

MODULE 2.3

# RESILIENCE PROGRAMS AND PLANNING

# Table of contents

Objectives	3
Outcomes	3
Key messages	3
What is a resilience program?	4
Why use a resilience program?	5
A whole school approach to resilience	6
Effective teaching strategies	7
How to choose a successful resilience program	8
Successfully implementing and sustaining resilience programs	9
Key considerations in program selection	10
Who and how?	10
Which student groups should participate (universal vs. targeted)?	11
Program length – number of sessions	11
Curriculum	12
Involvement of and communication with parents about the program	14
Evaluating your program and available tools	15
References and key readings	16

# Resilience programs and planning

## Objectives

- Students participate in evidence-based skills-based programs within regular school curriculum.
- School leadership plans and coordinates effective program delivery across the school.
- School staff provide information to parents about the school's skills development programs and seek to work collaboratively with parents to assist skill development.

## Outcomes

All staff:

- understand what a resilience program is
- understand how all staff can contribute to student resilience through their everyday interactions with students, by providing opportunities to practise and reinforce their skills
- increase awareness of how a whole school community approach is the most effective model for developing student resilience
- understand the factors associated with successful implementation of student resilience programs.

School leadership, student wellbeing and MindMatters action team:

- strengthen understanding of effective approaches to planning and coordinating student resilience programs
- support decision-making processes regarding how student resilience programs will be implemented and sustained.

## Key messages

- Ideally, resilience programs are delivered as part of the whole school approach to student mental health and wellbeing.
- Program planning and coordination by a senior school leadership or action team is important to achieving program success.
- Programs that meet the needs of the school community, taking into account student, staff and parent views, are more likely to be sustained over the longer term.
- Programs are more effective when delivered as intended by the program developers (i.e. when staff understand and stick to core principles of the program).
- Staff can support students to develop their skills outside the classroom by providing opportunities for students to practise their skills and by reinforcing their attempts.

# What is a resilience program?

MindMatters defines a resilience program as a ready-made set of lessons (or sessions) that seek to explicitly teach or strengthen skills or capacities for students to manage life challenges, so as to maintain mental wellbeing. There are a number of theoretical models that underpin 'resilience' programs with the following representing some of the more common or emerging models:

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

These theoretical models are overviewed in **Module 2.2 Developing resilience**

Many resilience programs utilise a mix of theoretical models and approaches. Some of the theoretical models underpinning resilience programs have evolved from clinical practice (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness approaches). Increasingly, resilience programs are focusing more on developing students' strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses or deficiencies.

In this context it is important to note that MindMatters is using 'resilience programs' as an umbrella term for a variety of programs such as student wellbeing, life-skills, positive psychology, cognitive-behavioural, mindfulness and SEL.



# Why use a resilience program?



**Using an evidence-based ‘resilience’ program is a great way to provide students with proven means of developing their skills and capacities to effectively deal with everyday life challenges.** Effective resilience programs have been shown to improve student behaviour, attendance, learning and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011).

Resilience programs offer a structured approach for schools to develop students’ skills. They offer evidence-informed theoretical frameworks from which the school can work, resources and materials for implementation and evaluation and guidelines about how to achieve the best outcomes possible. With many programs, there is teacher training specific to that program to assist schools to get started.

Using a tried and tested program makes preparation and planning much more straightforward for schools while an evidence-based program also offers clear information about effectiveness and expected outcomes.

# A whole school approach to resilience

To get the most out of resilience programs they should be part of a wider whole school approach to resilience. Some of the key features of a successful whole school resilience approach include:

- school leadership is driving implementation and providing ongoing support
- programs are integrated into curriculum and planned
- broader policies and practices are in place that support school community resilience
- staff have 'bought into' the program and work to develop their own skills for resilience
- every adult in the school can be a teacher of resilience
- parents and families understand and support the school's work in this area.



