

## UNDERSTANDING LEARNING MINDSET

### *Educational Design and Delivery Domain*

4-H uses several theories, models, and frameworks to “do” positive youth development. One model we use is the 4-H Thriving Model.<sup>1</sup> This model describes what happens when 4-H programs provide the conditions for youth to explore their sparks in a safe environment and are supported by positive relationships with adults and other youth. One concept related to the 4-H Thriving Model is *growth mindset*. According to Carol Dweck<sup>2</sup>, our mindset can contribute to our success or our failure. You can think of the mindset as a continuum (see Figure 1). On one end is the fixed mindset and on the other end is the growth mindset.

**Fixed mindset** is where individuals feel they are either good at something or they are not. For example, a youth might state they are not able to do public speaking, or that they can only learn under certain conditions. People in this mindset spend much of their time avoiding challenges and do not take feedback in a positive way. They are also easily discouraged.

**Growth mindset** is the opposite of a fixed mindset. Individuals with a growth mindset believe that their talents and abilities can improve over time with practice, diligence, and guidance. They look for opportunities to challenge themselves and they believe that feedback is a tool for growth. Youth and adults who have a growth mindset are more motivated to learn, have better relationships, and are more resilient<sup>2</sup>.

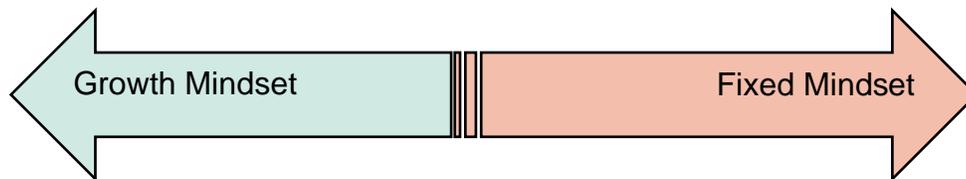
As individuals, we all fall somewhere on the mindset continuum. Sometimes we may have a fixed mindset in one area (e.g., public speaking) but have a growth mindset in another area (e.g., writing). As 4-H volunteers, you can support the development of a growth mindset to help youth thrive. Knowing where youth fall on the mindset continuum can help you design and scaffold 4-H experiences to develop a growth mindset over time.

Here are a few tips for encouraging a growth mindset as you plan 4-H experiences for your club or program:

- **Challenge them (but not too much)!** Don't be afraid to challenge youth! If youth are not challenged enough, they become bored. However, if they are challenged too much, they become discouraged. Facilitate activities and projects that allow them to practice new skills but be there to support them by giving encouragement and guidance. For example, if something they tried didn't work, you might say, “That was a good idea, but have you thought about trying....”
- **Build connections.** Partner youth with youth who have different abilities so they can learn and encourage each other. Create opportunities for youth to reflect on what they have learned, or how they have improved with each experience.

- **Provide meaningful feedback.** The way you talk about a young person's achievements impacts their mindset. You can support a growth mindset by focusing on the youth's effort or technique rather than their

accomplishment. Instead of saying, "Great job on getting a blue ribbon," you could say, "All of your practice and hard work really paid off—I am so proud of you!"



**Figure 1.** Mindset is a continuum with growth mindset on one end and fixed mindset on the other.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Arnold, M. E. (2018). From context to outcomes: Adolescent thriving in 4-H Youth Development Programs. *Journal of Human Science and Extension*, 6(1), 141-160.
- <sup>2</sup>Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.

*The original resource 4-H Educational Design and Delivery: Understanding Differences in Learning Styles (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed by Sue Pleskac.*

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