

Activities to Build a Growth Mindset

Adapted from *Y Is for Yet: A Growth Mindset Alphabet* by Shannon Anderson



You can use the activities in this section to explore, build, and strengthen a growth mindset in the kids you work with—whether you're a teacher, counselor, family member, or other caring adult. Feel free to adapt these in ways that work best for your group. (Most of these activities also work well if you're reading the book one-on-one!)

My Bumpy Brain

Kids love learning about their brains! In this activity, explain how our brains have billions of tiny nerve cells called neurons. Our neurons send messages to each other as we learn and practice skills.

Have each kid draw a bumpy oval representing their brain. Next, have them draw eight to ten neurons inside the brain. (They can just draw dots for these, or they can get more

creative if they choose!) Ask kids to think of a skill they have practiced a lot and are good at. Suppose it is tying their shoes. Kids can draw a thick line connecting two dots (neurons) and write “tying my shoes” on the line.

Now have kids think of something they have not learned to do well yet. Maybe it is learning to multiply. Have them draw a thin or dotted line connecting two different dots and write “multiply numbers” on the dotted line.

Discuss how their drawings represent how we learn. As we practice and learn something, the pathways connecting our neurons get stronger. We can picture this as a line that gets thicker and thicker the more we practice and learn a new skill. The thicker the line, the more easily we can do the skill. For example, once you’ve mastered riding a bike, you don’t have to think about it so hard to do it successfully. But if we stop practicing a skill for a long time, the pathways may start to weaken. That is why it is so important to keep practicing and reviewing skills.

Preparing for Growth Spurts

A growth spurt is when you have a setback as you are learning something new. It can be frustrating when you try really hard and still make mistakes or fail. The good news is that we learn and grow from our mistakes and trials. You can help kids prepare for these trials ahead of time by having them create motivational messages to post in your space. Ask students to create small posters featuring positive statements to help them remember to keep trying and not give up.

Examples might be:

- “I can do this!”
- “I’ve got what it takes!”
- “In some small way, I get better every day.”
- “It’s going to feel so good when I reach my goal.”
- “Keep moving forward.”

- “My hard work will be worth it.”
- “Stay strong and don’t give up.”
- “I can learn from my mistakes.”

When you see a student struggling, remind them to look at the motivation wall and read some words of encouragement.

Remind them that growth spurts are part of the process, and that we can grow and get better with more practice and time.

To-Do and To-Don’t Lists

Kids have probably heard of to-do lists, but may not have ever made a to-don’t list. Ask kids to think of the things they would write on a to-do list if they wanted to make more friends. You might write things like:

- Be kind to others.
- Ask someone to play during recess.
- Give someone a compliment.
- Help someone with a task.
- Smile often.

If you made a to-don’t list for making friends, it might look like this:

- Tease others.
- Ignore kids who talk to you.
- Laugh when someone trips or spills.
- Roll your eyes when someone talks.
- Frown at people.

As you discuss an example like this, it might seem funny or silly to kids, but at the same time it will build their understanding of what kinds of actions may help them reach a goal, and what may prevent them from attaining a goal. Have kids write a goal at the top of a sheet of paper. Then have them write two or three to-do steps and two or three to-don’t steps. If kids are willing to share, you could invite some to read their lists and talk about how they made them.