

Guide 1



Resilience—a brief overview

Despite our best efforts, we sometimes cannot prevent adversity and stress. We can, however, develop our capacity for resilience in the face of serious difficulties and daily stresses by nurturing positive relationships, reaching out to give or get support and changing how we think about adversity and opportunity.^{1, 2, 3, 4}

What is resilience?

The definition of resilience varies in different cultures and contexts,^{6, 7, 8} but it generally refers to one's ability to "cope well with adversity" and "persevere and adapt when things go awry."^{3, 11, 17}

Resilience is not a trait or set of characteristics that some have and others don't. Resilience is something that happens. It is a dynamic process—the interplay between the individual, family, community and society.⁸

Resilience helps people deal with stress and adversity, overcome childhood disadvantage, and reach out to new opportunities.^{9, 10, 11} In addition, more than forty years of research shows that resilience is associated with better health, longer life, more success in school and work, happier relationships and less likelihood of depression.^{3, 12}

What role does our thinking play in promoting resilience?

Stress, adversity, and challenge are inevitable parts of daily life—and sometimes out of our control. However, the way we *think* about stress is very much in our control and makes a substantial difference in how we handle serious challenges and daily bumps in the road.

Some people feel helpless in the face of stress and adversity, so they easily give up attempts to change the situation or take opportunities that may improve it. Other people hold more resilient views. They believe many problems can be solved if they look for options and keep trying.^{3, 9, 13}

Studies show that people who manage stress and adversity best have **3 Cs** in common:^{14, 15}

- **Control:** a belief in their ability to take charge of the controllable aspects of their situation and influence a positive outcome
- **Challenge:** a view of mistakes as opportunities for new learning, and change as potential for growth
- **Commitment:** an active engagement in work and other pursuits that provides a basis of meaning for their lives

A resilient view is characterized by *accurate* and *flexible* thinking, and consists of creative problem solving, the capacity to see other points of view and to challenge one's own views, and the ability to move on with daily life despite obstacles. Most importantly, research suggests that resilient thinking patterns, based on accuracy and flexibility, can be learned.^{3, 4, 5}

Resilient thinking can be learned.

How can children's resilience be promoted?

The most important factor in promoting children's capacity for resilience is a stable relationship with a caring, responsive adult who provides protection, positive experiences, guidance and opportunities to build self-regulation skills.^{1, 16, 17, 32}

Children also benefit from community supports that are accessible, culturally relevant and meaningful for their family.⁸

These supports include faith and cultural groups, drop-in centres, sports and volunteer programs, help for those with special needs, etc.^{2, 8}

Another key factor is the importance of thinking processes in the development of resilience and the handling of stress and adversity. Resiliency skills that help develop accurate and flexible thinking can be absorbed by children from an early age and can optimize the development of resilience.^{5, 18, 19}



What role does adult modelling play in children's ability to develop resilient thinking patterns?

Warm, caring adults at home and in the community, who model resilient thinking and coping in their daily interactions, nurture children's lifelong capacity for resilience.

In fact, researchers point to just how crucial our modelling is. By eight years of age, most children have developed a thinking style, or habitual way of reacting to stress. Even children two and three years old mimic the thinking styles and coping behaviour of caregivers around them.⁵

Just as children develop language in a "language-rich" environment, so they will develop resiliency skills in a "resilience-rich" environment.

Introducing age-appropriate resilience-building strategies to children as early as possible can promote emerging coping skills to ease anxiety, overcome life's inevitable difficulties and help inoculate them against depression.⁵

Research has provided us with the direction and tools *We can put both children and ourselves on the pathway to a brighter future.*

What do teachers say?

I think the role modelling that teachers do when they are teaching the resiliency skills is absolutely essential to the children. It is a far more important part of their learning than we realize. The role modelling we do on a daily basis – we really have to look at that. – CG (resource teacher)

[After the skills training] I'm more aware of how I talk, how I engage in conversation and play with the kids because I know they're watching me and whatever I do. They are like sponges. They want to do the same thing. They'll use the same tone, the same inflections, and I've noticed if I come in and I'm having a bad day and the group is really down – I'll wonder why is everyone so angry today? Then I'll think about it and I'll figure maybe they're seeing some of it from me. And I find when they see it from me, they initially will take over that feeling, even if they were happy and calm before. So, I am very aware of my body language, my emotional regulation, because they pick everything up. What I do is reflected right back from them. – EL (preschool)

Summary of Guide 1



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What is resilience?

The definition of resilience varies in different cultures and contexts, but is generally defined as the ability to “cope well with adversity” and “persevere and adapt when things go awry.”

Resilience is not a trait. It is the dynamic interplay between the individual, family, community and society.

Resilience is associated with

- better health and longer life
- more success in school and work
- happier relationships
- less depression

People who respond with resilience are able to

- deal with stress and adversity
- overcome childhood disadvantage
- reach out to new opportunities

What role does our thinking play in promoting resilience?

- The way we think about daily stress and serious challenges directly affects our resilience.
- A resilient perspective is based on *accurate* and *flexible* thinking.
- We can build our resilience by changing how we think about challenges and opportunities.

People who manage stress best have three Cs in common:

- Control: a belief in their ability to take charge and influence outcomes
- Challenge: a view of mistakes as opportunities for growth
- Commitment: an active engagement in activities that give meaning to life

A stable relationship with a caring, responsive adult is crucial for children to develop their capacity for resilience.

What role does adult modelling play in children’s ability to develop resilient thinking patterns?

- Even two-year-olds can mimic the thinking styles and coping behaviour of caregivers around them.
- Adults who model resilience in the face of daily stresses and serious challenges create a “resilience-rich” environment in which children can develop resilient thinking and coping strategies.