## Effective teaching strategies

The effective teaching of resilience is grounded in respectful and emotionally responsive relationships between students and school staff. In particular, schools look to create an environment that provides opportunities for students to embed and reinforce their skills and capacities for resilience. This can occur through:

- everyday and incidental interactions
- regular academic curriculum
- support systems, e.g. learning support networks, home room structures, provision of school counsellors
- student leadership and participation (or empowerment) processes (see **Module 2.4 Empowering students**)
- regular reinforcement and feedback to students about their developing skills
- teacher role-modelling.

The way in which teachers view and undertake their teaching role is also critical. Teachers who conceptualise their role as a facilitator who guides their students' learning, are more likely to provide opportunities for students to think through ideas and resolve problems, providing incidental learning and reinforcing learning opportunities. Therefore the role of the teacher-student relationship and how teachers teach, relate, interact and model their resilience skills with students, cannot be understated in the development of student skills.



# How to choose a successful resilience program

A school will want to ensure that the time and resources being invested in a program are not only well spent, but will also have the desired impacts on student resilience and mental health. Resilience programs are more likely to be successful in strengthening student resilience when they:

- are based on a sound theoretical framework that incorporates an understanding of adolescent development, learning principles, and prevention science
- have some research evidence of effectiveness
- actively engage students
- have clarity with respect to objectives, implementation guidelines, tools and resources
- provide sufficient training and support (if staff delivered)
- provide structured activities to guide students toward achievement of specific goals
- are interactive in nature (e.g. may use coaching, cooperative learning or role-playing scenarios).
- are sustainable and consider ongoing costs and staff turnover.

As a general rule, resilience programs are more effective when they are delivered over the longer term with sufficient intensity (i.e. more sessions rather than fewer) and in the manner intended by the program developer (often referred to as 'program fidelity'). Program developers generally recognise schools will, at times, look to adapt some of the content to meet student needs or address timeline pressures. In considering adaptations, schools ideally will understand and stick to the underlying principles on which the program is based and consult any implementation guidelines provided.

Ultimately, it is important to remember that a structured student resilience program is not a silver-bullet and will not fix all the problems students face. Schools that can back up resilience programs with a supportive school community, where student-staff-parent relationships are positive and where individuals feel they are valued, will achieve better outcomes for students.

## A note on the evidence base

Resilience programs chosen by schools ideally have some research evidence for effectiveness. While many programs have undergone some form of evaluation, the nature of these evaluations can vary widely and this can make it difficult for schools to critique the evidence.



# Successfully implementing and sustaining resilience programs



Research shows that schools often struggle to successfully implement and sustain student resilience programs over the longer term. To improve their chances of success it is important that schools are aware of program options and make conscious decisions around their choices, in particular:

- the extent to which the program is a good 'fit' with the school's mission, values, goals, and curriculum
- the extent to which the program is viewed as meeting students' needs and able to engage them
- the level of school community buy-in (staff, students and parents)
- the amount of resourcing required (e.g. staffing resources and funding for training and materials)
- the level of ongoing leadership support and planning required.



## Key considerations in program selection

There are a number key considerations in selecting a resilience program:

### Who and how?

One of the key questions for a school leadership team is whether school staff or external facilitators should deliver the program or whether the school should opt for an online program, which reduces the resourcing demands.

#### Teacher-led delivery

Having classroom teachers deliver resilience programs has benefits when teachers are actively engaged in the program and incorporate changes into their own teaching behaviours to support the program. One of the key considerations for teacher-led programs is teacher knowledge and confidence to deliver the material and whether professional development and support is required.

Some of the main benefits of teacher-led programs include:

- Staff are able to effectively model the target skills or behaviour, e.g. coping strategies. Staff members who have sound interpersonal skills are better-placed to teach those skills to students and to model them within their interactions.
- Improved mental health and wellbeing of staff. Skills and techniques such as stress-management and problem-solving skills have been found to improve staff mental health and wellbeing (Tyson, Roberts, Kane, 2009).

