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Utilising a Growth Mindset within a young athlete's sport journey

The most commonly known use of the 'Growth Mindset' approaches have been with education settings, with Carol Dweck conducting most of her mindset research in education settings. Through this research Dweck repeatedly found that students with a Growth Mindset seek out difficult situations and respond to failure by increasing their effort and finding effective strategies to overcome the challenge. Individuals who take this approach therefore hold the belief that you *can* improve which leads to outcomes that make it more likely that you *will* improve (Dweck & Leggett, 1988),

Within this article we will provide an overview of what a Growth Mindset is, how it can transfer from education to youth sport and some suggestions for applying the Growth Mindset ideas that we have outlined.

What is the Growth Mindset?

The view that you have of yourself can determine everything. If we look at the belief that your basic qualities are unchangeable then you are likely to take more of a *fixed mindset* approach to challenges. This means that you want to prove yourself correct in these beliefs and therefore you don't embrace challenges or learn from mistakes or setbacks.

In contrast, the *growth mindset* is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things that you can cultivate through your efforts. Changing your beliefs to this growth mindset approach can have a powerful impact and create a passion for learning and improving. "why waste time proving over and over how great you are, when you could be getting better" (Dweck, 2006).



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From Education to Youth Sport...

Due to its value within education environments there is scope for the idea of fixed and growth mindsets to transfer in to other environments where individuals are aiming to develop and improve e.g. youth sport.

Research in youth sport has shown that individuals have developed *fixed mindsets* when they have been praised for their 'talent' or results and outcomes. Children who have these experiences of praise often for their talent often then find themselves in situations where they chose easier options and give up earlier than children who were praised for their effort (Dweck, 2006).

If we look more specifically at this, praise can have a huge impact on an individual's motivational mindset. Praising winning might make a young athlete happy and proud for a short while, but when they lose, their confidence may spiral as they don't receive the same level of coach or parent approval. From a fixed mindset approach the individual may see losing as an indication that they lack talent and therefore cannot overcome this challenge or similar challenges in the future (Vealey, Chase and Cooley, 2018).

While young athletes should be recognised for their accomplishments, excessive praise and focus on outcomes should be avoided as it can often lead to pressure to keep repeating the outcomes (as well as the fixed mindset outlined above). Think about this, instead of saying:

"way to be a winner"

You could say:

"your practice on...really showed today – great job".

(Knight, Harwood and Gould, 2018, pg102)



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Coaches can help young athletes develop a growth mindset by:

- Explaining that mistakes are part of learning, improving and developing
- Using examples of top athletes facing setbacks and overcoming them
- Helping them develop a mistake ritual to accept and overcome mistakes and focus on the next part of their performance.
- Debriefing after a competition to discuss the positive performance accomplishments as well as using the mistakes to create a learning experience and goals for improvements.

Some suggestions to help you with the Growth Mindset

Dweck (2006) has a few exercises to help you out.

- Never think of yourself as talented, gifted or smart. Describe yourself as a lifelong learner, intellectually curious, and motivated to grow.
- Identify the areas where you would like to grow.
- How can you achieve your ideal self?
- Which potential areas of improvement are within your control?
- How will you respond to setbacks and failure?

It is important to have patience with yourself. You will encounter many challenges and setbacks as a young athlete and no matter how hard you try; it might be a long time before you see the results you hope for. But just remember you will never see those results if you give up. Adopt a lifelong growth mindset, and you will see the benefits.



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