

Understanding Mindset

A ProFriends guide to noticing how your thinking can influence the way you approach challenge, change and learning.

What is mindset?

Mindset is the collection of beliefs, attitudes and expectations that can influence how we see ourselves, other people and the situations we face. It can affect how we interpret setbacks, respond to challenge and decide what to do next.

You may have heard people described as having a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. These ideas can be useful, but they are not labels for people. Most of us move between different ways of thinking depending on the situation, our confidence, our experiences and how much pressure we are under.

Mindset is not about forcing yourself to 'think positive'. It is about noticing the story you are telling yourself and asking whether another perspective might help.

Fixed and growth thinking

Fixed thinking might sound like...	Growth-oriented thinking might sound like...
I'm just not good at this.	I may not be good at this yet.
If I struggle, it means I can't do it.	Struggle can be part of learning.
I made a mistake, so I failed.	What can I learn or change next time?
They are better than me.	What can I learn from what they do well?

When mindset becomes unhelpful

Rather than labelling yourself as having a 'negative mindset', it can be kinder and more useful to notice patterns that may be making life harder at the moment.

- Self-doubt - assuming you are less capable than the evidence suggests.
- Fear of failure - avoiding opportunities because making a mistake feels too risky.
- Harsh self-talk - speaking to yourself in ways you would be unlikely to speak to somebody you care about.
- Perfectionism - feeling that something only counts if it is done exceptionally well.
- Getting stuck on the problem - finding it difficult to see choices, influence or possible next steps.
- Procrastination or avoidance - sometimes a response to pressure, uncertainty, fear or overwhelm rather than laziness.

These patterns are not character flaws. They can be understandable responses to experience, pressure or uncertainty - and they can be explored without judgement.

A more flexible mindset

A flexible or growth-oriented mindset makes room for learning, adjustment and uncertainty. It does not mean enjoying every challenge or believing you can achieve anything simply by trying hard enough.

- Being willing to try, even when you cannot guarantee the outcome.
- Seeing effort as part of learning rather than proof that you are not capable.
- Using feedback as information while still deciding what is useful to you.
- Allowing yourself to change approach when something is not working.
- Recognising progress without demanding perfection.

Pause • Reflect • Act

PAUSE

Notice the thought before you automatically accept it as fact or react to it.

REFLECT

What am I telling myself? What evidence do I have? Am I making an assumption? What would I say to somebody I care about in the same situation?

ACT

Choose one small, realistic response. You do not need to feel completely confident before taking a step.

Sometimes the most useful mindset shift is not from negative to positive. It is from 'I can't' to 'What might be possible from here?'

Helpful tools

- Self-compassion: Replace harsh judgement with a fairer, more supportive response.
- Realistic goals: Break a larger goal into manageable steps and notice progress.
- Balanced thinking: Question automatic thoughts and look for evidence on both sides.
- Gratitude and noticing: Deliberately notice what is going well without pretending difficulties are not there.
- Mindfulness: Bring your attention back to the present rather than becoming caught in predictions or 'what ifs'.
- Learning from setbacks: Ask what the experience can teach you and what you might do differently next time.

You may also find the ProFriends resources on Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) and Limiting Beliefs useful alongside this guide.

Your mindset check-in

Choose a current situation where you feel stuck, uncertain or under pressure. Use the questions below to explore what your mindset may be adding to the situation.

1. What is happening?

2. What am I telling myself about it?

3. How does that thought affect the way I feel or behave?

4. Is this a fact, an assumption, a prediction or an old belief?

5. What evidence supports what I am telling myself?

6. What evidence suggests there may be another perspective?

7. What would a fairer or more balanced thought sound like?

8. What is one small thing I could do next?

Building a more flexible mindset

What is something you are currently learning or developing?

This could be personal, professional or simply something you want to handle differently.

Where do you notice 'I can't', 'I should', 'I always' or 'I'll never' thinking?

What could you add to that sentence to make it more open or balanced?

For example: 'yet', 'at the moment', 'this is difficult, but...', or 'I can start by...'.

What would progress - rather than perfection - look like here?

A final reflection

What has stood out to you most from this guide?

What is one mindset shift you would like to practise?

What could help you remember to Pause • Reflect • Act when you need it?

You do not need the 'right' mindset all of the time. The goal is simply to notice when your thinking is closing down your choices - and create enough space to consider another way forward.



How ProFriends can support you

Mindset, confidence, self-doubt, perfectionism and feeling stuck are common themes in coaching. At ProFriends, we can explore what is happening for you, notice patterns that may be getting in the way and identify practical steps that feel realistic for your circumstances.

If you would like to explore whether coaching feels right for you, you can book a free 30-minute discovery call. There is no pressure to commit to a set number of sessions.

Supporting your goals, one step at a time.

Important note

This resource is for general information and personal reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and does not replace medical, psychological or other professional mental-health support. If reflecting on these topics causes significant distress or raises concerns about your wellbeing, please pause and seek appropriate support from a qualified health professional.