

# Promoting resilience and wellbeing



## Fact Sheet

### What is resilience?

The term resilience is used in mental health literature to describe a person's capacity to cope with changes and challenges, and to bounce forward during difficult times. A resilient person is better able to cope with adversity such as negative life events and to maintain their social and emotional wellbeing. Resilient people still experience challenges and feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety and anger; however when these situations arise they are able to respond constructively and resolve them.

Resilience is influenced by a person's cognitions, behaviours and biology, and social and situational factors. Resilient people have skills and capacities that contribute to them maintaining positive social and emotional health and wellbeing. These include:

- Skills in communication – including clear communication, the capacity to be assertive when required, the ability to negotiate and resolve conflict, and willingness to ask for help and support when needed;
- Emotional understanding – the ability to understand and talk about one's own emotions and the feelings of others, and a sense of caring and empathy toward others;
- Social competence – the ability to form and maintain positive and respectful relationships that are beneficial for both people, drawing on positive communication skills and understanding of people's emotions;
- Problem-solving skills – the capacity to calmly analyse a problem, understand the practical and personal implications, and develop and implement constructive solutions; and
- A sense-of-self – belief and confidence in oneself, the capacity to take responsibility for one's own actions, a certain amount of age-appropriate

independence, and the ability to set realistic and rewarding goals and work toward them.

### What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is a positive state related to the enjoyment of life, feeling connected to others, the ability to deal with challenges, and having a strong sense of purpose and control. Wellbeing covers all facets of life, including mental, spiritual, physical and social wellbeing. Wellbeing is important as it contributes to a person's overall mental health.

### Benefits of resilience and wellbeing

Resilient children and young people have skills, coping strategies and resources which they can draw upon under difficult circumstances allowing them to positively resolve personal problems and deal with difficult events. Resilient young people can draw upon their social networks, their flexibility in finding solutions and their strong sense-of-self to support them until the situation improves. As a result, they will generally feel more positive and be able to effectively manage the social and emotional areas of their life much of the time.

This flows on to a reduced risk of mental health or behavioural problems, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviour, substance abuse and antisocial behaviour. There is also emerging evidence that suggests that young people who have such skills and resources are more likely to achieve school success, both in terms of academic outcomes and personal development.

Schools and teachers should take an active role in promoting the wellbeing of children and young people, because this will help with behaviour management and academic outcomes, as well as contributing to a healthier and happier school community.

### Building resilience and wellbeing

Resilience and wellbeing are dependent upon both internal and external factors. A person's innate way of looking at the





world and solving problems can influence their resilience and wellbeing – but people can learn new skills to help them respond more positively to life’s challenges. In a school setting, creating a supportive and caring environment is important. Young people are likely to behave and perform more positively in a classroom and school in which they feel safe and accepted. Young people who have difficult family experiences, such as anger, violence or abuse, may be particularly reliant on a supportive school environment for their wellbeing.

Schools can also teach or encourage specific skills (such as communication and problem solving), perhaps in the context of a subject on health or personal development. Such skills can also be incorporated into other learning areas or into a home room or pastoral care period.

This dual focus - on both the school/classroom environment and the incorporation of specific skills into the curriculum – means that all teachers (regardless of their learning area) can benefit from an understanding of how to build resilience and wellbeing. This will make your job easier in terms of behaviour management and promoting learning.

## How can teachers promote student resilience and wellbeing?

Research suggests that four factors are important in creating an environment that promotes resilience in young people. These are:

- An environment in which caring and support are considered important, creating a sense of connection and belonging;
- Developing students’ problem-solving skills and encouraging their autonomy;
- Positive and realistic expectations of the capacity and behaviour of a young person, with consistent guidelines and support to help them achieve their goals; and

- Genuine opportunities for participation and chances to contribute to decision making.

Teachers can apply these principles through the following:

### Relationships with others in the school community

Positive relationships with students and with others in the school community help to create a positive school environment and a sense of belonging. This demonstrates modelling of positive behaviour, which young people will see and may adopt themselves.

Show genuine interest in your students’ academic achievements but also in their other interests such as sport or hobbies. If possible, encourage young people to participate in the broader community as well, perhaps through sporting clubs, drama groups or other community activities. This will help them to develop a stronger sense of belonging both in the school and in the broader community.

Become involved in the school community beyond your own teaching area, to encourage the development of positive relationships and a sense of belonging. This will help to improve your own sense of belonging to the school and you will be modelling participation and positive relationships to others. Becoming involved might include helping out with fundraising, attending student performances, or being involved in cross-curricular special interest groups or working parties.

### Teaching style in the classroom

It is helpful to use a teaching style which offers both praise and constructive feedback, while reassuring the young person that you are willing to offer support to help them improve their performance. Avoid judgemental or dismissive feedback and recognise that young people learn in different ways and at different rates. At an individual level, for some students’ knowing they have the capacity for improvement may be more important than their academic position in the class or their long-term career or study goals.



