



Inspir^{ED}



HSC Parent Guide

FOSTERING A GROWTH MINDSET

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that Year 12 will be one of the most difficult periods of your child's schooling life. Not only is this a stressful time for our sons and daughters, but parents also tend to ride a roller coaster of emotions during this time.

While we can't sit their tasks/exams for them, there are things that we can do to reduce their pressures and help them achieve their best.

The good news is that as a parent - you matter! All of the research and our experience into student performance points to the fact that parents play a critical role and impact in your child's results (no matter your own level of education).

This guide will outline strategies and practical suggestions on how to foster a positive growth mindset. It will also include practical suggestions that have been tested and endorsed by psychologists, counsellors, teachers and parents alike.

WHO WE ARE

For students preparing for the HSC, InspirED delivers high quality and engaging face-to-face and online education services led by senior teachers and HSC markers, in partnership with leading universities.

As well as helping students increase their results, InspirED is committed to supporting students to reach their full potential through the development of well-rounded skills for success in study and life.

Over the last 15 years, we've helped over 15,000 students from over 400 schools achieve their potential.



WHAT IS A GROWTH MINDSET?

Fostering a Growth Mindset

Perhaps the most exciting news in education over the last decade is the discovery of brain plasticity. That is, the brain is always growing and developing!

Whether a student holds a fixed mindset or growth mindset significantly impacts their learning experience across all years, including the HSC.

Students that hold a fixed mindset give up when they can't solve a problem and admit defeat. This can be detrimental to students' future efforts and leads to limited student growth.

With a growth mindset, students continually work to improve their skills, leading to greater growth and ultimately, success. The key is to get students to tune into that growth mindset.

Let's explore the concept of a Growth Mindset further, particularly in relation to how we, as parents can apply these concepts.

Fixed Mindset:

"In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort."

Growth Mindset:

"In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work — brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment."





PARENTING A GROWTH MINDSET

It's exciting to know that your child's talent and smarts are not fixed. Their brains can always learn more, continue to grow and be stretched.

This doesn't mean that your child doesn't have a propensity to be smart in certain areas such as maths or that all talent is created equal. Genetics gifts us with certain abilities that are either developed or they're not. Instead, your child's abilities and talents, (just like yours) continue to evolve over time.

So as parent it seems smart to develop a growth mindset in your child. A fixed mindset is limiting, even debilitating for kids. You want them to understand that with effort and practice they can develop their skills and abilities in whatever area or interest they want.

Their brains will continue to grow and stretch. However, a fixed mindset will let them down. Put simply, if they believe that intelligence and talent is fixed, then those beliefs will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It all comes down to attitude!

Success has more to do with fluid intelligence, tenacity and belief. Our attitude or mindset is not something we are born with. It evolves gradually, refined by our experiences and who we spend our time with.

A growth mindset is the quality that separates those who succeed from those who don't. We need to understand that the use of language when praising kids can have a profound impact on their attitudes.

So how can a parent develop a growth mindset in their children, particularly at the pointy end of their education: the HSC? It comes down to language and a few other strategies as well. Here are three simple ideas to get you started:



THREE STRATEGIES

1. Praise effort, not results

Focus more on the processes of what kids do rather than results to develop a growth mindset. Kids need to hear comments such as “You worked hard to get that right!”(effort), “That was a smart idea to tackle the hardest task while you were fresh!”(strategy) and “You recognised the first few steps were the most important but then after that you were right.”(action).

This type of praise, also known as encouragement, helps kids develop the belief that success has more to do with what they do than innate smarts and talents.

The problem with praising intelligence and ability is that it leads to fixed mindset development. Kids believe that their success is reliant on their ability or talent, rather than their effort or attitude. So, to be respected and recognised as successful they become risk adverse. Far better to achieve some success no matter how meagre, than risk failure and being seen as dumb, stupid or a failure.

2. Give honest feedback

Providing your child with honest feedback about their performance not only helps them improve, but also promotes a growth mindset. We often shy away from giving feedback for fear of harming their self-esteem. Confidence can be maintained by being sensitive to how we provide feedback. For instance, focusing on two or three things your son/daughter is doing well before giving constructive feedback is one way you can keep their head up while giving pointers about better performance.

Having a plastic brain means that we can continue to acquire new skills, learn new things and embed new habits across our lifespan. It is important then that we help children develop a growth mindset so that they can reap the benefits of brain plasticity over their lifetime rather be limited by their belief systems

3. Model your own behaviour

You can do something incredibly useful that only a parent can do. You can model an attitude of consistent improvement and growth.

You can show your teen that persistence and struggle is a normal part of life, and it's certainly a normal part of studying. No one gets good grades without struggle along the way. Results come from hard work, determination, and perseverance.

Every student wants to improve their grades, and while we can dish out all our advice about motivation, organisation and studying effectively — ultimately — your teen's academic success boils down to how much work they're willing to put in.

It could be argued that perhaps some teens don't know what it is to grit their teeth and work hard at something that they're not going to enjoy all the time. They don't yet understand the enormous rewards that come with delayed gratification.

