

MODULE 2.2

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

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Developing resilience

Objectives

- Schools understand the range, type and evidence-base of programs available to support student resilience.

Outcomes

All staff:

- understand 'resilience' and why it is important for young people, especially during adolescence
- enhance understanding of the importance of implementing evidence-based programs to gain maximum benefit for students' mental health and wellbeing
- understand staff members' roles in implementing programs and reinforcing learning throughout the school day
- increase awareness of the benefits of the various types of programs available, their underlying theoretical frameworks and some of the reasons for using the program chosen by the school.

School leadership, student wellbeing and MindMatters action team – these outcomes inform the above (i.e. this group undertakes the initial research and then informs the staff):

- develop an understanding of the theoretical models and available programs in order to determine the most appropriate programs for their school community
- increase skills in choosing the most appropriate programs for the various student groups
- develop awareness of the ways in which the school community will undertake programs as part of the whole school approach to students' mental health and wellbeing.

Key messages

- Evidence-based programs are one of the most effective approaches to help students develop their resilience skills within a secondary school setting.
- Resilience programs are underpinned by a variety of theoretical frameworks and have various levels of research evidence supporting them.
- The school staff-student relationship remains at the heart of the success of any school-based strategy to strengthen student resilience.

What is resilience?



Resilience refers to the ability of an individual, family or community to manage change (life challenges or adversities) so as to maintain mental wellbeing.

A young person's ability to be resilient can depend upon many things, particularly their relative balance of risk and protective factors (see **Module 1.3 What is mental health?**). Depending upon their situation, young people's resilience may vary. Importantly, specific situations or events that one person may find challenging, another may not.

Resilience, like mental health, is not static but is something that can change over time due to experiences and circumstance.

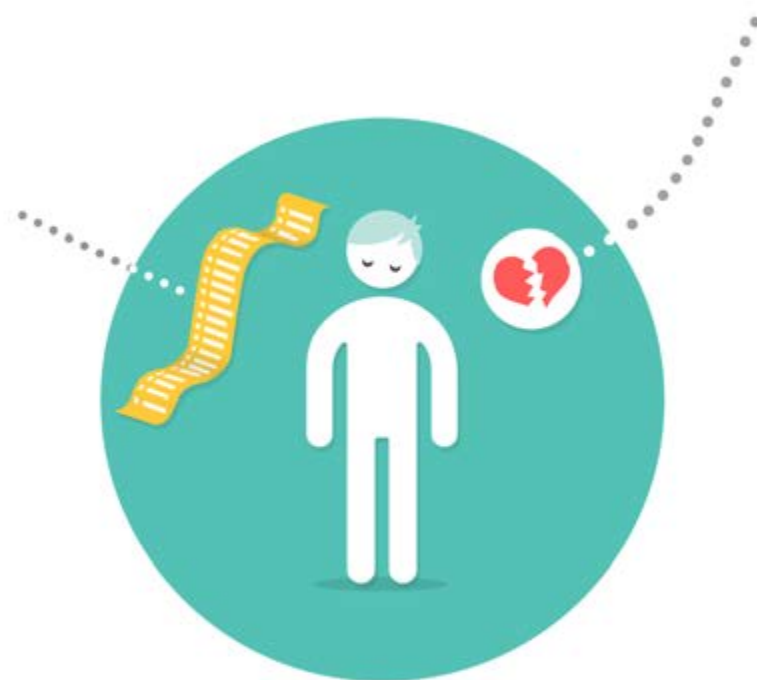
Why is resilience important during adolescence?

Resilience is particularly important for young people. The transition from being a child to an adolescent to a young adult occurs over a relative short period of time and the rapid changes in physical, psychological and social development presents with a number of challenges (e.g. managing mood fluctuations, dealing with romantic relationships, establishing an independent identity and study and school demands).

(See **Module 2.1 Adolescent development**)

Students who are more resilient are better able to stay on track with the biological, psychological and social demands of adolescence. Being resilient is associated with better academic performance and school behaviour and over the longer term is associated with fewer mental health difficulties and greater life opportunities (including employment and relationships).

Individual (as well as family and community resilience) is something that can be developed over time. Students can be supported to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to cope with common life challenges such as school, study and relationship issues and the more significant ones such as moving away from family and friends, family break up or even the death of someone close.



How schools can strengthen student resilience



Schools are places where young people spend a great deal of their time, and as such they play a key role in the development of students' resilience. This occurs in a range of ways — via formal teaching opportunities and the informal learning that occurs through modelling and practice of new skills.

