

Building Resiliency in Children



St Anthony's School

Seatoun

26 July 2023

Dr. Chris Bowden
Faculty of Education,
Victoria University of Wellington
chris.bowden@vuw.ac.nz

Outline

- Sources of stress.
- What is resilience?
- Psychological resilience.
- What contributes to/helps build resilience?
- Tips and strategies for building resilience.
- Resilience robbers.

Sources of Stress

- Learning difficulties
- Disabilities
- Health issues
- Grief and loss
- Trauma
- Mental health issues, anxiety
- Finding and keeping friends
- Bullying and peer rejection
- Worries about climate change
- Pressures to conform
- Pressure to take dangerous risks
- Dangerous neighborhoods
- Global issues
- Problems at home, conflict
- Parental unemployment
- Incarceration
- Financial strains
- Relocation
- Remarriage/reparenting
- Relational stress/conflict
- Family breakup
- Others?

(Merrick et al., 2018)

Resilience Involves The Ability to...



Resist

- Withstand, not give up, perseverance.
- Push on and through despite the difficulties.



Rebound/Recover

- Effectively cope with challenging situations, uncertainty, chaos, stress.



Return/Reconfigure

- To a state of balance/stability.
- To see the learnings and growth from the experience.

True or False?

1. A person is born resilient?
2. Resilience is a quality that everyone needs?
3. Resilient people see themselves as victims of adversities/situations?
4. Children and young people who have experienced adversity but have learnt to cope have a good chance of entering adulthood with a set of skills, positive attitude and resources they can draw on.



True or False?

1. People develop adaptive responses when all stress is removed, and when adults protect children from tough problems and challenges.
2. A person learns something useful from a challenge.
3. People develop adaptive responses when they use their own tools or seek support, and this leads to a positive solution.



Psychological Resilience

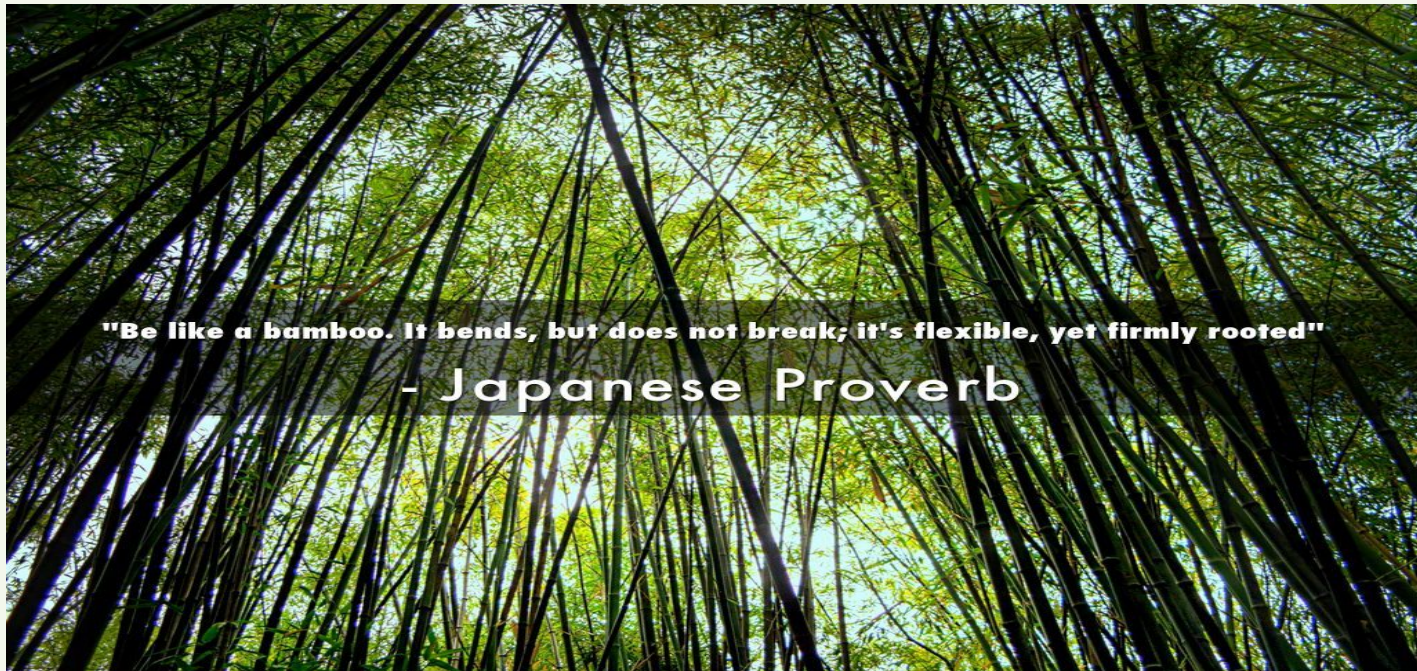
- **Psychological resilience** – helps protect children (youth and adults) from the effects of stress and boosts their ability to regain control (Southwick & Charney, 2018).
- **What Helps Build Children's Resilience?**
 - A flexible and resilient mindset.
 - A set of tools and skills to manage difficult times.
 - A supportive and growth-minded family, school and community.



