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# Mental Health in Schools

Promoting Resilience

**Minds  
Ahead**

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## EDITORIAL

Resilience is an important character trait in children and young people. It helps them to cope with adverse situations and it helps to promote a 'can do' attitude. Children and young people need to be resilient in a range of situations. They need resilience to cope with transitions as they change classes or change schools. They need to be resilient when they encounter new social situations or when they are presented with academic challenges that are new to them. Resilience will help them to cope with many of the challenges that they face in their lives both inside and outside of schools, for example, when they experience loss.

However, developing resilience does not excuse exposing young people to toxic environments which damage their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. The structures that underpin the education system, such as the curriculum and assessment regimes, can result in young people disengaging from education and being labelled as failures. Whilst a degree of 'failure' can be healthy, repeated educational failure can result in young people disengaging from education. They give up on education and unfortunately, in some cases, the education system gives up on them. In some cases, toxic schooling causes educational failure and the blame is placed on the child rather than on an education system which fails to meet the needs of all learners. 'Bouncing back' from these experiences is deeply problematic because of the damage that has been caused.

The collection of papers in this volume address the concept of resilience. The papers are interesting, thought-provoking and greatly appreciated. I hope you enjoy reading them.

Professor Jonathan Glazzard

## Supporting young children's resilience in the early years

Tracy Howard

The curriculum for early years clearly identifies the importance of promoting young children's resilience, one of the four overarching principles in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2012) states;

“every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured”

This, along with the other three principles, underpins the learning and development opportunities that early years providers offer to young children.

The different ways children learn are captured in the EYFS as the Characteristics of Effective Learning. Delivered through a play-based learning environment with quality interactions from knowledgeable adults these characteristics identify the key skills children need to be confident, capable and resilient.

When young children are resilient they demonstrate a number of these characteristics, for example;

- Showing a 'can do' attitude
- Taking a risk, engaging in new experiences, and learning by trial and error
- Persisting with activity when challenges occur
- Bouncing back of difficulty
- Enjoying meeting challenges for their own sake rather than external rewards or praise
- Finding ways to solve problems
- Testing their ideas
- Changing strategy as needed
- Reviewing how well the approach worked

The success in promoting these relies almost entirely of the skills of the practitioners working with young children, and specifically how strong the key person approach is. A key person is the child's significant adult in their life while with an early years provider, a strong key person can hold a child in mind, providing the support, care and love a young child needs in the absence of their parent or main carer and tailors their interactions and the environment to develop children's learning and development.

“... we learn incredibly early how to relate to other people, to have confidence and trust in them – or not. Our bodies are programmed in infancy to cope well with stress and to be resilient - or not.” Gerhardt (2004)

This positive relationship between a key person and a child ensures the child feels safe and secure, with the emotional support to enable them to cope emotionally with unexpected events and thus ready to explore, investigate, question and actively be involved; the qualities needed to promote the characteristics and ultimately build resilience. For example, imagine an 18-month-old child building a tower with wooden bricks, it falls down, a child in a safe secure environment with an adult that they trust will try again, they will demonstrate a ‘can do attitude’ they will ‘bounce back’. The same for a four-year-old learning to ride a bike or a one-year old learning to walk.

Children will have the opportunity to make mistakes, to test and trial activities, and will see practitioners doing the same, for a child to observe adults demonstrating the characteristics tells them it is acceptable for things to not work first time, for mistakes to be made as this is what builds resilience.

*“Successful people are not those for whom everything comes easily, but are familiar with failure” Stewart (2011)*

A knowledgeable skilled early years practitioner will also be able to present an enabling environment, which in itself will offer learning opportunities to develop resilience, referred to as the ‘third teacher’ a quality environment will continue to offer learning opportunities in the absence of an adult. For example, activities that require critical thinking, that promote problem solving and that have no determined outcome, focussing on the process rather than the end product.

Resilience is key in developing the attitudes and behaviours to be successful, it supports children’s mental health and is essential to support lifelong learning.