Promote participation and group work in the classroom and encourage young people to listen to and respect others' opinions, even if they do not agree.

Create a classroom environment which respects personal and academic achievement and encourages high expectations. Within the parameters of the curriculum, use a variety of tasks for learning and assessment, to maintain interest and to give young people opportunities to learn and succeed in different ways.

## Disciplinary practices in the classroom and beyond

Disciplinary styles are also important. Establish and enforce clear and consistent guidelines for behaviour, in the classroom and beyond. Do not tolerate put-downs, racism or bullying in your classroom. Consider negotiating rules for behaviour with your students at the beginning of the year or term.

Rather than appearing judgemental, or blaming individuals or groups, focus on why behaviour is unacceptable or undesirable and encourage behaviour change. Certainly this involves discipline and you should be aware of the disciplinary procedures in your school, but it also may involve showing support and believing that individuals can change. Negative expectations tend to lead to further negative behaviour. If your school does not have a merit or reward system, consider implementing one in your classroom – for non-academic as well as academic achievements.

## School participation and involvement

Apart from these general strategies, you may find opportunities to promote skills such as problem solving and good communication in your classroom. The KidsMatter and MindMatters resources provide many classroom activities that can help you to do this, as do some other programs and resource materials. For more information visit:

- [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)
- [www.mindmatters.edu.au](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au)

## Maintaining and supporting teacher resilience

For teachers, maintaining resilience themselves is just as important as promoting resilience amongst their students. Teachers who are stressed and experiencing poor wellbeing and mental illness face additional challenges in supporting students' development. Maintaining their own resilience will ensure that teachers are physically and emotionally available to their students, and have increased capacity to model social and emotional competence. Resilience also contributes to personal health, job satisfaction and career longevity.

Research suggests there are four dimensions which demonstrate teacher resilience: these are social, emotional, motivational and professional. Within the following dimensions are aspects of resilience that teachers should aim to achieve, maintain and support in their colleagues:

- Solves problems for themselves, students and colleagues;
- Seeks and offers help and advice;
- Has self-confidence and self-efficacy;
- Focuses on learning and improvement;
- Remains positive;
- Sets realistic goals;
- Engages in reflective practice;
- Is flexible and adaptive;
- Looks after own mental health and wellbeing;
- Uses tools to deal with stress; and
- Develops strong support networks.

Working on developing and fostering these aspects will contribute to maintaining strong teacher resilience.

## How can schools promote resilience?

To promote resilience, schools should implement whole-of-school strategies to support and care for teachers and



students. These strategies communicate high expectations and encourage participation from the school as a whole.

Schools can demonstrate caring relationships by providing support and professional development for staff and providing welfare and support services for students. In addition, schools can show an interest in students beyond their academic performance, by encouraging and recognising social, sporting and other achievements as well as academic outcomes.

Schools that have positive and high expectations support a culture of achievement amongst young people and staff. They also establish and enforce clear and consistent guidelines for acceptable behaviour and should have sound policies about discipline, prevention of bullying and substance use. This will help to create a supportive environment in which everyone feels safe and respected. Schools can provide opportunities for success by offering students varied curriculum options and extra-curricular activities. In addition teachers will benefit from access to a wide range of professional development including reflective practice, rewards and leadership opportunities.

Schools can provide opportunities for young people to participate and contribute to the broader school community. Examples may include inviting young people to contribute to decision-making processes, giving them responsibility for a range of activities, encouraging teaching styles which promote classroom participation and encouraging young people to participate in community groups and activities.

## How can communities promote resilience and wellbeing?

Beyond teachers and schools, the broader community plays a role in promoting and developing resilience in children and young people. Studies have shown that a caring relationship with even one adult – such as a parent, grandparent, teacher, sporting coach – can enhance resilience significantly.

Community groups provide support for young people by investing in and providing resources and time for educational, social and recreational opportunities. Communities also provide health, welfare and counselling services to young people which contributes to a sense of belonging and support.

### Sources and Links

Embrace the Future Resiliency Resource Centre:  
[www.embracethefuture.org.au](http://www.embracethefuture.org.au)

Keeping Cool: Building Teachers' Resilience:  
[www.keepingcool.edu.au](http://www.keepingcool.edu.au)

KidsMatter: [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)

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

ReachOut.com Professionals. *Building Resiliency in Young People: Resource*. Retrieved July 3, 2014 from: [professionals.reachout.com/Building-Resiliency-in-Young-People-Resource](http://professionals.reachout.com/Building-Resiliency-in-Young-People-Resource)

ResilienceNet: [resilnet.uiuc.edu](http://resilnet.uiuc.edu)

The Resilience Doughnut:  
[www.theresiliencedoughnut.com.au](http://www.theresiliencedoughnut.com.au)