(Boniwell & Tunariu, 2019)

Flexibility

- Capacity to remain flexible in our thoughts, feelings and behaviours when faced by life disruption, or extended periods of pressure, so that we emerge from difficulty stronger, wiser and more able (Pemberton, 2015, p.2)







Challenges and Stressors

- The **timing and amount of stressors/challenges** makes a difference.
- Stressors can accumulate, pile up and overwhelm, heightening vulnerability.
- **One-off serious crises** and **persistent life challenges** have an impact on children and the whole family/whānau system.
- **Past experiences of coping** (success and failure) also shape current responses.
- Challenges can be an opportunity for children and families/whānau to become stronger, together.

Control - Self-Regulation

- Resilient children can identify and regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour.
- Emotional Awareness** is important.

Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
			
Low	Happy	Wobbly	Angry
Running Slow	Good to Go	Caution	STOP
unhappy tired withdrawn tearful	positive proud calm focused	excited nervous frustrated annoyed	mad furious yelling aggressive

- Help children notice, name and talk about or express their feelings.
- Co-regulation - model de-escalation, calming** and focusing say out loud – “taking a deep breath helps me calm down – lets try this together”.
- Let’s talk about how you feel.
- Let’s take a break.
- Let’s get moving.
- Help them to self-soothe and calm themselves and communicate clearly.



How to Regulate Your Emotions

Nawal Mustafa M.A.  thebraincoach

When I Feel...

I will...

Angry



Pause until I am able to think clearly so I can respond rationally instead of reacting.

Overwhelmed



Write down what I need to get done and focus on one task at a time based on importance.

Insecure



I will work on appreciating and accepting myself, flaws and all. I am more than I give myself credit for.

Rejected



I will acknowledge that this feeling sucks but I will not let it consume me. Rejection is redirection.

Discouraged



I will be kind to myself and remind myself of the reason why I am trying. I will use that as my strength.

Anxious



Focus on the present moment and take deep breaths to regulate my nervous system

Managing Anxiety

- **Focus on the present** (anxiety is a future focused problem).
- **Build locus of control.**
- Explore:
 - What stressors are within and outside of personal control?
 - How does it feel when they cannot control something?
 - How can they cope when things happen that are out of their personal control?
- **Build distress tolerance** (not avoidance of triggers).
 - Unhook self from negative emotions (It's just a bit of anxiety).
 - Negative emotions come in waves, but I can ride them out.
 - I have choices, I can pause and shift my focus and energy onto achieving my goal rather than feeding the emotions.

FOUR CORE STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY

1. ATTENTION - CENTERING TECHNIQUES

To neutralize anxiety, it can often help to use techniques designed to focus attention beyond anxious thoughts.



MEDITATION



BREATHING



VISUALIZATION

2. EXPRESSIVE, CREATIVE STRATEGIES

To channel anxious thoughts or feelings in more productive ways, we might identify specific outlets to express creativity, such as working on a project, drawing, and athletics.