MindMatters advocates the use of evidence-informed structured programs, where possible, to develop student knowledge and skills for resilience. Furthermore, schools can help young people to generalise and reinforce these skills outside program sessions by embedding these processes and skills in:

- everyday and incidental interactions with students
- regular academic curriculum
- support systems, e.g. learning support networks, home room structures, provision of school counsellors
- student leadership and participation processes (see **Module 2.4 Empowering students**)
- the development of relationships with peers and staff (see **Module 1.4 Relationships and belonging**)
- regular feedback to students (reinforcing students when they exhibit resilient behaviours or attitudes).

Perhaps the most critical point here is for school staff to recognise their capacity as role models to influence student resilience. Staff can demonstrate resilient attitudes and skills in how they manage everyday challenges and stress, including talking to students about how they deal with setbacks.

Module 2.3 Resilience programs and planning provides an overview of effective strategies for planning and coordinating student resilience programs in schools.

Theories underpinning resilience programs

Current resilience programs seeking to support student knowledge, skills and capacities to manage life challenges and maintain mental wellbeing tend to be underpinned by a number of overlapping theoretical approaches. These include:

- Social and emotional learning
- Cognitive behavioural approaches
- Positive psychology
- Mindfulness.



Each of these theoretical approaches emphasises somewhat different sets of knowledge, skills or capacities to strengthen student resilience (described below). Each of these approaches is supported by research evidence, although there are differences in the research evidence for individual programs. In general, these approaches are complementary and either explicitly or implicitly recognise the following as important features of student resilience:

- awareness of, and ability to manage, emotions and behaviour
- ability to focus on positive or helpful ways of thinking.

Moreover, each of the above approaches recognises that no young person 'is an island' and that resilience develops best in supportive environments that provide opportunities for students to develop and generalise their skills.

MindMatters is using 'resilience programs' as an umbrella term for a variety of programs (for example, student wellbeing, life-skills, personal and social development, character education, as well as positive psychology, cognitive-behavioural, mindfulness and SEL programs). It is also important to note that in reality, many resilience programs utilise a mix of the theoretical approaches identified in this module.

Social and emotional learning

The area of social and emotional learning or SEL has its historical roots in Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and subsequent research into social competence programs. There are various conceptualisations of SEL, however in simple terms it is the process of developing students' knowledge and skills to regulate emotional and social aspects of their lives to successfully manage life tasks and challenges. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in the United States figures prominently with respect to research and advocacy for SEL in schools and provides a number of resources including an evidence-based programs guide.

CASEL identifies five core social and emotional competencies for students to develop. These are:

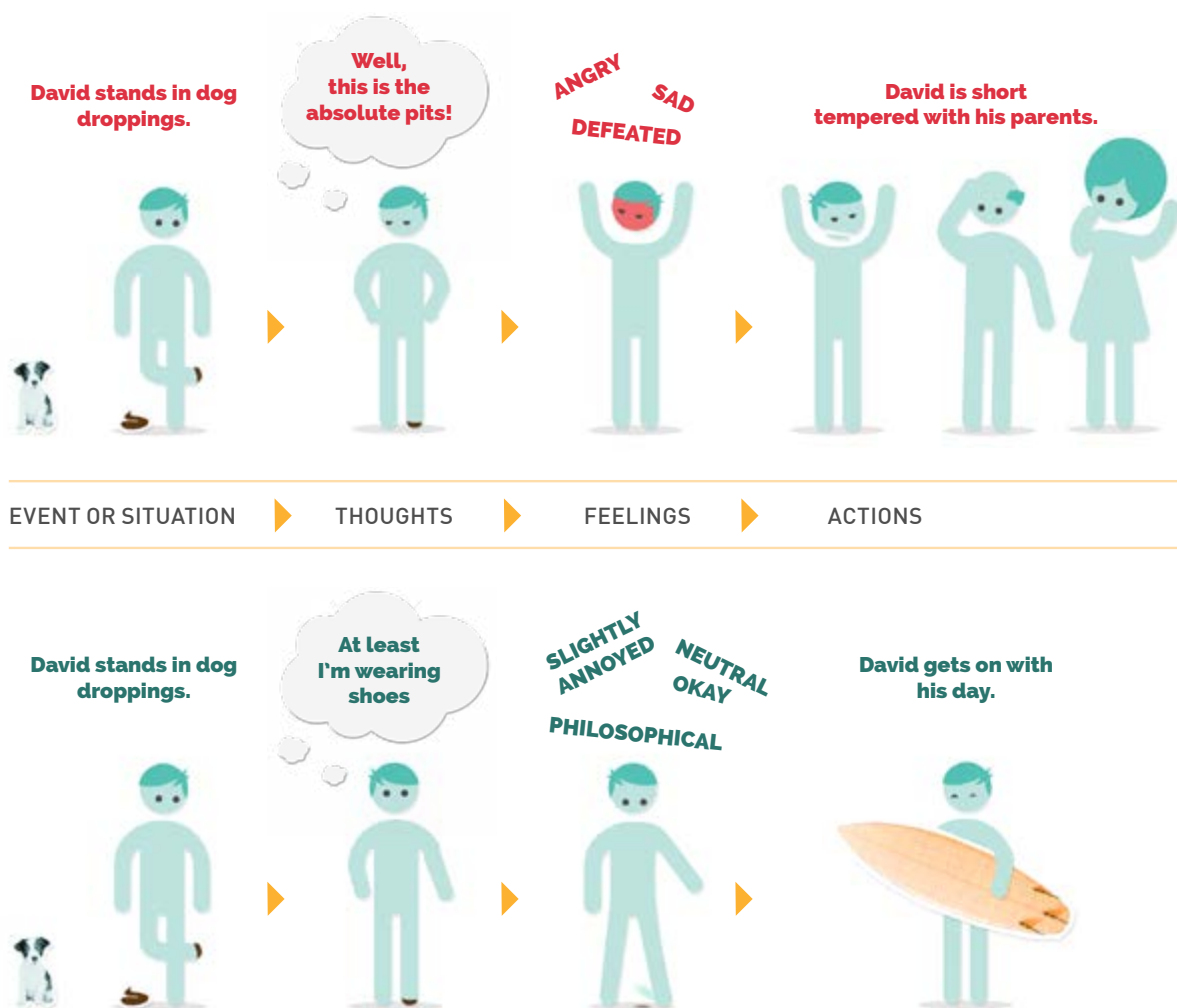
- **Self-awareness**
Identifying and recognising emotions; recognising personal interests and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
- **Self-management**
Regulating emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and motivating oneself to persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward the achievement of personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately.
- **Social awareness**
Being able to take the perspective of and empathise with others; recognising and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences.
- **Relationship skills**
Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation and resistance to inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and constructively resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed.
- **Responsible decision-making**
Making decisions based on a consideration of all relevant factors, including applicable ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms; the likely consequences of taking alternative courses of action; evaluation and reflection.

While specific SEL core competency focused programs are more commonly available for primary schools (for example, KidsMatter Primary uses SEL as its overarching framework for student resilience – providing a Programs Guide that maps programs against the five SEL core competencies), there are some programs that cover junior secondary school years (for example, the Social Decision Making and Social Problem Solving program).

Reviews have found SEL programs improve student skills as well as lead to improved academic performance, fewer behavioural problems and reduced emotional distress (Durlak, et al. 2011).

Cognitive behavioural

The cognitive behavioural approaches to resilience historically stem from clinical interventions for common mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety. Cognitive behavioural (CB) resilience programs focus on the interactions between thoughts, feelings and behaviours. The underlying principle of these approaches is that how an individual thinks about an event or situation will affect how they feel and what they do. In other words, when an event happens to a person it is their interpretation of the event, rather than the event itself, that leads to the experience of certain emotions and the subsequent actions that follow.



The link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours will be evident to staff in their daily interactions with students. For example, two students may receive exactly the same grade for an assignment but have completely different responses. One student may see this as an outstanding success and feel a sense of pride and accomplishment, whereas another may view this as an obvious failure and become despondent.

The main thrust of cognitive behavioural approaches to resilience is helping students to identify and practise more helpful ways of thinking about challenging situations, so as to better manage subsequent emotions and behaviours.

Resilience programs that use cognitive behavioural principles generally assist students to:

- understand the connections between one's thoughts, emotions and behaviours
- reflect on everyday challenging situations and some of the negative or self-defeating thinking patterns that can emerge
- identify more helpful ways of thinking or alternative ways of viewing challenging situations.

Reviews of cognitive behavioural-based resilience programs have found them to be effective in preventing anxiety and depression symptoms, at least over the short-term (Merry et al., 2004; Weare & Hind, 2011).



