Albert Einstein is considered one of the greatest geniuses of all time, though rumor has it that he failed high school calculus. As you might imagine, this is quite an exaggeration—Einstein didn’t remember getting anything but A’s.

It’s possible that this story had something to do with his math skills. Despite his amazing intellect, Einstein wasn’t as strong in math as many of the other physicists of his day. Throughout his life, he was known to have frequently said, “If I could just do the math.”

At the age of 76, Einstein passed away. On the table next to him were a pen and pad on which he was working through math equations. The greatest genius of his day—and arguably in history—understood that life is a process. Until the day he died, Einstein lived in a state of growth and self-development.

We are all born with certain skills, but the mindset we have about the process of improving our skills and character ultimately determines our success in life.

The legendary boxer Joe Louis once said, “Championships are not won in the ring. That is just where they are crowned; they are won in the dark halls of the training room early in the morning when nobody is watching.” Einstein’s theories were the crowning achievements of his life. But they were the product of years of focus and personal growth that happened behind the curtain.

In her groundbreaking work, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck presents the “growth mindset” as the most essential element of success and happiness in life. The growth mindset is a perspective on life in which we find validation from internal growth and not external rewards.

Who we become is what we take forward forever.

So how do we instill a growth mindset in our children? The key is how we frame success and the language we use with our students. It doesn’t require doing more, just an adjustment to how we already do things.

Here are 6 strategies to support a growth mindset in the classroom that only require a simple adjustment to the language used:

**Support intrinsic pride**—As educators, we like to validate our students. Personally, I love to tell my son that I am proud of him. I feel good, he feels good, and it’s a win-win ... or is it? Here’s a simple suggestion on taking this validation to the next level and fostering the growth mindset in your students. Rather than saying “I am proud of you,” simply say, “You should be proud of yourself.” You will each experience that great feeling inside, but you’ve delivered a powerful message that validation comes from within. This reinforces to the student to look inward rather than outward for appreciation and acceptance.
Mindful Life Coaching Workshop Series Translation: Reflect on your effort as you try something new and be proud of your attempts, whether you succeed immediately or not! Keep focused on what you learn in that process and try again!

It’s about being and becoming, not having and getting – We teach to help our students grow. When they have successes, it is important that we acknowledge them. There is a simple strategy for recognizing individuals from the growth mindset perspective. Rather than emphasizing the good grade, recognize the achievement by celebrating the person they had to become to get the grade. Ask them to reflect on the work they did, the obstacles they overcame, and the new capabilities they developed. When you focus on the effort involved rather than the result, your students understand the value of the process that yields success.

Mindful Life Coaching Workshop Series Translation: Reflect on your effort as you try something new and be proud of your attempts, whether you succeed immediately or not! Keep focused on what you learn in that process and try again!

Celebrate failure every day – As students grow older, they become less inclined to answer questions in class or participate in discussion. In kindergarten, you can’t stop them! But by high school, it can be like pulling teeth. Often, this is because they have been conditioned to fear the sense of failure that comes from being wrong. For teachers, this can make for a pretty lonely classroom. Here’s a tip to help reinvigorate discussions and further emphasize growth: When a student answers a question incorrectly in class, genuinely celebrate it. You might say, “Not quite, but kudos for trying. Life rewards people who take risks, so keep it up!” The key is to help students build confidence in trying, so they’re less concerned about the negative consequences of making mistakes. When you do this, you instill the valuable lesson that taking risks, participating, and making mistakes are all critical ingredients to success.

Mindful Life Coaching Workshop Series Translation: When you fail or do not reach your goal, instead of thinking, “I will never succeed” or “I can’t do this”, think, “I tried and this is what I learned in that process that I can remember for the next time.” Know that risk, and mistakes are critical to your learning! Imagine if the first time you tried to walk as a child you and your parents said, “You are awful at this, give up!” Failure is a teacher that helps you figure out what to do next!

Debunk the talent myth – Calvin Coolidge once said, “The world is full of unsuccessful men with talent.” One indicator of having a fixed mindset—which is the antithesis of a growth mindset—is the belief that our abilities and intellectual capacities are defined at birth. Science has proven the concept of neuroplasticity or brain plasticity. Essentially, our brains are like plastic and have an incredible capacity to change and evolve based on our experiences. In a nutshell, we have enormous potential to develop ourselves much more than we ever believed possible.

Share this concept with your students! Help them understand that the work they put into the process of school or life will greatly impact what they achieve and who they’ll become. Share stories of people like Ben Carson, who despite being labeled unintelligent and ungifted, ultimately developed himself into an extraordinary brain surgeon. The point is that talent will always be trumped by effort and a growth mindset. This will motivate academically-challenged students to maintain high expectations for their lives. It can also be a wake-up call for students who’ve leaned on their natural intellects for years and may have never developed the capacity to work hard or overcome adversity.
Mindful Life Coaching Workshop Series Translation: Talent can be practiced and developed over time!!! Innate abilities do not define what can achieve or who we are!

Start anew – One of the most powerful things we do with our students is guide them through the process of forgiving themselves. So many come to us labeled as bad students or as having behavior problems. It is so engrained in their minds that this is who they are, they feel powerless to be anything else. Early on in your relationship with your students, let them know that your partnership begins today. Their lives are about who they want to become and not who they were, and within them is the ability to create a new future on their own terms... a process that starts now. They are not a product of their past, and their future is not predetermined. Agree that you’ll let go of any preconceived notions, and ask them to do the same. Your belief is that everyone is capable of great things, and you’re asking them to share in that belief and apply it to themselves.

Mindful Life Coaching Workshop Series Translation: Begin again! Never let failure hold you back or define who you think you are! You are the captain of your own ship – take the helm and decide where you want to go.

Share your own growth – Students often view us only as teachers. Help them see you as an individual, and that where you are in life is a culmination of all the actions you’ve taken and decisions you’ve made. There is so much power in your stories, and you can unlock it by sharing the challenges and struggles of your life ... the difficult decisions and failures as well as the successes. Our research tells us that these shared stories can have a lasting impact on the lives of students—often the ones you least expect to affect. So find opportunities to share your stories! You never know how critical those moments might be in making a difference for your students.

I remember hearing a story about legendary basketball coach John Wooden. His secret to success was the recognition that everything in life is a process. Short cuts can’t be taken, and certain things must always be done. The first day of practice every year, the first thing he’d teach his players is how to put their socks on and lace up their shoes. It was daily growth that started on day one and enabled him to build extraordinary championship teams.

The little things add up to major significance in life. Imagine if your goal each day wasn’t to win or lose, pass or fail, but just to be a little better than you were yesterday. Imagine being validated not by getting the question right, but by learning how to solve new types of problems. Imagine valuing yourself not based on single moments in time, but on who you’re becoming.

Now imagine instilling this thinking in our students. There would be less anxiety and depression among our youth. Self-esteem would increase, grades would improve, and behavior issues would decline. I believe school could become what we all want it to be... a place of true learning.

No one truly has a 100% growth mindset, and no one can make the switch overnight. However, we can do little things each day that remind our students to look inward for validation, to appreciate the little improvements, and to become growth-oriented individuals. We don’t want them to just go through life... we want them to grow through life!

Mindful Life Coaching Workshop Series Translation: Pay attention to those around you and learn from their example. Validate your courage to try new things and celebrate that in others as well.