


## How can teachers develop children and young people's resilience in the classroom?

It is widely recognised that the capacity to cope with adversity and even be strengthened by it – resilience – is an important factor in children and young people's wellbeing.

Evidence shows that these coping strategies are learnable and teachable. Resilience is relevant for all children and young people, not just those who might be considered vulnerable.

- Counselling in Schools: A Blueprint for the Future, DfE, 2016



**A key way for schools to reduce the amount and intensity of mental health issues they face is to develop the resilience of children and young people.**

Some of this support might come through PSHE, counselling, or other interventions, but we should not overlook the ways in which resilience can be built moment to moment, day to day, as children and young people navigate the challenges of academic learning.

Everyday teaching can be a perfect arena for the development of resilience. With some simple techniques, which add little to their workload, teachers can help pupils to overcome and recover from challenges, to persevere through difficulties, to bounce back from failure, and to embrace mistake making as part of learning.

Resilience in the classroom will not automatically translate into resilience in all situations in life. However **teachers can help children and young people to develop mindsets and habits that can help them in other areas of life, as well as enabling them to experience a sense of success and self-worth in the classroom that can bolster their overall wellbeing and mental health.**

Here are five simple methods for developing young people's resilience:



## **1. Regularly express the belief that children and young people belong and can achieve**

A key reason we persevere with a challenge is our belief that we belong in a given environment and that we can ultimately be successful. Teachers can help to build children and young people's self-belief and sense of belonging. [E]ducators at every level', write Dweck, Walton and Cohen, 'can promote tenacity by sending the message, in word and deed, that their students truly belong and have great potential'.<sup>32</sup>

## **2. Talk explicitly about mistake-making and turn mistakes into opportunities for learning in the classroom**

Sometimes we see struggling and making mistakes as an indication of failure and a reason to give up. Teachers need to support children and young people to adopt the mindset that finding something difficult is part of the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills and that mistakes are opportunities for learning.<sup>33</sup>

If children and young people don't acquire these mindsets, they may give up when work becomes difficult and fall back into old habits. Pupils need to know, in Angela Duckworth's words, that 'the emotions of confusion and frustration are typical, and possibly essential, to learning'.

The first step here is simply for teachers to talk openly and frequently with pupils about the experience of making mistakes and the discomfort that can accompany it, sharing from their own experiences, and then to model and explain how mistakes can provide invaluable opportunities for learning.

Alongside this narrative, **teacher can introduce simple routines that give mistake-making a positive prominence in the classroom**, for example:

- Having a 'Best Mistake of the Day'
- Inviting children and young people to share the 'Classic Mistakes' they have made in a lesson that they think others could learn from
- Creating time to review and discuss useful mistakes as a class and highlighting the learning

When pupils recognise that mistakes are an essential part of good learning, and not a regrettable lapse, they are more likely to embrace challenging learning experiences and more likely to share their struggles as learning opportunities for others.

### **3. Use feedback to show pupils the progress they're making**

Feedback is perhaps a teacher's most powerful tool for developing their children and young people's self-belief and willingness to persevere through challenges.

The American Psychological Association's 'Top 20 Principles from Psychology for Teaching and Learning' states that:

**When students are learning a new task or struggling with an existing one, frequent praise following small degrees of improvement is very important, and when progress is evident, encouragement to persist can matter a great deal. Targeted feedback can also motivate students to continue to practice learning a new skill.**<sup>34</sup>

**Praise should be specific and focused on progress** ('it's fantastic you can now do x') **and effort** ('it's amazing to see the effort you're putting into this'), **not at the person** ('you're so good at maths'). Generic praise directed at an individual can lead them to avoid difficult work in order to preserve the appearance of being good at something.

#### **4. Teach strategies and provide tools for overcoming challenges**

As well as building self-belief, shifting mindsets around mistake-making, and praising effort and progress, teachers can provide children and young people with specific tools and strategies for helping themselves when they are finding something difficult and close to giving up.

These can include practical tools like:

- Checklists of actions to take when they are stuck (e.g. as a poster on the wall, or as a laminated card on tables)
- Instruction in using relevant subject-specific resources to help themselves
- Prompt questions or cues
- Peers support mechanisms

'Try to program scaffolds (e.g. hints, cues, prompts, additional research resources, or peers that help),' recommend John Hattie and Greg Yates, 'so that all learners feel able to move forwards in your classroom.'<sup>35</sup>

This might also include teaching children and young people methods for staying calm and handling their emotions when they feel frustrated. Dweck, Walton and Cohen suggest teaching pupils 'how to handle high pressure situations' – techniques like stopping and taking deep breaths, or visualising a safe place where they feel safe and in control.<sup>36</sup>

**By equipping pupils with methods for resolving their own problems and handling their emotions, they can get into the habit of persisting with challenging work under their own steam.**

## **5. Build a sense of team in the classroom**

When pupils feel like they're part of a team, they are more likely to take risks and make an effort. At best, a class of pupils can become a powerful mutual support network: developing ideas together; offering mutual assistance when they're struggling; acting as examples for one another; providing one another with feedback; and boosting one another's wellbeing and sense of self-worth.

Dweck, Walton and Cohen write that building a strong group dynamic and identity can help pupils 'learn not only that they will reach a higher standard, but also that they will help their classmates as a group to do so.' The experience of 'working with others', they continue, 'helps students to enjoy, value, and work hard on challenging tasks.'<sup>37</sup>

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## References

- 32** Dweck, C., Walton, G., and Cohen, G., 'Academic Tenacity: Mindsets and Skills that Promote Long-Term Learning', The Gates Foundation, 2012 <sup>31</sup>
- 33** Duckworth, A., 'Research Statement', [Online] The Duckworth Lab, 2015
- 34** American Psychological Association, 'Top 20 Principles from Psychology for preK-12 Teaching and Learning', 2015
- 35** Hattie, J. & Yates, G., Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn, Routledge, 2013
- 36** Dweck, C., Walton, G., and Cohen, G., 'Academic Tenacity: Mindsets and Skills that Promote Long-Term Learning', The Gates Foundation, 2012
- 37** Ibid.