

September 2020 | Samantha Houston-Crook Registered Associate MFT & Registered Associate PCC | BCM Clinician

# TEACHING YOUR TEENS THE GROWTH MINDSET

I WAS BORN  
TO MAKE ~~THE~~ ✓  
MISTAKES,  
NOT TO FAKE  
PERFECTION.

**DRAKE, SINGER-SONGWRITER**

BIG LIFE JOURNAL - BIGLIFEJOURNAL.COM

## WHAT IS GROWTH MINDSET

We all have beliefs about our own abilities and potential. These beliefs are part of our mindset which is so powerful it can fuel our behavior and predict our success. Mindset shapes our everyday lives, helping us interpret our experiences and future possibilities.

In her research at Stanford University, Dr. Carol Dweck identified two different types of mindsets. **Growth Mindset** occurs when we believe our intelligence and abilities can be improved upon with effort and the right strategies.

A willingness to confront challenges, a passion for learning, and viewing failure as a springboard for growth are all characteristics associated with a **growth mindset**. Not surprisingly, this type of mindset is strongly linked to greater happiness and achievement in life.

In contrast, those with a **Fixed Mindset** believe their intelligence and abilities cannot be altered in a meaningful way. As a result, mistakes are often seen as failures rather than opportunities to grow and learn. When stuck in a fixed mindset, we may fear new experiences, avoid risks, and feel the need to repeatedly prove ourselves to others.

### **Discussion Questions to have with your teens:**

1. What does it mean to Grow?
2. What do you think Mindset means?
3. What does it mean to have a **Fixed Mindset**?

## THE TEENAGE BRAIN

During the teen years, a child's brain goes through "remodeling", or a process that helps them build a stronger more effective brain that will help them develop into an independent adult.

This remodeling includes periods of extreme emotional responses, risk-taking behavior, boundary-pushing, and a lack of consistent impulse control. When they were younger, they soaked up facts and thought in concrete ways. Now, teens are able to see things in a more abstract way. They are able to be more creative with their problem solving and think critically about themselves and others. This means that your teenager may be more idealistic and opinionated about the "old ways" of doing things.

It's normal for parents to feel threatened, concerned and confused when faced with the emotional rollercoaster of the teen years. But teens often feel overwhelmed by these dramatic brain changes, too. As parents and teens learn to navigate this "remodeling" stage, helpful comments are interpreted as criticism, suggestions turn into lengthy lectures, and differences of opinions quickly become **power struggles**. It's often hard to know how to motivate your teen.

### Growth Mindset

- your teen can improve their results ("Meeting with my algebra tutor helped me understand the last unit")
- develop talents ("I enjoy signing and I can get better with practice")
- grow their skills ("Practicing daily will improve my serve").

### Fixed Mindset

- "I will not be good at math"
- "I will never be on the tennis team"

### Resources:

- [BigLifeJournal.com](http://BigLifeJournal.com)
- "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol Dweck
- A [TED Talk](#) by Carol Dweck "The power of believing that you can improve"

# 8

## HELPFUL TIPS FOR TEACHING TEENS

### GROWTH MINDSET

#### 1 SHARE FACTS ABOUT THE BRAIN

- Encourage them to learn about the parts of the brain, how feelings are expressed, and new information is processed.
- Let them explore words like "neuroplasticity".
- Reinforce that their brain has the ability to learn new skills - and improve old ones - throughout their entire lifetime.



#### 2 THIS IS AN ONGOING CONVERSATION

- Encourage teens to look for examples of growth mindset in everyday experiences (someone on TV, in the news, or at school).
- Share ways you are growing and learning even as an adult.
- Share the Famous Failures Kit with them (available on [biglifejournal.com](http://biglifejournal.com)). Read the stories together as a family and share things you know about these people.



#### 3 GOALS ARE GOOD, PRESSURE ISN'T

- Focus on the process of goal-setting rather than the goals themselves.
- Use creative options such as bucket lists or vision boards - either as a family or individually.
- In the Big Life Journal - Teen Edition, there are a lot of fun goal-setting exercises your teen can do on their own.



#### 4 MAKE SPACE FOR FAILURE

- Rather than trying to make the path smooth for your teens or keeping them perpetually happy, focus on your role as support, or staying close at hand.
- Carol Dweck recommends "addressing the setback head-on and talking to your children about the next steps for learning."



#### 5 WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS TOGETHER

- Rather than telling your child to "ask the teacher for extra credit," when they do poorly on a test, walk through what happened and explore problem-solving options with your teen.
- See what they're comfortable with rather than dictating their next move.



#### 6 ADDRESS LACKING SKILLS

- Problem-solving together may highlight areas where your teen needs additional help.
- Some teens are impacted by mental health concerns, such as anxiety or depression. Seek outside support for your teenager as needed.



#### 7 LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK

- Ask your teen for suggestions, solutions, advice, and thoughts.
- Empathize with their perspective, rather than jumping to a solution, criticizing or judging.
- Reiterate you are willing and available when they need a listening ear.



#### 8 WATCH YOUR REACTIONS

- Encouraging your kids to adopt a flexible growth mindset might require you to work on your own mindset, too.
- If you overreact to small infractions or mistakes, your child may be cautious about pursuing goals or may shy away from sharing challenges with you.
- It's OK to struggle with growth mindset. Let your teen know you will be working on it together!