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Early Education (2012) *Development Matters in the Early Years* Early Education

Gerhardt S (2004) *Why Love Matters: How affection shapes a baby’s brain* Routledge

## Developing Resilience through Pupil Voice at Oakthorpe Primary School

**Keith Ellis, Headteacher**

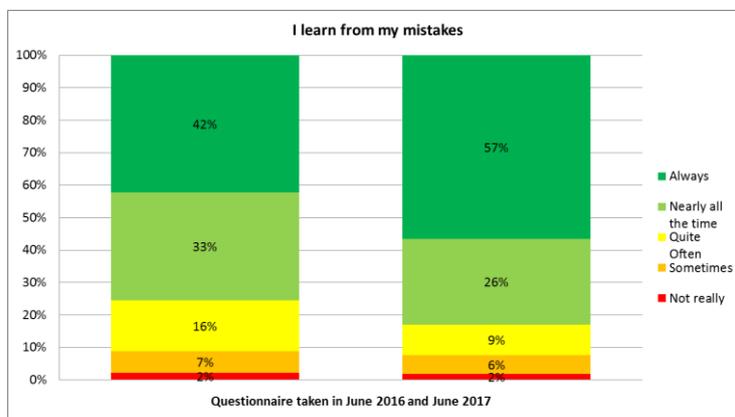
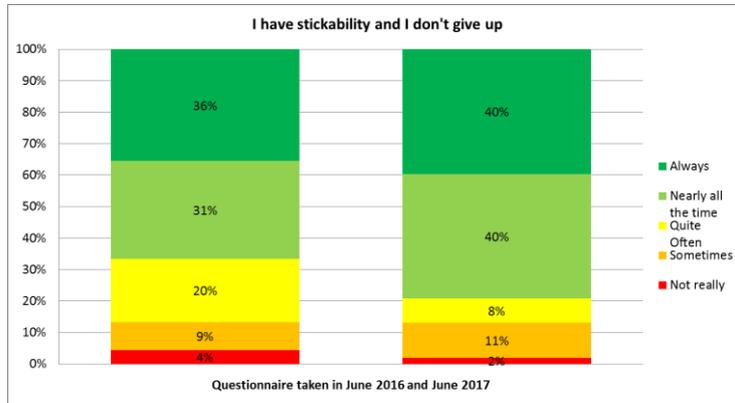
For a number of years, pupils at Oakthorpe Primary School have taken an active role in developing their resilience. As a small rural primary school in Leicestershire, we work with limited resources to develop a whole school culture of pupils understanding themselves as learners and to develop their emotional health and wellbeing.

Six years ago, Oakthorpe's journey started in response to the needs of pupils and the community to develop a language for learning and to raise pupil's aspirations. As a result, we developed a curriculum based around Guy Claxton's Building Learning Power - Resilience, Reciprocity, Resourcefulness and Reflection (the 4 Rs). These are regularly monitored using pupil councils under a range of different names – Learning Council, Character Council, Wellbeing Council. This pupil voice has led to developments such as the introduction of the fifth R – Responsibility. Regularly, pupils will identify peers showing the keys aspects of the 5Rs in the classroom. These are recorded on a display in the main corridor.

Since becoming a regional finalist for the DfE's Character Education Awards in 2015, the school has worked with a number of schools and organisations to further develop pupil's resilience with a focus on Positive Psychology. Pupils are provided the opportunity to attend to internal resources of resilience to build their capacity to deal with times when they need to draw on their resilience. To help pupils to identify and attend to these aspects of resilience, the school has measured various aspects of resilience. These include pupil's attitudes towards themselves as learners and identifying resources and capacities such as stickability, ability to face challenges and learning from mistakes. This information is then used to develop approaches and interventions within the school that develop these various aspects of resilience. This evidence-informed approach gives the opportunity for staff and pupils to review strengths and areas for development to support pupil's metacognition around resilience.

Impacts of using this approach are evident. The school has seen significant improvements in pupil's reflections towards questions such as 'I have stickability and I don't give up' and 'I learn from my mistakes.' The featured data graphs show a sample of the impact on pupil responses between June 2016 and June 2017. In terms of its impact academically, it is

difficult to pin down this approach having a direct result on raising standards. What is evident is the distinct language for learning that the pupils use across all their learning including when they are at home.



