



## DEVELOPING A GROWTH MINDSET ABOUT PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO CHANGE

*"We are not trapped or locked up in these bones. No, no. We are free to change. And love changes us. And if we can love one another, we can break open the sky.*

—Walter Mosley

### OVERVIEW

Students apply a "growth mindset" lens to people who exclude others and/or are victims of exclusion, recognizing that people can change for the better.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Because adolescents learn social-emotional skills best when they are relevant to their lives, use this activity when a situation arises that involves exclusion and/or victimization.

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes

#### LEVEL

- High School

#### MATERIALS

- one web-based clip on [Growth Mindset](#)
- whiteboard & markers
- [one worksheet](#) for each pair of students
- three small sticky notes per student (optional)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Demonstrate their understanding of how “mindsets” (beliefs) affect how they respond to social challenges, like exclusion or victimization, at school.

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Think of a fixed mindset belief you have about your interactions with another person, e.g., someone who never listens to you or who you will never get along with.
- Now, try applying a growth mindset to your interactions with this person, believing in this person’s capacity to change. For example, perhaps this person listens to you on occasion or doesn’t always disagree with you.
- Notice whether this new belief eases any stress you might feel about interacting with this person.
- How do you think this practice is relevant to your students’ lives, both in and out of school? Would they agree?
- Can you use this practice to help students interrogate their fixed mindsets about diversity, equity, and inclusion, namely how they see other groups of people, themselves, and their communities?
  - Be sure to reflect on any biases or beliefs that you might bring to this discussion. For example, do you think it’s possible for people to overcome their biases and become more inclusive?

## INSTRUCTIONS

### SETTING UP THE PRACTICE

- **Before students arrive**, write the following statements on the whiteboard:
  - People who exclude others really can’t be changed.

- Victims who are excluded always bring it on themselves.
- Some people are just jerks, and not much can be done to change them.

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## PART 1 (10 MINUTES)

- When students walk into the classroom, ask them to rate their agreement with the phrases written on the whiteboard (1-5: 1 = Disagree strongly; 5 = Agree Strongly).
- Ask for a few volunteers to share their ratings, or post students' ratings next to each statement on the whiteboard using sticky notes.
- Hold a short discussion with students using the questions below. (The purpose of this discussion is to challenge students' potentially black-and-white views of people who either exclude others or who see themselves as victims, and to begin prompting them to understand the following: "(a) if you are excluded or victimized, it is not due to a fixed, personal deficiency on your part; and (b) people who exclude or victimize you are not fixed, bad people but, instead, have complicated motivations that are subject to change.")
  - *Why do people exclude others?*
  - *Are victims always victims?*
  - *What traits do those who exclude and their victims share?*
  - *Can people who exclude or their victims change?*
- Tell students:
  - *Today we are going to learn about how our beliefs about people and ourselves affect the way we view social challenges at school like excluding others or being excluded.*
- Ask:
  - *How might this topic be important or relevant to your lives as students?*

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## PART 2 (15 MINUTES)

- Watch this "[Growth Mindset](#)" video to introduce or remind students of the basic differences between a growth and a fixed mindset (5:03).
- Ask:
  - *How can we apply the information from this video on growth versus fixed mindset to people's personalities and behavior? Do you think we can actually change our personalities?*
- After discussing these questions with students, let them know that researchers have found that we can indeed change our personalities and that this growth mindset belief can help lessen our stress during social interactions.
- Ask:
  - *What "fixed" negative beliefs do you think people who exclude others and/or victims might have about themselves? What ways could they reframe these beliefs so they reflect a growth mindset? [Consider using the examples below as a guide.]*

<b>Fixed Mindset Beliefs</b>	<b>Growth Mindset Beliefs</b>
No one likes me.	I can make new friends.
I don't belong.	I can do things to help myself feel more like I belong here.
He is a bad person.	He did something that I don't like, but it doesn't mean he can't change.

- As a class, choose one item from the "growth mindset" belief column above and discuss ways a student could put this belief into action.

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### PART 3 (10-15 MINUTES)

- Create heterogeneous pairings of the students (based on gender, race, academic performance) and hand out [one worksheet](#) to each pair.
- Ask student pairs to fill in the growth mindset column for each fixed mindset belief.
- Ask several pairs to share their growth mindset column ideas with the whole class.

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### CLOSURE

- In their journals, ask students to write a short piece summarizing what they learned from this lesson and what they might say to convince other students that personalities aren't "fixed."

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### EXTENSIONS

- In pairs, have students create a mini-lesson for younger students that teaches them about how growth mindset can be used in our social interactions.

### REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What worked or didn't work in leading this practice? How did the students respond to the practice? Would you change anything for next time?
- Over the next week or two, you might notice if you use more of a "growth mindset" approach to your interactions with people as a result of this practice. Do students use more "growth mindset" language when talking about others or themselves in social situations?
- Did your discussion with students include questions about diversity, equity, and inclusion? For example, did students question how they saw other groups of people, themselves, and their communities, and/or issues related to injustices based on people's identities? If so, how did it go? (We encourage you to share your experience with other users in the comments section.)
- Did students discuss how this practice might relate to or be helpful or unhelpful in their lives?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A study with a diverse group of teens discovered that adolescents who were taught the belief that people have the [ability to change](#) lessened their social stress, helping them to cope better, to keep their bodies calmer, and to do better in school—as much as seven months later.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The way students view social challenges at school can dramatically affect the levels of stress they experience in their body, their thoughts, feelings, behaviors—and even their grades. If they believe that they (and their peers) have the capacity to change, then it's more likely that they will see social struggles (like being bullied or excluded) as changeable and surmountable too.

It's crucial for young adolescents to realize that they are not helpless; they can [grow and adapt](#), and the peer who is challenging them can change, too. Things can get better. This perspective releases some of the pressure they might feel, and then they can think more clearly about a social problem as a challenge to solve rather than a threat to fear.