

# Mindset in Early Years: Case Study



Joyce Murray - Child Development Officer,  
Mearns PS & Nursery, East Renfrewshire



## Why did you decide to take part in the growth mindset programme?

I heard about Growth Mindset through our school and different articles on social media. It immediately caught my interest and I was curious to find out more.

Since Covid and the introduction of 1140 hours, we had noticed a difference in the children and the families within our setting: Separation anxiety, lack of parental involvement, a reduction in children's independence skills and children being more adverse to risk. When I was offered the chance to take part in the growth mindset programme, I snapped it up in the hope that I would develop and learn new skills to allow myself to support, aid and challenge children and families.

## What was the most important thing you learned from taking part in the programme?

The growth mindset programme has opened up my thinking and taught me a lot about myself, allowing me to reflect on my practice. I always believed I had a 'growth mindset'. I considered myself outgoing, confident, positive and open minded. Whilst working through the programme I began to question and reflect on my unconscious bias. An important learning was being able to recognise there are situations when I don't feel so confident, and subconsciously I would shy away from these situations, allowing others to lead as I believed this to be their strength. Through deeper reflection I realised that this happened in areas that I had never believed 'I was good at' from my childhood, physical activity being one.

## Can you share an example of how you used your learning with the children? What did you do and how did it go?

Through my self-evaluation, the techniques and knowledge I was learning through the programme I became more aware of my responses, interactions and body language when working with the children. I reinforced the importance of being at a child's eye level when communicating, I always ensured to give clear, direct praise e.g. "you have worked so hard on this", "I like the way you have given that person spiky hair", "it's not that you can't do this, you just can't do this yet".

When children were feeling the 'I can't', I would acknowledge the struggle, celebrate the mistakes and encourage, challenge them to keep going.



Working with children in small groups of mixed mindsets, I would use peer modelling to promote and support resilience and problem solving. This consistent approach is used in all situations from children independently putting on their coats and shoes to children sewing and creating their own teddy bears. The example I will share is when I was using our 'Muddy Movers' programme, promoting physical activity using loose parts.

I challenged the children to build an obstacle course covering the length of the outdoor play area that would allow them to go from A to B without touching the ground.



All the children were fully engaged at the beginning working together arranging milk crates, decking boards, tyres and stepping stones. Once the course was built and the challenge of completing came, some of the children started to say "I can't", "I'll fall".

I then implemented the said strategies, they looked at what had gone well, they made changes, they learned from each other, they laughed when they fell but they got back up and tried again, persevering to the end and learning from their mistakes.

Sometimes their mistakes allowed children to think differently and took them down a different path e.g. one child kept falling off a plank in between two crates, so they instead used the two milk crates by standing on one and moving the other to in front of them and so on, allowing them to still complete the challenge just in a different way. The next time the children learned from their first course/attempt, they created a different course but this time used some of the strategies they had learned from their mistakes and so it continued.

## **Now that you've done this, what are the next steps for growth mindset?**

Going forward from the growth mindset programme I continue to reflect on myself both personally and professionally, I am continuously challenging myself in areas that do not come naturally to me and accept that at first things might not work but I will get there.

I have learned to understand, change and adapt to learn from my mistakes and the importance of mistakes in everyone's learning journey. Professionally I continue to strive to support this continuous approach empowering children, raising self-esteem, resilience and confidence. I will also add that I have received good feedback from my peers, who have enjoyed going on the growth mindset journey with me and are able to reflect and adapt their own practice.

## **Is there anything you feel could make the programme more effective?**

I thoroughly enjoyed the growth mindset programme. The style of learning it offered was perfect giving a good balance to work through modules at an individual's pace and then come together at the twilight sessions to share, reflect and celebrate good practice with other professionals.