WORKING ON A PROJECT



ARTS



PHYSICAL MOVEMENT

3. REFLECTION EXPLORATION STRATEGIES

To monitor where anxiety arises, become more aware of anxiety triggers, and reflect on anxious thoughts and feelings, we might try strategies that foster self-observation.



JOURNALING



SELF-MONITORING



COMMUNICATION

4. HEALTHY LIFESTYLE VALUES

To reduce residual feelings of anxiety, it could help to turn attention toward healthy habits, healthy relationships, healthy pleasures, and a healthy environment.



NUTRITION



RELATIONSHIPS



EXERCISE

Reset

- 4,3,2,1
 - 4 things you see,
 - 3 things you hear,
 - 2 things you smell,
 - 1 thing you feel
-
- This will take you out of stressful situation (Snipes, 2017).



It Is What It Is, Acceptance

- **Waves, Clouds** – you can't stop them, you notice them, they pass.
- **Radical acceptance** – this is not same as agreeing with it (this is the way it should be) it is saying (this is how it is in this moment), and (I can choose how the next moment is going to be). Now what do we do to fix the situation, improve the moment.

what is acceptance?

IT'S RAINING

i don't like rain.
i wish it wasn't raining.
my day would be better
if it wasn't raining. my day is
ruined. every day is like this.
it's always like this. why does
it always rain when all i want is
for it to be sunny?

IT'S RAINING

yup.

Mastering Attention & Focus

- Appraisal of stress is important.
- Is this a **threat/crisis** or a **problem to be solved**?
- Help children reframe their thinking.
 - Will this matter next week or in 6 weeks?
 - Could this be an opportunity?
 - What would nana say?
- Help children **see problems as challenges that can be resolved with effort and support.**
- Help children **focus their attention on parts of the problem/situation they can change.**



Focus on Strengths First

- Help children identify tools, skills, attributes, relationships can they use to help them deal with issues.
- Focusing on strengths boosts children's confidence and reminds them of assets/tools they can use to cope.
- Encourage strengths-based talk
- "I can..."
- "I am good at...."
- "I am learning to..."



Problem Talk

vs

Solution Talk



problems



what isn't working



weakness



what isn't wanted



what is wrong



causes of the problem

Yes, but...

Cannot

Why?

If...

Problem is...

Sigh

focus



solutions



what is working



strengths



what is wanted



what is going well



action toward preferred future

Yes, and...

Can

How?

When...

Imagine...

Wow!

language

Help Children Focus on What They Can Control

Things I cannot control

Things I can control

What other people do

What I do – my behaviour and reactions

Other people's attitudes and efforts

My attitude and how much effort I put in

When other people accept or offer help

When I ask for help

What other people say

My words, what I say to myself and others

Other people's beliefs, opinions and thoughts

My beliefs, opinions and thoughts

How other people feel

How I feel

How much other people take care of themselves

My self-care - How much sleep I get, what food I eat, how much time I spend on social media

Personal Coping Mantra

- Help children tap into their **Inner Optimist**.
- Encourage children to engage in positive self-talk.



The Power of Positive Self Talk

Negative

- I can't do this.
- This is too much to handle.
- I hate this.
- I don't know what to do.
- Everyone will laugh at me.
- I can't handle this.
- I never get what I want.



Positive

- Take a deep breath and relax.
- I can deal with this.
- I'll do this one step at a time.
- Oh, well....
- Getting angry isn't going to help.
- I can manage this with some help.



Thoughts That Build Resilience



Thought

- I wont make it



Awareness

- Is this thought helpful?



Action

- What thought would be more helpful?

- **S – Stop!**

Just pause for a moment.

STOPP

- **T – Take a Breath**

Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out.

- **O – Observe**

What thoughts are going through your mind right now?

Where is your focus of attention?

What are you reacting to?

What sensations do you notice in your body?

- **P – Pull Back – Put in Some Perspective**

What's the bigger picture?

Take the helicopter view;

What is another way of looking at this situation?

What would a trusted friend say to me right now?

