset!



How can one belief make such a difference?

Mindset is a simple idea discovered by world-renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck in decades of research on achievement and success—a simple idea that makes all the difference. Teaching a growth mindset creates motivation and productivity in the worlds of business, education, and sports.

Buy Mindset

**MINDSET** by Carol Dweck

<http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/index.html>

(This is a very good website to test your own beliefs about intelligence as well as find other resources for parents, teachers and coaches on motivating others by strengthening a GROWTH mindset!)

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