It is only when teachers and schools take the time to focus explicitly on resilience as part of whole school improvement, will staff, pupils and families understand the impact this can have on learning attitudes. With a focus on pupil voice, Oakthorpe has been able to embed a whole school culture which allows pupils to understand how resilience can help them with challenges in their learning and help them to learn from mistakes. Into the future, the school is working closely with four other schools in the Oval Learning Trust with a focus on how this resilience can be incorporated into the way we design lessons across the curriculum as well as how we can help families to understand the importance of developing resilience as a key skill in everyday life.

For further information, please see the school's website ([www.oakthorpeprimary.co.uk](http://www.oakthorpeprimary.co.uk)) or follow the school on Twitter (@OakthorpeSchool)

## How I approach resilience

**Laura Jackson**

Resilience is one of those words that is used often in schools currently. A word we want our students to understand and something we want them to be; to overcome difficulties, to work hard to get better at something they find difficult, to try their best when work, skills or tasks are challenging. But how is it approached in school, and in my own classroom?

I am lucky, extremely lucky that I work across a large faculty where resilience is central to all we do and want students to be. Working across music (my own subject), drama, dance and PE means resilience is one of the most important attributes for our students.

My approach to resilience:

1. Modelling- by showing the students, by putting myself in their shoes and by not always being perfect, it means that I lead by example. They will then follow my lead by having a go or help me with the mistakes I may have made. I model this in my PE lessons and within my music classroom and have high expectations; if it is not done properly it needs to be done again.
2. Using a variety of different instructional methods- to show students there are multiple ways to approach a task just like they would in real life. Questioning methods, calling on individuals, using a set format to approach written challenges, demonstrations of expected skills and standards and time to rehearse, practice and embed the skills all mean that there are no right or wrong ways to approach the task, just the way that works best.
3. Time- to allow skills to develop properly. This also means effective monitoring and observation of students. It is not a race to see who can play the piece of music first, or who can play it the fastest, but to make sure the skills are correct and the piece of music is performed accurately with confidence.
4. Concentrate on confidence- to make sure students are confident in their own abilities and they understand how this links to real- life learning. When they are nervous about performing in front of the class, it is much more useful for them to understand it is the same feeling they will feel at a sixth-form or job interview or having to present a topic or speech in assembly and by doing more of the things that make them 'butterfly bellied' or feel that tingly, giddy nervous feeling, their confidence will

develop along with this. So, what they do in music will change their lives (or so I tell them).

5. Relate it- so they realise how resilient they are in their comfort zone.

'Would you give up if you lost your match when you were playing Fifa?'

'Absolutely not!!'

'So, what do you do differently?'

It all comes down to practice. Getting the correct skills, spending time getting better, trying hard and trying again, a different way. I have heard Mary Myatt speak several times at different teaching events and she said 'We are a challenge seeking race' at every one of them. I pass this on, to make sure the students I work with know and understand that hard work is good work, that there are different ways to approach work and that I will help, show and believe in them until they are confident to take their next steps.

## Teaching Resilience by being a role model

### Ceri Stokes

One of my favourite quotes is “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work”. By Thomas A. Edison or if you would like something a little more up-to-date I often refer to James Dyson. “it took five years and 5127 failed prototypes to develop one that worked. If failure sucks but instructs, that is a lot of learning”.

Why do I like this? Because so many students are scared to fail, so scared that some by 17 haven't. They have worked and worked so hard that they have never failed a test or got a low grade. So, when failure actually does hit their door (and it will) everything comes crashing down. It's normally the driving test, right before their mock examinations. Or worse still, right before their exams.

Why are they so scared of failure? Well part of this must be the pressure that either we (and by that, I mean parents, school and society) put on them. But another must be their role models and how everyone is so quick to pick up on their mistakes and publicly judge them. I often joke that sixth form girls often have two extremes of role models. Miley Cyrus or Duchess of Cambridge (let's call her Kate). One is a rebel and doesn't care what others think, teenagers like her attitude but don't really want to be her. Confrontational in her dress and attitude. The other is immaculate in every way, but rarely speaks and she doesn't look like she is having fun. I let you work out which is which. Both are criticised by the press all the time. Therefore, nobody is perfect, so why do our pupils strive to be so?