Is this thought a fact or an opinion?

What is a more reasonable explanation?

How important is this? How important will it be in 6 months' time?

- **P – Practice What Works – Proceed**

What is the best thing to do right now? For me? For others? For the situation?

What can I do that fits with my values?

Do what will be effective and appropriate (Vivyan, 2015).



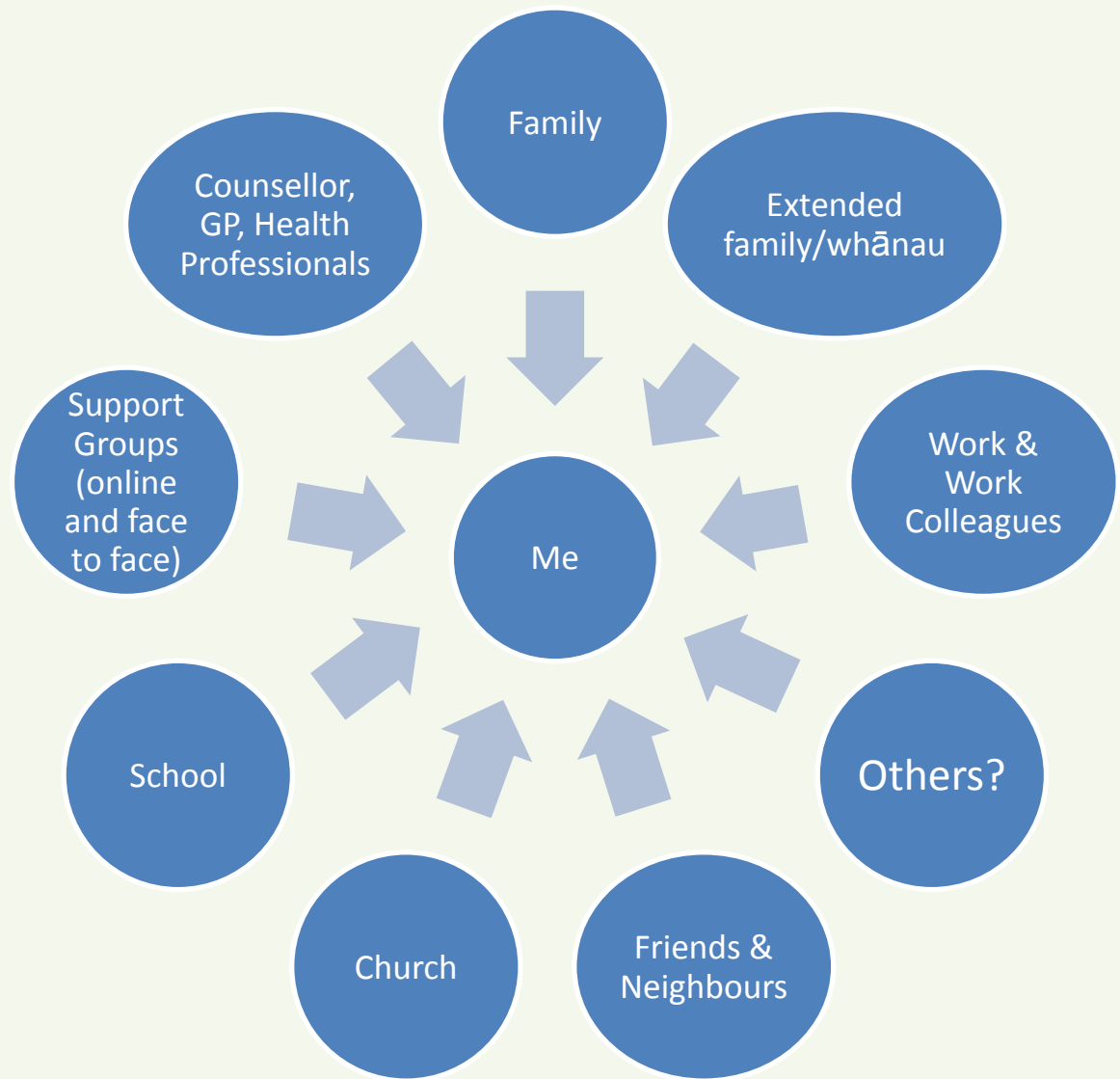
Communicating Needs

- **Remind children...**
- It is OK to ask for help.
- No one is perfect.
- Everyone makes mistakes. It is part of how we learn.
- Everyone needs help at sometime in their life.
- Accepting help means you can solve your problem quicker.