#### External facilitator delivery

Relying on external educators or facilitators to deliver resilience programs offers schools access to expert knowledge and potential links with community support agencies and services. The main challenges with this approach are sustainability and the capacity to support student generalisation of skills through everyday interactions. In addition, it does not maximise the benefits of the teacher-student relationship in fostering respectful relationships that model helpful and healthy skills for resilience.

#### Online delivery

Advancements in web-based technologies are rapidly expanding the possibilities for student resilience programs (as well as in areas of staff professional development and online tools for evaluating program impacts). Increasingly, resilience programs are being developed or revised for online delivery, including web-based and mobile phone apps, which enable students to access the content directly rather than school staff needing to deliver the content. Some of the advantages of online programs are that the sessions can be delivered in a standardised format and there is less pressure on staff knowledge and skills (and associated costs of professional learning). Ideally, schools opting for online programs will support students to access these programs in a variety of ways. These include general promotion and integration into relevant curriculum areas, as well as recognising the value of teachers' understanding and reinforcing key principles of the program or resource.

## Which student groups should participate (universal vs. targeted)?

All students are likely to benefit from participating in an evidence-based resilience program, particularly when the program also builds positive relationships and enhances communication across the school community. Reviews of SEL 'resilience' programs delivered to a broad range of students (i.e. not specifically for students who were experiencing specific difficulties) found improvements in student skills as well as improved academic performance, fewer behavioural problems and reduced emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011).

Some schools may prefer to deliver a resilience skills program to groups of students with specific needs (e.g. students who are disengaged from school, students who have trouble identifying or managing emotions or have poor coping skills, students who are anxious). By targeting a program to smaller groups of students who have specific needs, a school may be able to deliver a more tailored program, which ultimately provides greater benefits to individuals. **Module 4.7 Who can help?** focuses on programs and supports for students experiencing mental health difficulties.

## Program length – number of sessions

It is clear that skills to build resilience take time to develop, so ongoing skill development over year levels and across learning areas is necessary, particularly with the many changes occurring during adolescence. Greater duration enables a range of teaching strategies, including role-plays, skills training and feedback to be incorporated in the programs. This provides more opportunities for the acquisition of new skills and knowledge through practice, meaningful repetition and application of knowledge.



Programs delivered over the longer term tend to be more successful in strengthening student resilience.

## Curriculum

Secondary schools will vary in the structures that enable them to implement programs regularly and effectively through the curriculum (as recommended in the literature for effectiveness). Some of the possibilities include:

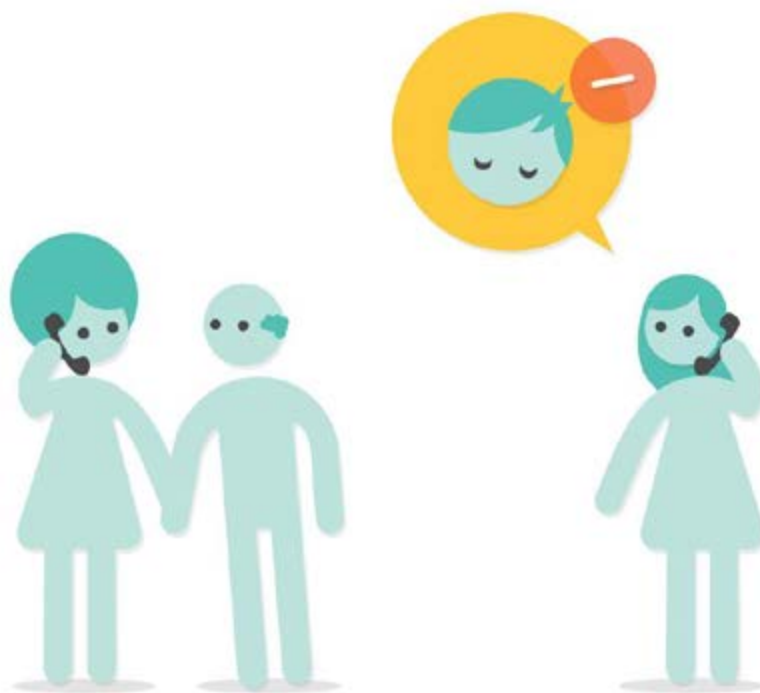
- **Home room or pastoral care arrangements**  
Although generally not long enough to introduce resilience skills they may provide regular opportunities to reinforce skills. For example, regular meditation sessions could be implemented during home room sessions.
- **Team approaches to classes**  
where students have a team of teachers rather than many teachers across their subject areas. This team may follow the students for a number of years. This enables relationships to develop between staff and students. Resilience programs could be incorporated throughout several curriculum areas in this type of arrangement as teachers communicate regularly and share curriculum ideas.
- **Health and physical education (HPE) curriculum**  
Traditionally this may have been the area in which resilience skills were explicitly taught. In a whole school approach, the HPE teaching staff may take a lead role in supporting other teachers with curriculum ideas or opportunities to reinforce learning.
- **Health days**  
As social and emotional wellbeing of students increasingly is linked to academic learning, it is recognised that efforts to enhance mental health will be of benefit. Health days could complement the day-to-day curriculum work by enhancing knowledge, providing links to services, engaging families and providing variety for students.
- **Peer support structures and cross-age tutoring**  
could be utilised to implement some aspects of the curriculum with older students running sessions or events for younger students (see **Module 2.4 Empowering students**).
- **Bringing classes together**  
Within-level or multi-level class groups could be brought together for some curriculum delivery. This would enable teaching staff to work together in delivering content.
- **Reflecting on existing structures in the school and finding creative ways to incorporate the sessions into the curriculum**  
Teachers with a mentoring or coaching role, for example, may support other staff.

The Australian Curriculum, through the HPE curriculum and the personal and social capability, provides schools with opportunities to make explicit links between resilience programs and their teaching and learning programs. One aim of the HPE curriculum is to enable students to develop and use personal, behavioural, social and cognitive skills and strategies to promote a sense of personal identity and wellbeing and to build and manage respectful relationships.

An evidence-based resilience program will help schools achieve this aim. In addition, the personal and social capability through the four organising elements: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management provides schools with another opportunity to develop and promote resilience. More detailed information of the structure and organisation of the HPE curriculum and the personal and social capability can be found on the Australian Curriculum website, [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au).



# Involvement of and communication with parents about the program



Families obviously play a crucial role in supporting young people's development of resilience and parents and other family members are models for young people in relation to attitudes and skills. Building partnerships between families and schools is an important way to generalise students' skills in the home. In addition, involving parents and families in the implementation of school-based resilience learning programs can benefit student behaviour as well as family wellbeing.

As part of a home-school partnership, the provision of information on resilience skills can enable families to be a part of any resilience program implementation in the school. Direct methods of communication such as:

- newsletters
- articles in the local newspaper
- presentations to school councils and parent bodies
- talking up resilience skills programs when school staff are participating in community activities (see **Module 3.1 Meeting parents' information needs**)
- student-led information and skill-building sessions for parents and families

are some useful ways for informing families about the school's resilience programs.

# Evaluating your program and available tools

Evaluation is an important component in implementing a student resilience program. It is important to know what is working, what is not, and what areas need further review or development. Evaluations can be used to support refinements to program delivery and provide evidence of program impacts or outcomes. Ideally, all key participants are represented in an evaluation of student resilience program – students, staff and parents. Some resilience programs have tools and evaluation suggestions built in to their resources. There are also other tools available for schools to use for evaluation such as the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Social-Emotional Wellbeing Survey:

[www.acer.edu.au/files/SEW\\_Sample\\_Report\\_Secondary\\_Jul\\_2012.pdf](http://www.acer.edu.au/files/SEW_Sample_Report_Secondary_Jul_2012.pdf)

The MindMatters student, staff and parent tools will also be useful for tools for evaluation.



To help maintain interest and engagement with stakeholders within the school community, relevant results gathered from evaluations should be shared with the groups who provided feedback.

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](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au)

# References and key readings

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