Positive psychology

Historically, psychology has focused on identifying effective approaches to addressing various mental health difficulties. Positive psychology is a relatively new branch of psychology that shifts the focus from trying to identify what is going wrong, to understanding how we maximise mental wellbeing for a satisfactory life. Positive psychology is defined as the “study of conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005).



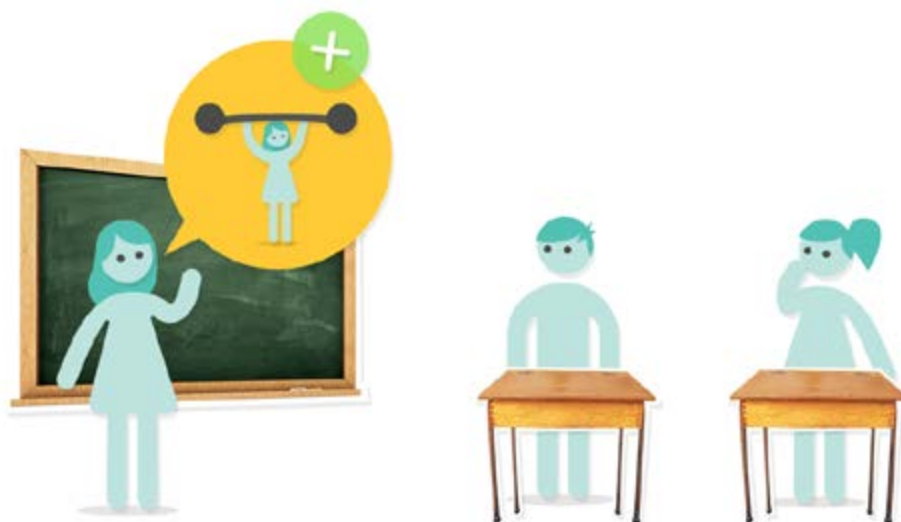
Positive education

Positive education represents the application of positive psychology in school settings. Martin Seligman, who developed some of the early cognitive theories of depression, has been an important figure in the positive education movement. He defines positive education as education for both traditional skills and for happiness. His PERMA model for psychological wellbeing (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) provides one approach to measuring student wellbeing (Seligman et al., 2009).

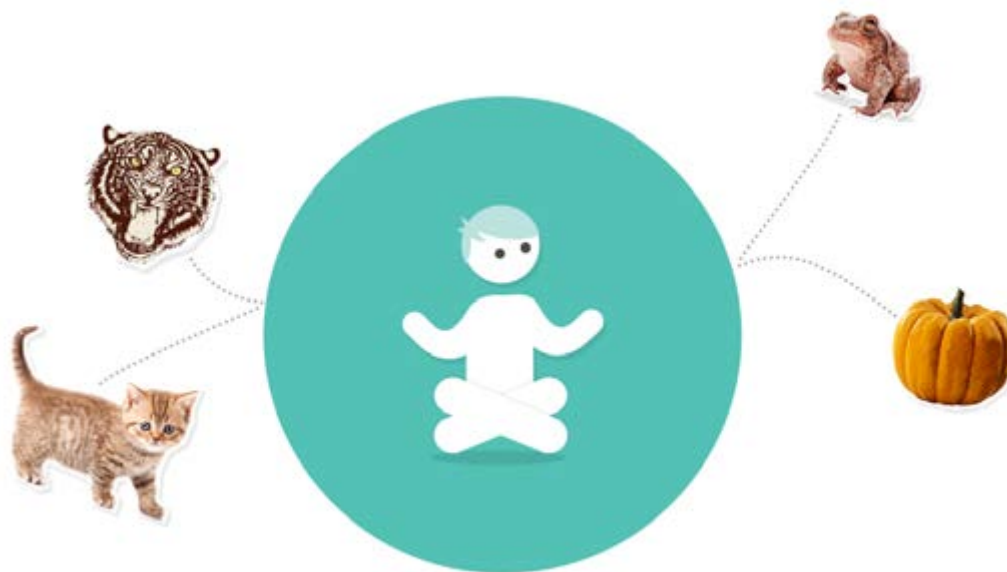
Positive psychology, as applied in schools, can incorporate a number of approaches and activities around key themes (for example, positive emotions, positive relationships and finding meaning). Some examples include:

- performing small acts of kindness
- identifying and using one's signature strengths
- keeping a gratitude diary, blessings journal or writing a letter of gratitude
- learning to forgive
- making changes in your life to match your priorities
- being conscious and 'savouring' experiences that give you pleasure
- seeking out 'flow' experiences (activities that fully engage your attention and leave you with a sense of accomplishment).