Widen Children's Support Network

- Help them connect with people who care.
- Bring others into the room.
- Encourage them to keep communication flowing (in good times and when they have bad days).



Practice Problem Solving

- When things go wrong or there is a problem help children stop and think:
- **How might I/we fix this?**
- **What are my options/choices?**
- **What are the costs/benefits/impacts on me and others of each option?**
- **What would happen if...?**
- **What might be a good first step?**
- **Who can I/we ask for help?**
- **What is the best option?**

5 Steps to Problem-Solve!

1. Identify the problem

2. Brainstorm solutions

3. Evaluate

4. Try it!

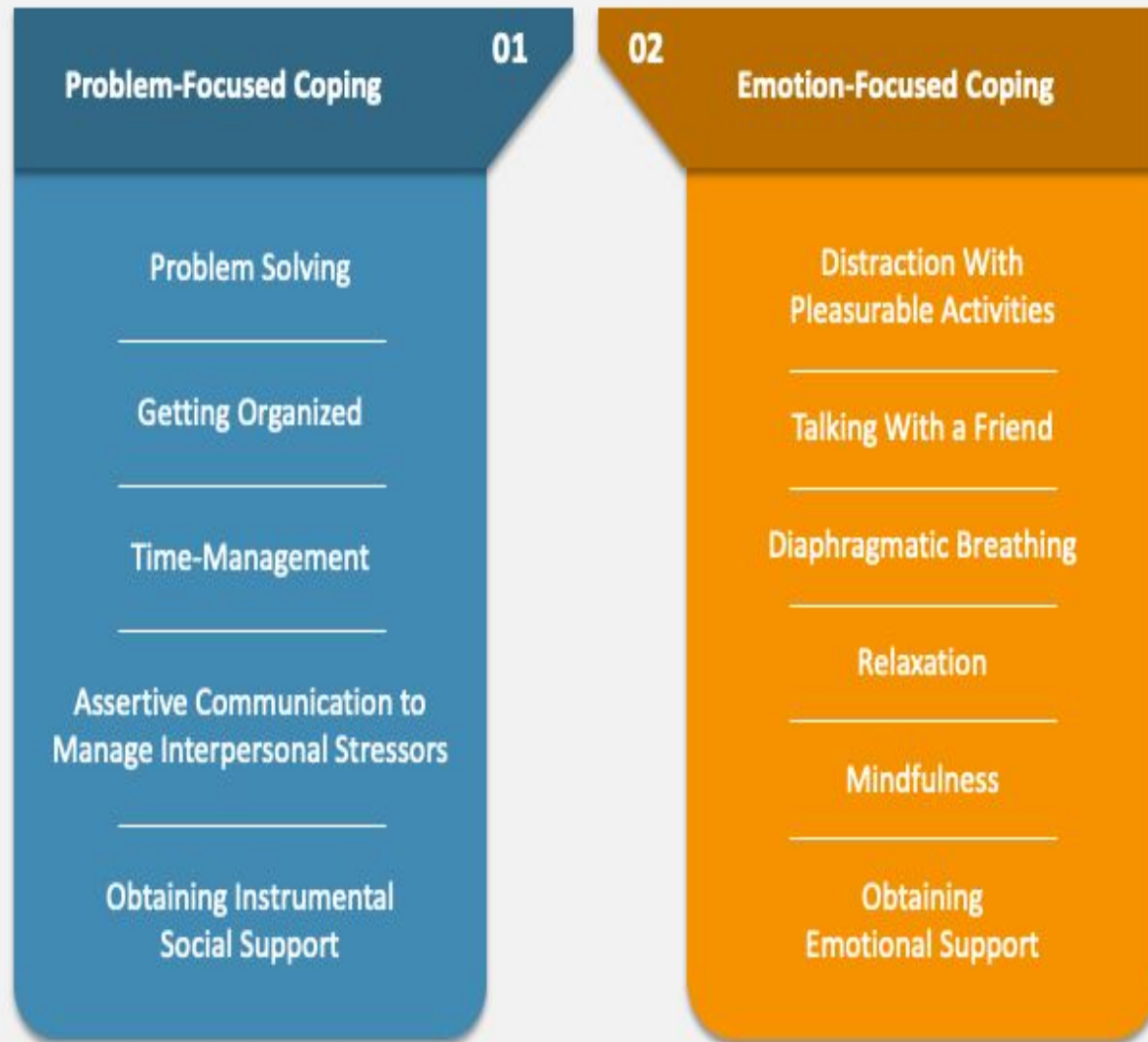
5. Check in



HaltonParents

halton.ca/haltonparents

PROBLEM AND EMOTION-FOCUSED COPING



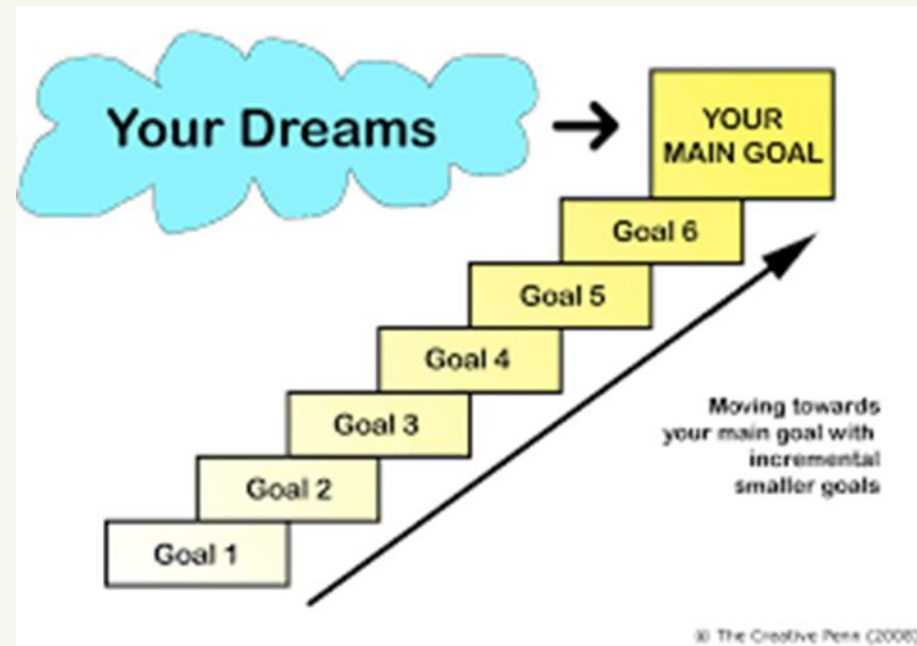
Inspiration and Motivation to Push Forward

- Help children find and use inspiration to help them keep going.