So how can we help the students to make mistakes and learn from them? Again, I would like to use another quote although I am struggling to find who wrote it. Falling into puddles doesn't define you; it's how you get up that does.

I feel that we as role models need to help them when they do make a mistake. Don't criticize but give constructive points about how to not make the same mistake again. This is harder that you think. Actually, being able to look back at something without getting depressed and blinker and think constructively about what went wrong is something some students will need help with. We as role models also need to admit when we have made a mistake and although we are sorry we are only human. How we move forward when we have made a mistake is a huge learning lesson for them.

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Build their confidence. Some students are so worried about their work being rubbish that they hesitate to start, so I often scribble at the top of the page and say, page is already ruined anyway so it doesn't matter what you do. This has worked well with a few students who suffer badly with anxiety, that I actually see them scribble at the top of their test. However, they also need to fail something. A cycle proficiency test was a perfect opportunity for me. At 11 it was the biggest and most important test in the world, I failed but actually it didn't really matter and I moved forward. Tried again and learnt.

## Resilience Work in Schools in Hampshire supported by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Educational Psychology (HIEP)

Dr Cath Lowther

HIEP regularly works with schools to promote resilience, on an individual and whole school level. One of the more systemic approaches being developed is a process involving training around what resilience is, followed by the use of a simple but evidence-informed framework to capture what is already being done in school and what more could be planned.

The initial stage involves defining resilience. In summary, we say that resilience is evident when a person achieves what is expected for her or him despite adversity. It is a dynamic process of interactions between individuals and their immediate and wider contexts. While not an innate trait, it is ordinarily experienced by most people as long as they are healthy and their environments are adequate. Exposure to manageable adversity can promote resilience. However, resilience is not about keeping going regardless, but involves the capacity to know when to stop and ask for help<sup>1</sup>.

The overarching definition used is Masten's (2014): '**positive adaptation in the context of risk or adversity**' (p. 9). This definition requires two judgements to be made: what is positive adaptation and what constitutes risk/adversity (ibid.)? Ungar (2008) highlights how both of these judgements may be 'culturally and contextually specific' (p. 219). Schools therefore describe what adversity looks like in their contexts, and stipulate positive adaptation outcomes against which they can measure the impact of what they then do around promoting resilience.

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<sup>1</sup> Resilience is '**dynamic**' (Luthar, et al. 2000), incorporating 'a **range** of processes' (Rutter, 1999, p. 135) within the **individual**, his or her immediate **environment** and the wider **society** (Rutter, 1999, 2013; Masten, 2014; Hart, et al., 2016). This results in an '**interactive** phenomenon' (Rutter, 2013, p. 474), which is 'not a static feature' (ibid, p. 482). It does not 'constitute an individual trait or characteristic' (Rutter, 1999, p. 135). Resilience is also *not* completely protecting ourselves or each other from manageable adversity or risk. 'Brief exposure to negative experiences in circumstances that allow the individual to cope successfully with the experience' allows for a '**steeling**' effect (Rutter, 2013, p. 477). Finally, while this may not be drawn directly from research, it is useful to remember that 'resilience allows you to recognise when you need to slow down, or say no' (Hooper, 2012, p. 147) and 'resilience is about how you recharge, not how you endure' (title of a Harvard Business Review article by Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan, 24 June, 2016).

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Schools then discuss four key areas grouping the factors noted in research to contribute to, or be predictive of, resilience. They are supported to identify what they are already doing within these areas and to actively plan what more they can do. This thinking is facilitated by psychologists, drawing on the literature around what contributes to each area, e.g. positive psychology, relationships and CBT.

Involvement has ranged from 1½ hour twilight sessions to ongoing projects within schools. Feedback about the training has consistently been very positive. Impact evaluations are currently being undertaken. Further information is available on request.

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