

### Lesson Name:

Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset

### Student Objectives:

- Students will define growth mindset and fixed mindset.
- Students will consider the benefits of a growth mindset.
- Students will determine areas of life in which a fixed mindset holds them back.
- Students will begin to shift these fixed mindsets to a growth mindset.

### Educator Preparation:

- Familiarize yourself with the lesson information about growth mindset and fixed mindset.
- Consider areas of your life that you have a fixed mindset and be prepared to share one that you'd like to work on shifting to a growth mindset to move forward in your life, personally or professionally.

### Introduction:

Hello! My name is Dr. Kristie Hofelich Ennis, and I am bringing you this Happiness Lab lesson from Louisville, KY. Today, I will share with you the concept of growth and fixed mindsets, model for you the process of identifying your own fixed mindsets, and encourage you to take steps toward a growth mindset in your own life.

### Instruction:

Dr. Robert Puff, clinical psychologist and author, tells us that, "If we have a growth mindset, our whole universe can change" (2017). In education, it seems like there are all kinds of initiatives or popular words and phrases that teachers and administrators latch on to, for better or worse. One that you might have heard before is *growth mindset*. This term is

generally opposed to *fixed mindset*. The singer and actress Demi Lovato calls her fixed mindset the “roommates” that reside in her brain that argue and get in her way when she’s trying to move forward in life. While this is a metaphor, it is easy to make the comparison; we must live with these thoughts because they are natural, but that doesn’t mean we have to let them direct or control our lives in negative ways.

When a person has a fixed mindset, they are determined to stick to this thinking process and unwilling to entertain outside perspectives on it. In a fixed mindset, a person may feel trapped or helpless to change due to outside influences or circumstances. It is a deficit approach in which a person thinks more about what she doesn’t have or can’t do instead of what can happen or might change for the better with some work. This person generally thinks that they are born with certain abilities (or not) and that will not change with effort.

In a growth mindset, however, a person shifts their thinking to consider the possibility that circumstances and outside influences are only part of our realities. A person with this growth mindset believes that they can learn from mistakes or perceived failures and take steps to move forward in every situation. Simply, a growth mindset is an approach to thinking focused on how far you’ve come, where you want to go, and taking steps to get there instead of wallowing in the missteps that inevitably occur on this journey to living one’s best life.

### Interaction:

Let’s look at an example together from Dr. Puff’s article, “Growth Mindset v. Fixed Mindset.” In this article, there are three scenarios given of students with various mindsets and circumstances in their lives as they make their way through high school and into college and adulthood. Consider if any of these sounds like you:

- One student comes from a challenging family background and is regularly told that he is not smart so should seek out a blue-collar job that doesn’t require a college education. Even though this student shows promise in math classes, he has learned the fixed mindset that he is not very smart and ends up doing poorly in school overall as a result. He is *convinced* that he won’t achieve because that’s what people, including his parents, have told him throughout his life. Does this sound like you?
- One student comes from a loving and supportive family background in which she is consistently told that she is brilliant and capable of doing whatever she wants to do. In this way, she believes this about herself in life and in academics. As the student begins

to encounter challenging classwork in college, however, and does not perform well, she begins to blame others, such as teachers or the producers of the work rather than owning her own areas of growth and making small improvements to achieve better results. She has a fixed mindset as well. Does this sound like you?

- One student is raised by parents who remind her often that if she works hard, she can do well at whatever she sets her mind to. They don't constantly praise her for being "smart" or "athletic", but they do recognize her effort and model hard work themselves. As a result, when this student encounters setbacks or hardships, she sees them as growth opportunities and she tries harder or works in a different way to learn from the experiences and move forward. This student operates with a growth mindset. Does this sound like you?

Maybe you find yourself a combination of these students. In any case, it may seem that you can't change what your parents, family, or other adults have done to raise you and that is partially true. What's done is done. That doesn't mean that you cannot recognize what's done and see a positive and different future for yourself that is not focused on the end result as much as the process in getting there.

### Closure:

You have control over your thoughts everyday, even though you don't have control over many things, such as your parents, siblings, or peers. Take this chance to examine your own fixed mindset patterns with the following activity so you can start making changes to your thought processes now to positively affect your life moving forward.

### Activity:

Follow these steps to begin your own journey toward growth mindset:

1. On [this digital document](#), first list the labels that you feel apply to you that either others have designated you or you've given yourself.
  - a. For example, I have been labeled an "overachiever" or a "brown noser" many times in my life by others.
2. Then, in the left column, record a few things in your life that seem fixed, things that you feel like you cannot change or weren't your fault.

- a. For example, my mother is a recovering addict and she is currently homeless. This has affected me greatly and continues to stress me out. I tend to say, “that’s not my fault” or “she made her own choices.”
3. Next, for each of your fixed mindsets, consider one way that you *could* look at this differently in a more positive way.
  - a. For example, in response to my mom’s homelessness and addiction, it is true that I can’t change either of them as they are rooted in past actions of someone else (my mother). I *can*, however, help research programs and facilities that may help her help herself by searching on the internet, asking professionals in the field via email or phone call, and offer the information I find to my mom. This will help me stop feeling helpless without unduly stressing me out.
  - b. Feel free to consult the internet, adults, or peers as you consider these positive growth mindsets; this may be difficult to do on your own.
  - c. Check out the Additional Resources for more examples.
4. Finally, select **one** of the fixed mindsets that you’d like to work toward shifting and highlight it. Record three ways you’d like to try doing that. Write the fixed and growth on a piece of paper with the steps (or print the document) and stick it to the bathroom mirror, on the fridge, in a notebook you use everyday, or somewhere prominent that you see every day as you perform routine aspects of your life, such as brushing your teeth or fixing your hair.

Return to it each day when you do this routine life thing and remind yourself of your plan. When you take a step that’s on your list, check it off. When you’ve come to the end of your time frame, decide if you’d like to move on to another fixed mindset on your list or reformulate your plan until all the steps are checked off. **Remember: it is a process to change this because it was a process to get into a fixed mindset in the first place! Give yourself some grace and continue working at it. Each little step is positive progress.**

### Resources:

- Dr. Robert Puff’s article, [“Growth Mindset v. Fixed Mindset”](#) (*Psychology Today*)
- [Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset](#)
- Graphic:

