



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

CRUMPLED REMINDER

"Mistakes have the power to turn you into something better than you were before."

—Oscar Auliq-Ice

OVERVIEW

Students write down a recent mistake and their feelings about it, and then crumple up the paper. Then they reflect on how their mistakes help them to learn.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the start of the school year to introduce a growth mindset about mistakes
- During a unit in which students are wrestling with challenging material
- As an activity for professional development
- Anytime during the school year

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes (up to 30 minutes with optional closure discussion)

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

MATERIALS

- Paper (one fresh sheet per student)
- Crayons or markers in a variety of colors

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Normalize the experience of making mistakes
- Reinterpret the meaning of mistakes with a growth mindset—recognizing that mistakes are important for learning
- Understand that mistakes lead to greater synaptic activity in the brain

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to recall a mistake that you've struggled with.
- Write it down, along with the feelings you had about that mistake. Then crumple it up and follow the instructions below for the rest of the activity.
- Reflect on what you have learned from that mistake and how that learning has benefited you.
- How do you think this practice is relevant to your students' lives, both in and out of school? Would they agree?

INSTRUCTIONS

INTRODUCTION

- Help students reinterpret the meaning of mistakes by explaining that you love mistakes because that's how you learn. However, many people hate making mistakes because they worry that making mistakes means that they aren't smart, or that others will think they are not smart.

ACTIVITY (10-20 MIN)

- Ask participants/students to write about a mistake they made this week and how it made them feel. (2 min)

- Give each student a fresh piece of paper, ask them to crumple it up and throw it at the board with the feelings they have when they make a mistake. (2 min)
- Ask them to retrieve the paper, un-crumple it, and color each line with different colors. (2 min)
- Ask students what they think those lines represent. Explain that the lines represent all the synaptic activity that happens when a mistake is made. (3 min)
- Ask participants/students to keep the paper and stick it into a notebook or folder to look at when they make a mistake. This physical reminder prompts students to use mistakes to strengthen their brain every time they open their notebook. (1 min)

OPTIONAL CLOSURE

Lead a discussion using prompts from [Classroom Discussion about Mistakes](#):

- *How do you feel when you make a mistake? Why?*
- *How do you think other people see you when you make a mistake?*
- *Have you ever discovered something new from making a mistake?*
- *Have you ever felt proud of making a mistake?*
- *Has a mistake ever made you think more deeply about a problem? (You can start by talking about a non-academic setting, and then talk about how the lessons apply to academics.)*

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What worked or didn't work for you in leading this practice? How did the students respond to the practice? Would you change anything for next time?
- Do you find yourself responding to mistakes differently? Are students more willing to make mistakes? Are they less defensive or upset about mistakes after this activity?
- Did students discuss how this practice might relate to or be helpful or unhelpful in their lives?
- Continue to prompt students (and yourself!) to look at their Crumpled Reminder throughout the school year to help reinforce a growth mindset.

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Cultivating a [growth mindset](#)--one that embraces rather than fears mistakes--has been found by researchers to have a plethora of benefits. For example, a growth mindset can improve [academic performance](#), increase [well-being](#), boost [social competence](#), [reduce bias](#), and promote [prosocial](#) (kind, helpful) behavior.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Not wanting to make mistakes may be motivated by a [fear of failure](#)--a complicated human conundrum at best that is connected to our self-worth. For instance, [studies](#) have found that "overstrivers," (i.e., students who tell everyone that they have very little time to prepare for an upcoming test and then spend the entire night studying) are afraid that failure will confirm their greatest fear--that they're not perfect.

Thus, by helping students to see mistakes as opportunities for growth, teachers are placing more importance on students' efforts rather than their "innate" ability--and putting students' self-worth where it belongs: on the sole fact that they are imperfect but gloriously wonderful human beings.

SOURCE

This practice is an activity from PERTS' Mindset Kit, a free set of online lessons and practices that encourage adaptive beliefs about learning. PERTS (Project for Education Research that Scales) is a Stanford University-based lab that helps educators apply evidence-based strategies in order to advance educational excellence and equity on a large scale. See <https://www.mindsetkit.org> and <https://www.PERTS.net>.