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Description automatically generated with medium confidenceNurture a Growth Mindset

**Tip Sheet**



**What to do:** Review these ways to nurture a growth mindset and use them to build a can-do attitude for yourself, staff members, and students.

**Why it matters:** People with a growth mindset believe they can grow their abilities through effort and persistence. Fostering a growth mindset in your program supports learning and nurtures hope and confidence. Making this mindset part of your program culture — and intentionally designing activities that build on what students already know — encourages students to tackle new tasks and persist rather than giving up when the work feels too hard.

Be a facilitator of student learning rather than a sage on the stage.

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Description automatically generatedYou can do this by using guiding questions rather than revealing the answers. You can also try using think-pair-share activities or math talks to help students take charge of the discussion.

# Use games instead of timed tests.

Games can be a low-stress way for students to self-test. Solo games allow them to compete only with themselves. Team games allow them to learn from peers. Both kinds of games can help them identify what they’ve learned — and what they still need to learn.

# Give specific feedback instead of generic praise.

Hearing “Great job!” feels good but it isn’t specific enough to move learning forward. Try feedback like this instead: “The way you double-checked your reasoning with others in the group is a strategy that will help you succeed in the workplace.”

# Use heterogeneous grouping instead of homogenous grouping.

Grouping students by similar math achievement scores can reinforce the notion that “some people are just better at math than others,” even if that’s not your intention. It also deprives students of opportunities to hear diverse approaches and perspectives on problem solving.

# Increase deep-level questioning and reduce surface-level questions.

*What’s the answer?* isn’t the only question students should hear (or ask) during program activities or homework help. Prompt higher-level thinking with questions that go beyond simple recall.

# Emphasize effort and progress over outcomes.

Sometimes this is called “normalizing struggle.” Help students to understand that struggling and working hard to master new concepts is a normal part of the learning process.

# Be aware of your verbal messaging.

Don’t inadvertently send fixed mindset messages like, “It’s OK, you did your best. Maybe algebra just isn’t your thing.” Instead, say something like, “You don’t have to get it right the first time. The goal is to improve step by step.”

# Embrace the word “yet.”

Consistently using “yet” reminds students that learning is an ongoing process.

**Tip:** For information about how negative thoughts, anxiety, and a fixed mindset can affect learning, see **How Thoughts and Emotions Affect Learning** in the 21st CCLC NTAC Math Toolkit.

*The mind is like a muscle — the more you exercise it,  
 the stronger it gets and the more it can expand.*

*—* Idowu Koyenikan

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