

# Pushing Past Perfectionism

## Wellness Workshop

Student Wellness Services



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

# Acknowledging the Land and the People

We acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes

the **Blackfoot Confederacy** (the **Siksika**, **Piikani**, and **Kainai First Nations**), the **Tsuut'ina First Nation**, the **Stoney Nakoda** (the **Chiniki**, **Bearspaw**, and **Wesley First Nations**), and **Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III**.

The University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. The traditional Blackfoot name of this place is “**Moh'kins'tsis.**”

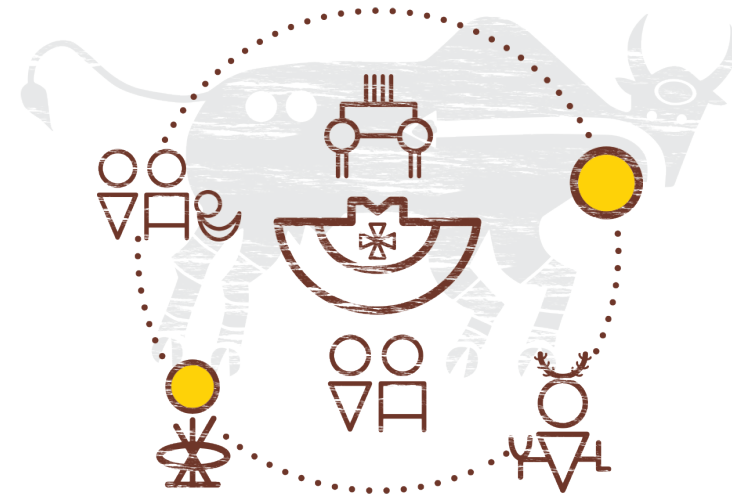


Image: The Cultural Model for the University of Calgary's Indigenous Strategy, ii' taa'poh'to'p

# Learning Objectives

- Explore perfectionism and shame
- Learn about fixed vs. growth mindsets
- Build a self-compassion practice as an antidote to perfectionism and shame

**“When perfectionism is driving us,  
shame is riding shotgun and fear is that  
annoying backseat driver.”**

**Brene Brown**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY**

# Perfectionism vs. Striving for Excellence

## Choose Excellence Not Perfection

©2019 Sharon Martin, LCSW

### Perfectionism

Impossibly high standards that can never be met



### Excellence

High standards that can be met with effort, practice, and persistence

Mistakes are failures and must be avoided



Mistakes are normal and help us learn

Only value the outcome



Value the process, not just the outcome

Rigid; there's only one right way to do things



Flexible; goals can be adjusted



LiveWellwithSharonMartin.com

# Learning to Recognize Perfectionism

- Do I have trouble meeting my own standards?
- Do I often feel frustrated, depressed, anxious, or angry while trying to meet my standards?
- Have I been told that my standards are too high?
- Do my standards get in my own way? For example, do they make it difficult for me to meet deadlines, finish a task, trust others, or do anything spontaneously?

“The compulsive need to achieve and accomplish one’s goals, with no allowance for falling short of one’s ideals” (Neff, 2011)

# What is Perfectionism?

- Perfectionism is:
  - Aimed at minimizing or avoiding feeling of **blame, judgment, and shame**
  - Protective; **shields self-esteem** from any vulnerability
  - Other-focused – seeking approval and acceptance
- Perfectionism is not:
  - the same as striving to be your best
  - self-improvement

# The Mindset Survey (adapted from Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, 2006)

1. *Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1

2. *You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1

3. *No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1

4. *You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1



# The Mindset Survey

5. *You are a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1

6. *No matter what kind of person you are, you can always change substantially.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1