One review of school-based positive psychology approaches concluded that the programs were associated with improved student wellbeing, relationships and academic performance (Waters, 2011).



Mindfulness approaches



Mindfulness, which has its roots in Buddhist practice, has emerged in modern psychology as a useful and distinctive method of managing emotions. While various definitions and conceptualisations of Mindfulness exist, one of the more common definitions is that it is “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness approaches are based on the belief that by connecting with the present moment and calmly observing our thoughts, feelings and sensations we increase our self-awareness and improve our capacity to manage our thoughts and emotions. Mindfulness can be practised through meditation and contemplation exercises but may also be cultivated through paying attention to one’s everyday activities such as eating, gardening, walking, listening and school-based activities such as class work.

Mindfulness practices are also often incorporated under positive psychology approaches. Mindfulness exercises in the classroom often include relatively simple breathing meditations. Research into mindfulness approaches with children and adolescents have reported improved focus and concentration and reduced stress, but research is generally limited (Kuyken et al., 2013).

Some common resilience programs used in secondary schools

MindMatters will be developing a programs guide for schools to review various resilience programs. Below are some of the main programs currently being used by secondary schools.

Aussie Optimism is an evidence-based mental health promotion program for children in primary and lower secondary schools. It focuses on building competencies in children, teaching practical skills and strategies relating to social and emotional wellbeing.

www.healthsciences.curtin.edu.au/teaching/psych_aussie_optimism.cfm

Bounce Back! is a wellbeing and resilience program for children and young people from kindergarten through to middle school. It provides a collection of practical classroom strategies to help young people cope with the complexity of their everyday lives and learn to 'bounce back' when they experience sadness, difficulties, frustrations and hard times.

www.bounceback.com.au

My Friends Youth is a resilience program that aims to increase social and emotional skills and prevent anxiety and depression in young people 12 to 15 years.

www.pathwayshrc.com.au/tag/friends-for-life

Passport Program is a prevention curriculum program for students in grades 9 to 12 to learn positive mental health concepts by developing self-acceptance, personal relationship skills, problem-solving and decision-making strategies and skills to deal with troublesome emotions.

www.researchpress.com/books/817/passport-program

The **Penn Resiliency Program** (PRP) teaches cognitive-behavioural and social problem-solving skills to late primary school and middle school students.

www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/prpsum.htm

Program Achieve – part of You Can Do It Education – provides curriculum lessons for young people 12 to 16+ years. The lessons are designed to develop young people's social and emotional capabilities with respect to the following key themes: confidence (academic, social), persistence, organisation, getting along and resilience.

www.youcandoiteducation.com.au/AboutYouCanDoIt

Resourceful Adolescent Program – Adolescent (RAP-A) is a universal resilience building program for teenagers. It consists of 11 sessions of approximately 50 minutes duration incorporating both cognitive-behavioural and interpersonal approaches to improve coping skills and build resilience.

www.hlth.qut.edu.au/psyc/rap

Second Step is a classroom-based social-skills program for children 4 to 14 years of age that teaches social and emotional skills aimed at reducing impulsive and aggressive behaviour while increasing social competence.

www.secondstep.org

SenseAbility is a strengths-based resilience program to enhance and maintain emotional and psychological resilience and is designed for those working with young people aged 12 to 18 years.

www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/schools-and-universities/secondary-schools-and-tertiary/senseability

Smiling Mind is an online and web-based mindfulness meditation program designed to assist people in dealing with the pressure, stress and challenges of daily life.

www.smilingmind.com.au/education-program/#sthash.wp3Qn30g.dpuf

The **Social Decision Making/Problem Solving** program aims to develop self-control, social awareness and effective decision-making skills in children from Kindergarten through to Year 8.

www.ubhcisweb.org/sdm

Values Education is an educational program that provides schools with a structured resource to develop and promote core values in children and young people up to age of 15 years (e.g. respecting yourself, respecting others)

www.ricgroup.com.au/product/values-education-toolkit

Useful links

- **The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**
www.casel.org
- **Australian Association for Cognitive and Behaviour Therapy**
www.aacbt.org
- **Oxford Mindfulness Centre**
www.oxfordmindfulness.org
- **Positive Psychology Center**
www.positivepsychology.org

MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools developed by *beyondblue* with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health.

See more MindMatters resources at www.mindmatters.edu.au

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