Growth Mindset

Goals and Motivation: Activities for Learning From Setbacks

A growth mindset is the belief that your skills and abilities can grow with effort, good strategies, and help from others. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck named the idea after years of studying how people respond to challenges and mistakes. With a fixed mindset, a mistake can feel like proof that you are not good enough. With a growth mindset, a mistake shows you what to work on next. Everyone has a mix of both, and these activities help you notice which one is talking.

1 Fixed and growth thoughts

Read the examples. Then write a few fixed thoughts you have had lately and turn each one into a growth thought.

Fixed mindset thought	Growth mindset thought
I'm just not a math person.	*Math is hard for me right now. I can get better with practice and a different way of learning it.*
She is so much better at this than I am.	*What is she doing that I could learn from?*
If I need help, it means I'm not smart.	*Asking for help is one of the ways people learn.*

Why does this work? *People who see their abilities as fixed tend to avoid challenges and give up sooner, because struggling feels like a sign they lack talent. When you see struggle as part of learning, you are more likely to keep going and to try a new approach. In a large study of US ninth graders, a short online lesson on this idea raised grades a little for students who had been struggling.*

2 Add the word yet

Adding "yet" to the end of a sentence turns a dead end into a work in progress. Write something you tell yourself you can't do, add "yet," and then name one small step that would move you forward.

I can't … yet	One small step I could take
I can't speak up in meetings yet.	*Share one idea at Thursday's team meeting.*

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3 Learn from a setback

Think of a recent time something did not go the way you hoped. Look at it the way a good coach would, with curiosity instead of blame.

What happened?

What did I learn from it?

What will I try differently next time?

4 Know your fixed mindset triggers

Some moments tend to bring out a fixed mindset, like getting criticism, starting something new, or seeing someone do better than you. Dweck suggests getting to know your own triggers so you can catch them sooner.

What brings out my fixed mindset	What I can say to myself instead

5 Try it this week

One challenge I will take on this week, and how I will talk to myself if it goes badly:

A growth mindset takes practice, and fixed thoughts will still show up. Each time you catch one and answer it, you are building the skill.

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