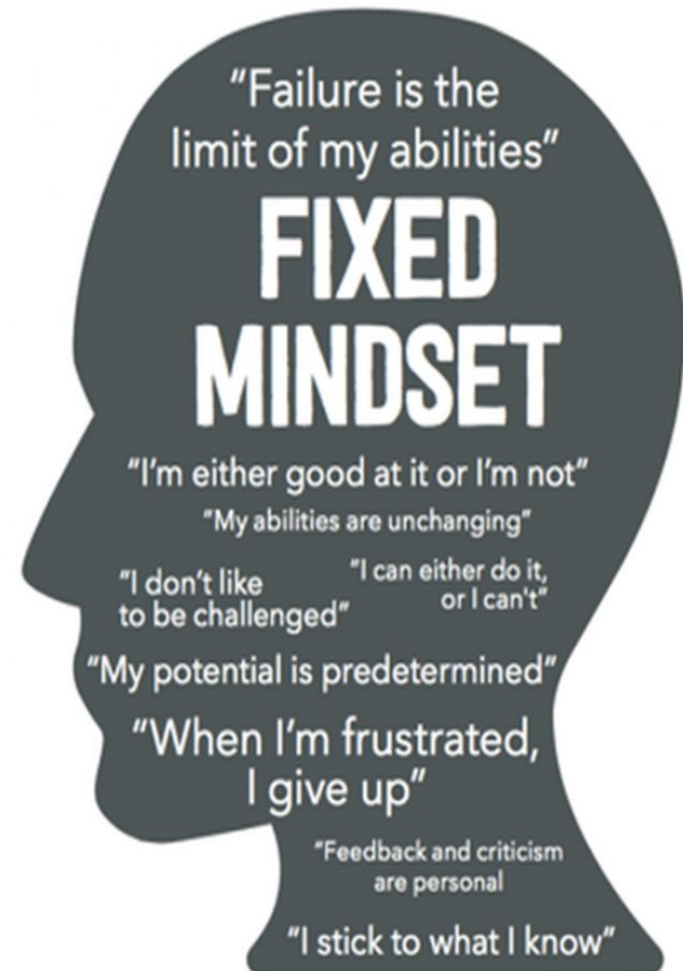


Foster and Praise a Growth Mindset

- Focus on **growth and development** – not just achievement.
- **Praise effort and perseverance.**
- Focus on **building competency coping** – how can skills used to cope with small stuff be used to cope with big issues?
- Highlight small changes and progress as important. **“You are heading in the right direction”**.



Foster a Growth Mindset



Learning and Benefit Finding

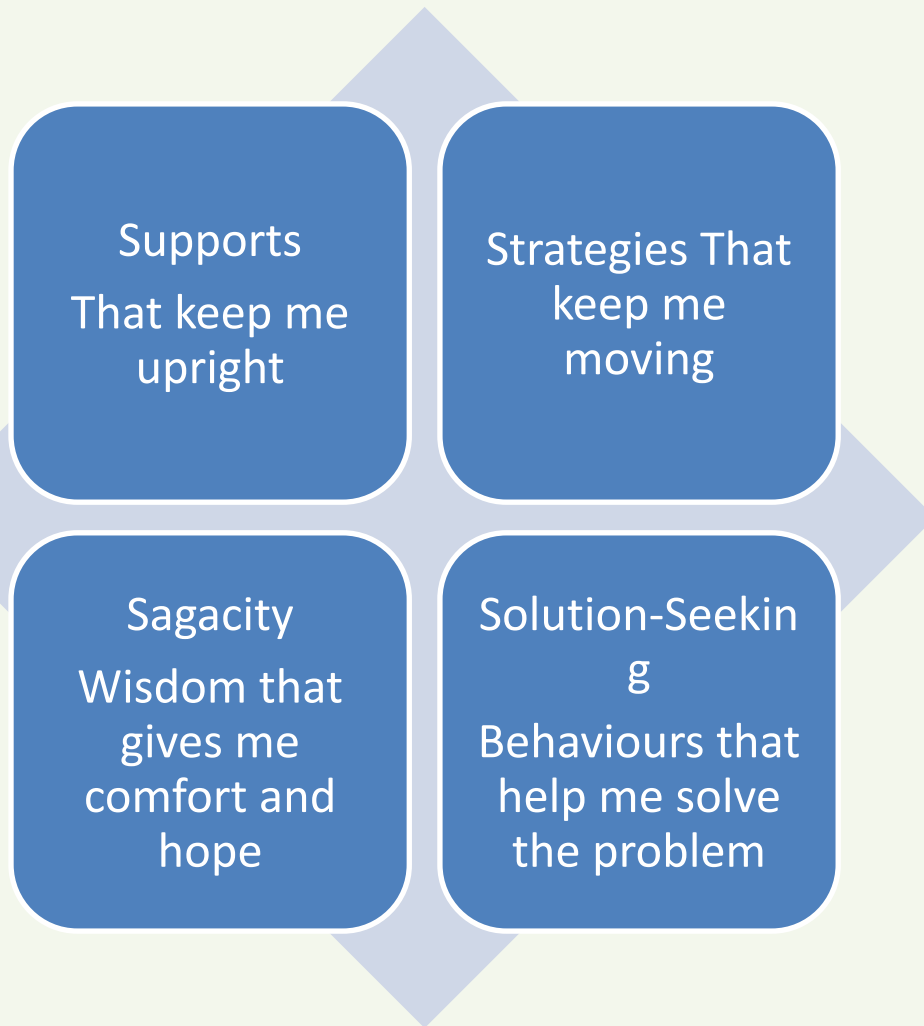
- Help children see what they have learned from the problem/challenge.
 - I am stronger than I thought.
 - I have friends and family who care about me.
 - We got through this by sticking together.
 - Asking for help is a good thing.