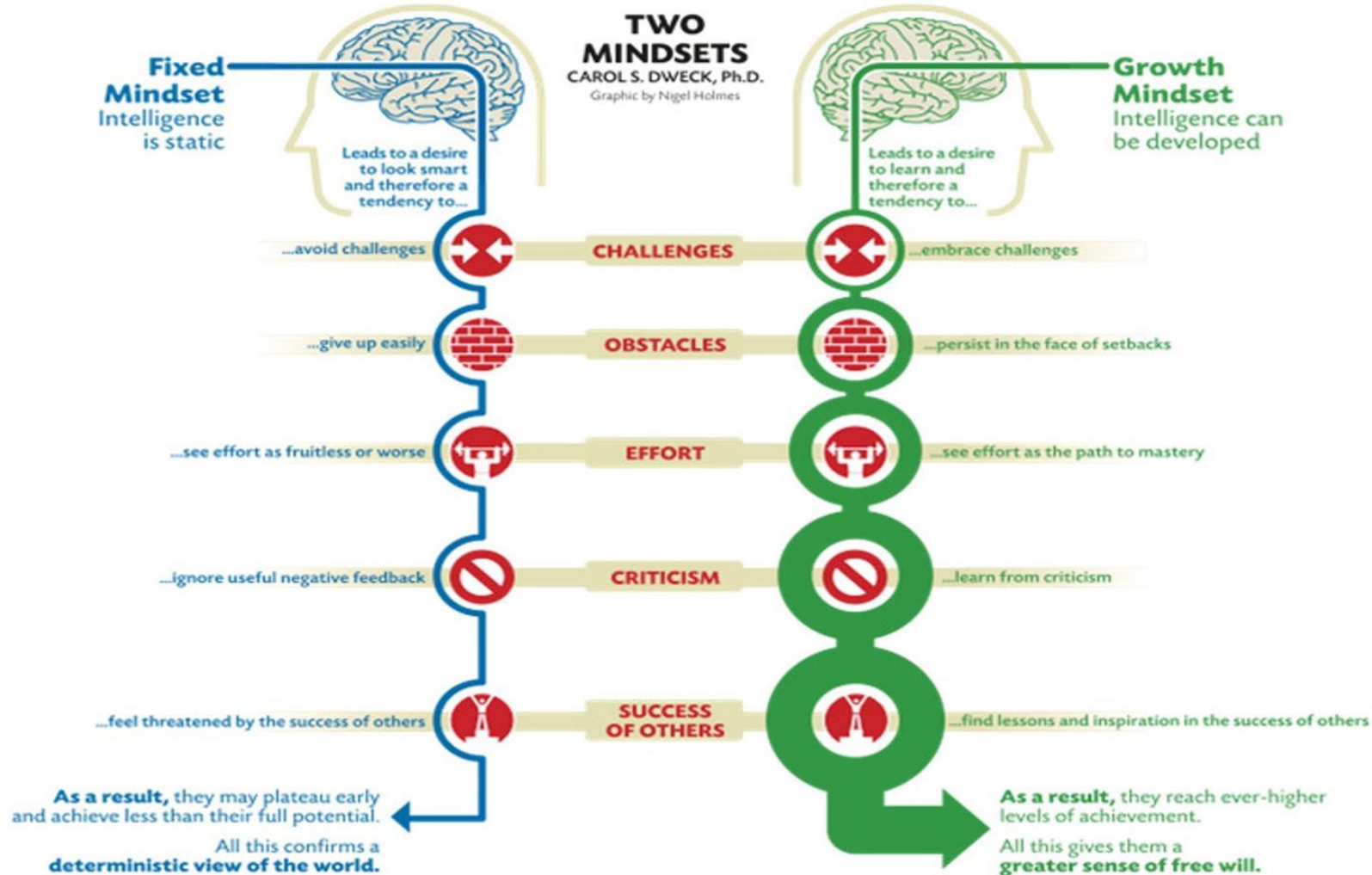
7. *You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can't really be changed.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1

8. *You can always change basic things about the kind of person you are.*

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4	3	2	1

# Growth vs. Fixed Mindset



# Case Example

You go in for an evaluation with your supervisor and you receive negative feedback. Your supervisor thinks you aren't putting in enough effort, or you're making too many mistakes, or that you're simply not competent enough to handle your current project.

- What is an example of a fixed mindset thought or statement?  
Growth mindset?

# Defining Self-Esteem

“Self-esteem refers to our sense of self-worth, perceived value, or how much we like ourselves.” (Neff, 2017)



What kind of thoughts, feelings, or behaviours do you think result in low self esteem?

- Perfectionism
- Approval-seeking
- Narcissism
- Self-serving attribution bias
- Reactive anger
- Hide or refute shortcomings
- Social comparison

# Defining Self-Esteem



What are examples of things that would raise or maintain your self-esteem?

- Recognize what you're good at
- Build positive relationships
- Learn to be assertive
- Start saying "no"
- Give yourself a challenge

## Self-Compassion (*a.k.a. shame resilience*)

... being **open to and moved** by one's own suffering, experiencing feelings of **caring and kindness** toward oneself, taking an **understanding, nonjudgmental attitude** toward one's inadequacies and failure, and recognizing that one's own experience is part of the **common human experience**

(Neff, 2003, p. 224)

# What is Shame?



# Self-Compassion > Perfectionism & Shame

“In contrast to self-esteem, self-compassion is not based on self-evaluations. People feel compassion for themselves because **all human beings deserve compassion and understanding**, not because they possess some particular set of traits (pretty, smart, talented, and so on).” (Neff, K. 2017)



Neff, K. (2017). What self-compassion is not. <http://self-compassion.org/what-self-compassion-is-not-2/>



# Small Group Discussion

## Question 1:

**What is an example of something you learned how to do, or perhaps something you discovered about yourself, as a result of previously making a mistake or failing at something?**

## Question 2:

**Is there someone who you've watched embrace their own vulnerability, make mistakes, and keep growing?**



# Practicing Self-Compassion

SKILL 1: Develop your own self-compassion mantra



# Practicing Self-Compassion

## SKILL 2: Compassionate Imagery



# Compassion Into Action

In the coming week:

1. Practice your own self-compassion mantra
- 

2. Practice compassionate imagery
-

# Thank you! Questions?

Check out our other wellness workshops:

- Healthy Thinking
- Motivation & Time Management
- Boosting Self-Compassion
- Managing Stress and Anxiety

For the most up-to-date information on our resources and services, visit our website!

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellness-services>

# Conflict Management Digital Badge

## Earn the Conflict Management Digital Badge

**Conflict management is a key skill for relationship building and achieving success**

Increase your confidence in your ability to manage conflicts at school, work and in other parts of your lives. Training within the Conflict Management Digital Badge includes learning about conflict styles, navigating conflict in relationships, and intercultural communication.

Get a virtual LinkedIn badge to show your skill development in this area!



# References and Resources

- Anxiety Canada. How to overcome perfectionism
- Kristin Neff: *Self-compassion: the proven power of being kind to yourself*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Brene Brown: TED Talks, *Daring Greatly*, *The Gifts of Imperfection*,
- [self-compassion.org](http://self-compassion.org)
  - <http://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>
- Positive Psychology. The Mindset Survey
- Practice mindfulness: UCalgary Groups