Building Confidence in Youth as a Youth Peer Advocate

"Confidence comes not from always being right but from not fearing to be wrong."
– Peter T. McIntyre

Why is it important for YPA's to support youth in building confidence?

Confidence is a feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of their own abilities or qualities. Experiencing low confidence levels is a normal aspect of the human experience, but the more confidence youth possess, the better equipped they will be for the challenges they face. Supporting youth in building confidence is essential to the work of a YPA.
YPA's hold a unique role in the lives of the youth they serve, relating to them as credible messengers and tangible examples of resilience. Youth who are confident perform better in academic settings, have healthier relationships, are equipped to make informed, safer decisions, and are more likely to develop into successful adults.

Confidence is a muscle



Think of confidence as a muscle that youth can build over time. For example, when going to the gym and attempting to build physical muscles, the expectation is not that a single work out will automatically accomplish a goal. In reality, it is the consistent efforts and micro-habits that yield the most dramatic change. The more confidence is "exercised" in youth, the more likely it is to become a natural response when facing adversity.
YPA's can support youth in building confidence by reassuring, validating, and helping them to solve their problems, encouraging consistent effort, and fostering a growth mindset. Confidence can grow over time and with positive feedback and successful experiences.



"Confidence is an every day habit, not a place youth arrive at." -Onyx Walker, YPA-C

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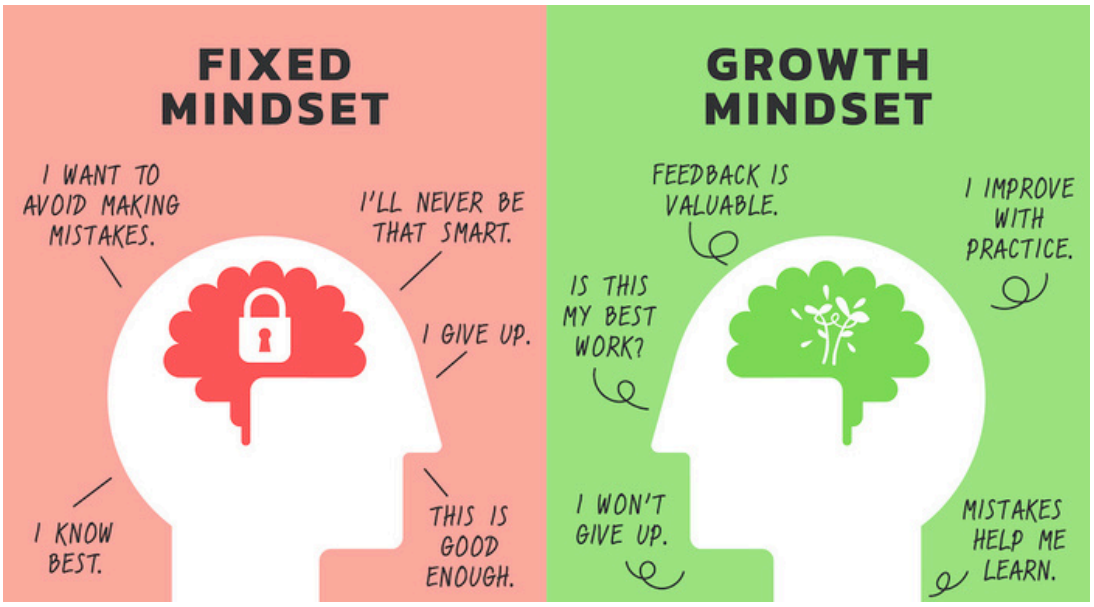
Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset



Fixed Mindset

- Often results in harsh self-talk
- Condemns failure in any form
- Internalizes failure as worthlessness
- Creates rigidity and less adaptability

Growth Mindset

- Encourages kind self-talk
- Embraces failure as a learning opportunity
- Values the person beyond their accomplishments
- Encourages flexibility and imagination

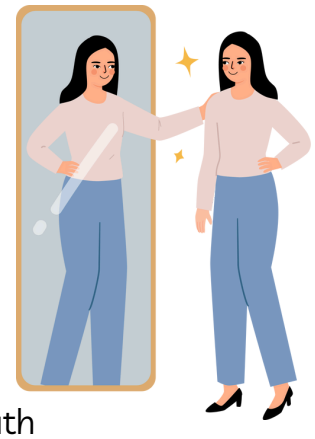
Confidence barriers to consider

Social media and social comparison. While social media can serve as a powerful resource for connection and community, it can also become a source of unhealthy comparison for youth.

Peer pressure. The desire to fit in and belong to a group is not inherently bad. And yet it can become dangerous if it is not coupled with the ability to make safe decisions and the confidence to make healthy choices and stand on one's own when necessary.



Tips for Building Confidence in Youth



Make time for them

Avoid canceling sessions and show up consistently for youth. These actions communicate that they matter to you.

Reassure them

A listening ear and a few encouraging affirmations can greatly impact youth who are developing confidence.

Praise them and identify their strengths

Youth might not identify some of their abilities as strengths. YPA's hold the power to reframe this narrative and help youth see their strengths.

Set achievable goals

Make sure that youth's goals are SMART goals and teach them to break larger goals down into smaller, achievable steps. This helps to boost confidence and satisfaction.

Encourage persistence

There will inevitably be moments where youth want to give up on their goals. It is the YPA's role to both hold space for the youth's range of emotions while also encouraging them to continue.

Allow them to teach you

When youth are speaking about their interests and passions it can be beneficial to encourage them to "dig in" by asking follow-up questions and allowing them to embody mastery in a certain subject.

"With every single step I took, every time I showed up (for myself) it built confidence in me."
-Johanna Devries

References:

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Eich, D. J. (2023). Growth or fixed mindset. Innovation Learning. https://www.innovationlearning.org/growth-or-fixed-mindset/