Identify and Focus on Values

- When stressful events occur, it can be difficult to stay connected to our values.
 - Children focus so much on the stress they lose focus on what is important.
 - Values can help us stay positive in dark times and guide our responses.
- Acceptance
 - Adventure
 - Compassion
 - Connectedness
 - Creativity
 - Family
 - Growth
 - Humour
 - Integrity
 - Learning
 - Loyalty
 - Openness
 - Peace
 - Relationships
 - Self-respect
 - Service

Help Children Develop a Resiliency Plan



- **Identify supportive people** (who kept you going, encouraged or gave you good advice).
- **Identify strategies** - that helped you cope with negative thoughts and feelings.
- **Identify wisdom** – what wisdom, words, music/lyrics helped you bounce back.
- **Identify solution seeking behaviours** – what did you do to solve the problem, seeking information, plan, how did you ask for help.

Foster and Praise A Learning Mindset

- **Don't bubble-wrap children/youth.**
- **Provide opportunities** for children to work through issues rather than avoid dealing with them.
- Children need practice coping with set-backs and challenges.
- **Praise effort** and **perseverance.**
- Highlight small changes and progress as important. **“You are heading in the right direction”**



I cant win every time,
but I can try hard and
get better each time.

Resiliency Robbers

- 1. Fighting all their battles for them.**
 - Give children the chance to develop their resourcefulness.
- 2. Making their problem, your problem.**
 - Make their problem, their problem (but help them solve it).
- 3. Giving children too much voice and choice.**
 - Make decisions for children and expect them to adjust and cope regardless.
- 4. Putting unrealistic or relentless pressure on children to perform.**
 - Keep expectations in line with children's abilities.
- 5. Letting children give in or up too easily.**
 - Encourage children to complete what they have started even if the results are not perfect.
- 6. Neglecting to develop independence.**
 - Don't routinely do for children what they can do for themselves.



Thank You



References

- Boniwell, I., & Tunariu, A. D. (2019). *Positive psychology: Theory, research and applications*. Open University Press.
- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Scribner.
- Henderson, N. & Milstein, M. (2003). *Resiliency in schools: Making it happen for students and educators* (Updated Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Hurlington, K. (2010). *Bolstering resilience in students: Teachers as protective factors* (What Works? Research Into Practice, Research Monograph 25). Ministry of Education, Ontario, Canada.
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ww_bolstering_students.pdf
- Merrick, M., Ford, D., Ports, K., & Guinn A. (2018). Prevalence of adverse childhood experiences from the 2011–2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System in 23 states. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172(11), 1038–1044. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.2537>
- Neenan, M. (2018). *Developing resilience: A cognitive-behavioural approach*. Routledge.
- Pemberton, C. (2015). *Resilience: A practical guide for coaches*. Open University Press.
- Snipes, D. (2017c). *Group counseling – Addressing anger, anxiety, addiction and depression*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsUSAoYnhvA>
- Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2018). *Resilience: The science of mastering life's greatest challenges*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tamres, L.K., Janicki, D. & Hegelson, V.S. (2002). Sex differences in coping behaviour: A meta-analytic review and examination of relative coping. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 6,(1) 2-30.