In realistic terms, nobody will be able to force your teen to sit down at their desk and study, but as their parent, YOU can be a model for the hard working and determined behaviour. They need to see that putting in the effort with their study now will pay off for them down the track.



The heart of success is not talent; it's effort over time that produces accomplishments.



LANGUAGE TO USE

WHEN THEY STRUGGLE DESPITE STRONG EFFORT

- OK, so you didn't do as well as you wanted to. Let's look at this as an opportunity to learn.
- What did you do to prepare for this? Is there anything you could do to prepare differently next time?
- You are not there/here yet.
- When you think you can't do it, remind yourself that you can't do it yet.
- I expect you to make some mistakes. It is the kinds of mistakes that you make along the way that will guide you.
- You might be struggling, but you are making progress. I can see your growth (in these places).
- Look at how much progress you made on this. Do you remember how much more challenging this was (yesterday/last week/last year)?
- Absolutely it's tough – school is here to make our brains stronger!
- You can do it – it's tough, but you can; let's break it down into steps.
- Let's stop here and return tomorrow with a fresher brain.
- I admire your persistence and I appreciate your hard work. It will pay off.

WHEN THEY STRUGGLE AND NEED HELP WITH STRATEGIES

- Let's think about how to improve (the accuracy of) this section/paragraph/sentence/word choice/logic/description/problem/calculation.
- Let's find some new information to help you solve this.
- Here are some strategies to figure this out...
- Describe your process for completing this task.
- Let's do one together, out loud.
- Let's practice (skill) so we can move it from our short-term to our long-term memory.
- Just try – we can always fix mistakes once I see where you are getting held up.
- Let me explain in another way with different words.
- What parts were difficult for you?
- Let's look at them. Let's ask ____ for advice – she/he may be able to explain/suggest some ideas/recommend some strategies.
- Let's write a plan for practicing and/or learning.

WHEN THEY ARE MAKING PROGRESS

- Hey that's a tough problem/task/concept that you've been working on for a while. What strategies are you using?
- I can see a difference in this work compared to _____. You have really grown (in these areas).
- I see you using your strategies/tools/notes/etc. Keep it up!
- You were working on this for a while and you didn't quit! Kudos!
- Your hard work is clearly evident in your process/project/essay/assignment.

WHEN THEY SUCCEED WITH STRONG EFFORT

- I am so proud of the effort you put forth to/in/with _____.
- I am very proud of you for not giving up, and look what you have to show for it!
- Congratulations – you really used great strategies for studying, managing your _____.
- I want you to remember for a moment how challenging this was when you began.
- Look at how far you have come!
- All that hard work and effort paid off!
- The next time you have a challenge like this, what will you do?
- What choices did you make that you think contributed to your success?
- It's exciting to see the difference in your work now when I compare it to your earlier work.

WHEN THEY SUCCEED EASILY WITHOUT EFFORT

- It's great that you have that down. Now we need to find something a bit more challenging so you can grow.
- I don't want you to be bored because you're not challenging yourself.
- We need to raise the bar for you now.
- You're ready for something more difficult.
- What skill would you like to work on next?
- What topic would you like to learn more about next?

SUMMARY

Our skills and talents aren't necessarily fixed - the brain is always growing and developing!

With a growth mindset, students can continually work to improve their skills. As parents, one of the best things we can do to support our students is to encourage a growth mindset.

The three best strategies to help promote a growth mindset in our children are to:

- Praise effort students put into a task, not their results
- Give honest, constructive feedback on a students' work to give them room to grow
- Model a growth mindset in your own behaviour

In encouraging our children, another great tool to encourage growth is our language. When discussing their work, make comments such as:

- 'I'm so proud of the effort you put into that project.'
- 'Let's look at this as a way to learn.'
- 'Look at how far you've come!'

Further reading:

- Carol Dweck 2014: *The power of believing you can improve*, TED Talk, available at <http://bit.ly/CarolDweckGrowth>
- Carol Dweck 2015: *Carol Dweck Revisits the 'Growth Mindset'*, Education Week, available at <http://bit.ly/CarolDweckGrowth2>
- Sarah Sparks 2019: *National Study Bolsters Case for Teaching 'Growth Mindset'*, Education Week, available at <http://bit.ly/SarahSparksGrowth>



CHECKLIST

Here, you can write down the strategies you think will *work best for you* in supporting a growth mindset. Then, you can come back later to see how you're going with introducing them into your parenting.

WHAT IS A GROWTH MINDSET?

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN I USE TO ENCOURAGE A GROWTH MINDSET?

WHAT LANGUAGE CAN I USE TO PROMOTE A GROWTH MINDSET?



WE CAN HELP YOU REACH YOUR POTENTIAL

HSC LIVE

Face-to-face study events
presented by expert
teachers and markers

HSC 
CONNECT

Online small-group
tutoring for HSC
students

HSC 4 Me

An all-in-one study app
proven to boost your
results

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