

Write from the Deep
Karen Ball & Erin Taylor Young
Going Deeper Workshop: Overcoming Damaging Self-Talk
Segment 5: Developing an Effective Mindset

If we're going to take on damaging self-talk, we need to be sure we're coming to this battle with the most helpful mindset. For many of us, that means learning to develop what's called a growth mindset.

The concept of a growth mindset was popularized by Carol Dweck, a Stanford University psychologist who's been researching achievement and success.

- Dweck wrote a book called *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*.
- She also did an interesting [Ted Talk](#).

A growth mindset harnesses the power of “not yet” instead of “I failed.” As Carol Dweck says, “If you fail, you're nowhere.” But “not yet” means you're on a learning curve. It's a path into the future.

Consider how God deals with us as His creation. We weren't born as wise adults. We're on a learning curve. But sometimes we forget that. Especially when we run up against something that's hard, maybe even “too hard.” We can get frustrated and discouraged, and that opens the door for damaging self-talk.

- A growth mindset can help you overcome damaging self-talk.
- A fixed mindset can work against you.

These tendencies could show you have a growth mindset:

- You believe new abilities can be developed through practice.
- You view, even embrace, problems as an opportunity to learn.
- You like challenges.
- You enjoy learning (because intelligence can be improved).
 - Joanna Penn on [The Creative Penn Podcast](#) is a good example of a person who consistently voices a growth mindset.
- You believe failing is part of learning.
- You believe critique is part of learning. It's not personal.

- You understand that effort is a necessary part of the journey.
- You like to see others succeed because it inspires you.
- You're the kind of person who'd say something like "I am a developing person" or "My writing skills are developing with every book I write."

A word of caution: If you're realizing you have a fixed mindset, that very mindset may be telling you you're a lost cause. That you may as well just give up now. Please hear us when we say this: Recognizing you have a fixed mindset is the beginning of freedom! You're recognizing an aspect in your life that is working against you. Now that you know that, you can replace it with a mindset that will work *for* you.

These tendencies could show you have a fixed mindset:

- You believe qualities like intelligence and talent are fixed traits. These fixed traits are responsible for success. You either "have it" or you don't.
- You avoid problems and challenges out of fear of failure, because failure confirms that you don't "have it."
- You avoid difficulty and conflict.
- You're inclined to give up because effort is pointless (because you either "have it" or you don't).
- You're more focused on the way things are now, rather than the way things can be in the future.
- You're frustrated by the success of others, because it creates more pressure to succeed yourself.
- You take critique personally, because it's a judgment of your innate ability, your limits. Or even a judgment on you personally.
- You say things like this about yourself: "I am a person with fixed traits and I'm being judged for them"; "I've always been this way"; "I'm a failure"; "I can't do it. I'm just stupid."

Remember, it's okay if you operate from a fixed mindset *right now*. No matter what the mindset is telling you, you don't have to stay there. When God created life, that included growth.

The truth is that our brains actually do grow.

- Research shows that we *can* create new pathways and learn new skills.

These steps can help you develop a growth mindset:

- Believe that you can grow; you can learn. Embrace that. Otherwise the fact that it's true won't matter.
- Focus on “yet” or “not yet” instead of “I can't.” Especially when you have a setback. A fixed mindset will tempt you to say, “See? I knew I couldn't do it.” Don't listen to that! Instead say, “I can't do it *yet*.”
- Accept that it doesn't mean you're dumb if something is hard or difficult. It means you have a chance to get smarter. There's no timeline on how long it takes you to learn something.
- Celebrate trying. Celebrate effort. Effort isn't pointless, it's the path to growth.
 - Praise perseverance. Value it.
 - Praise progress, and praise your attitude in progress.
 - Praise your strategy, the steps you take to do the task at hand
- Encourage and value the skill of learning by processing errors and correcting them.
 - Did you get a tough critique? Value the growth you'll gain as you correct grammar errors or do revisions. Recognize that you're learning, you're improving your manuscript and your craft.
- You can also help develop a growth mindset by trying new things—things that aren't even writing related. But as you try them, recognize that it may take a while to learn. And that's as it should be. Don't give up!