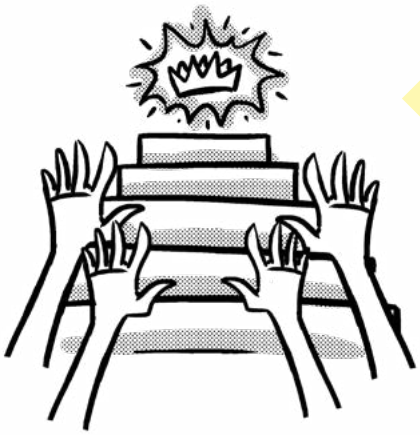
Growth Mindset

Information for parents and carers

What you need to know



Most of us have a strange relationship with failure as adults, but young people can also find the idea or feeling of failing really difficult to handle. Sometimes their thoughts can become a pattern that holds them back from being able to move forward. You may have heard these kinds of thoughts already:

- No one in my family is any good at maths.
- My sister is the one who is intelligent, not me.
- I can't do creative things.
- I'm not really any good at anything.
- I never understand things.

At secondary school, sometimes these thoughts can become more prominent as they are in bigger year groups and are working out who they are. Young people can often adopt something called a 'fixed mindset', made famous by the work of Carol Dweck. This is when people put limits on what they can and can't do, believing that intelligence, amongst other things, is fixed. The opposite is a 'growth mindset' and is one of the biggest secrets to success.

What can you do?

Your child will be exploring all kinds of different things at secondary school, including studying subjects they haven't had much exposure to so far in primary school. It is easy for them to give up at the first challenge or to assume "I can't do this". At home, it is good to start to slowly change that narrative.

Here are some pointers that may be helpful to use when talking with them:

- Ability can change with practice - talents, gifts and skills can be developed.
- It makes sense to have a go at anything. Putting effort in is the only way to get better at things.
- Mistakes happen, they are nothing to be ashamed of and they show us exactly what we don't know so that we can work on improving our skills.
- Feedback is good – we can't improve without it!
- We should welcome new challenges; trying is how we all learn. If we don't get it right first time, try again and again and again.
- Discuss with your child how they have achieved goals before. Ask them to think about what they did and what they could learn about how to achieve success.

(Material adapted from 'You Are Awesome' by Matthew Syed)