

ELSA Newsletter 12: Resilience

Resilience means being able to persist in the face of difficulty, or being able to “bounce back” from a problem. It is a skill that can be learnt and developed, and there are things we can do, as parents and as a school, to help children become more resilient.



Strong relationships

Having strong, supportive relationships has been proven to strengthen a child’s resilience. Having a close, positive relationship with at least one adult and knowing they have that adult’s unconditional support, gives a child confidence to deal with challenges and helps them handle difficulties. Spending individual time with your child lets them know you value their company and will help them feel good about themselves. Friendships, wider family networks and groups such as clubs and societies give a child a sense of belonging, positive role-models and a support network.

Knowing their strengths

Understanding their own strengths and talents is an important factor in children being resilient. Help your child recognise what they are good at and their positive characteristics. What do other people value in them? The ELSA [newsletter on self-esteem](#) has more ideas to help children appreciate their own strengths.

Setting goals

Having a goal (and breaking it into smaller targets), working towards it and achieving it is brilliant for boosting self-confidence and developing resilience. It demonstrates to a child that hard work leads to progress and achievement. Anyone who has done the “Couch to 5K” programme will know the satisfaction of completing each week and seeing progress! What goals would your child like to achieve? Help them set targets to get there.

The power of “yet”

Many of the children will know that “YET” is Mrs Farrow’s favourite word! There is a big difference between saying “I can’t draw a horse” (which implies that you never will be able to) and “I can’t draw a horse YET” (which reinforces that you can learn!). The children will have learnt about the idea of “growth mind-set” at school, which teaches that skills and talents can be developed with effort, rather than being something you are born with.



When I was at school, if we had an odd number of children in the class, my Year 6 teacher told me not to bother coming out for netball! It stuck with me that I was “bad at sport”, and it was only in my twenties that I realised I could get better at running if I persevered. Remembering the power of “yet” encourages resilience, especially if things go wrong or are tricky. You just haven’t got there YET!

Problem-solving

If your child has a dilemma or problem, try to avoid stepping in too quickly to “rescue” them. Give them some time to try to come up with a solution for themselves. If they are stuck, encourage them to list or draw possible solutions and think about the pros and cons for each.

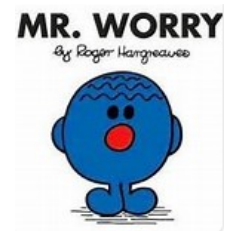
How big is the problem?

It is important to listen to your child and empathise (what may seem like a small problem to you may be a huge one for them), but also to help them realistically assess how big this problem really is. Matching the size of their reaction to the size of the problem is an important skill to learn. Some problems really do need adult help (injuries, bullying) but which smaller problems can they solve on their own?



Tackling worries

If your child shares a worry with you, praise them for telling you and work with them to tackle it. It may be tempting to remove them from the worrying situation, or deal with it on their behalf, but in the long-term, this will not help them to learn to deal with worries. In ELSA sessions I like to read the “Mr Worry” book with children. In it, a wizard magically takes away all of Mr Worry’s worries, which he thinks is great until the end of the book, when he is now worrying about having nothing to worry about! Children can normally spot that the wizard has not really helped Mr Worry, as he has not learnt how to deal with worries at all!



Encourage your child to work out what they are worried will happen. How likely is that? What would they do if it did happen? How would they feel, and how would they handle that feeling? Help them brainstorm different solutions and think about which would work best for them. Set small targets to help them overcome their worry and celebrate them reaching each target. Help them learn that they are stronger than the worry, and that they will be able to cope.

Risk-taking

Similarly, allow children to take age-appropriate risks so they can learn the skill of assessing risk and the competence of dealing with risk safely. Help them realistically evaluate the risks and benefits of an activity. Build their confidence by using positive language - e.g. rather than saying, “That’s too high!” try “Where do you think your foot will go next?” or “Show me how you could do that safely.” Encouraging them to step slightly out of their comfort-zone will give them the confidence to tackle other challenges. Risk-taking does not just mean physical risk - answering a question in class feels like a risk for some children - so again, help them assess realistically what is likely to happen. If they are fixed on the worst-case scenario (“I say the wrong answer and everyone laughs”) how would they cope if it did? (“I’d feel embarrassed but could think about something happy until I felt better”).



Emotions come and go

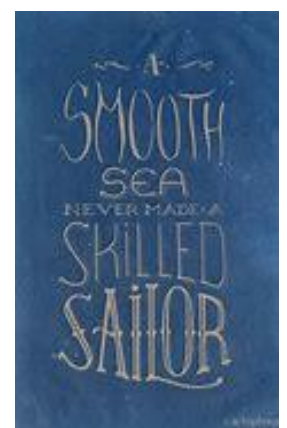
If your child is worried about taking a risk because of how they might feel if it goes wrong, remind them that feelings come and go. They might feel embarrassed if they get a question wrong in class, bored if they have to wait for something, or disappointed if they don’t win a competition, but that feeling won’t last forever. Some emotions might feel uncomfortable, but we can handle them, and come out stronger. The video [“Be the pond”](#) demonstrates this by likening feelings to “fish” swimming in and out of the “pond” of our minds. Don’t let the fear of an uncomfortable feeling put them off trying something - teach them how to handle it instead.

Embrace mistakes

Let your children know that it is ok to mess up and that making mistakes is part of life. Is there anything they can learn from what happened, to turn it into a positive? Nobody is perfect, so let them know about times you’ve messed up! Children notice how we deal with our mistakes, so try to stay calm and have a sense of humour when things go wrong!

Dealing with set-backs

When things go wrong, try asking “How” questions rather than “Why” questions (which they may well not be able to answer). Rather than asking, “Why did you leave your lunchbox at school?” ask, “How could you sort this out?” Try helping them (non-judgementally) to reflect on how much of what happened was due to their actions, how much was down to other people, and what was just bad luck, so they can start to take responsibility for their actions.



Help them keep things in perspective; a problem may only have happened in one area of their life, and they are much more than just that problem. Normalise dealing with set-backs and let them know it's part of life and how we grow and get stronger.

Teach specific skills

Does your child need to learn and practise ways to deal with a situation in order to feel more confident? For example knowing what to say if someone is unkind to them; calming their breathing if they are starting to feel overwhelmed; having some phrases to start a conversation if they are feeling shy. Feeling prepared beforehand will make them more confident about trying.

Being optimistic

Having a positive outlook on life is linked with increased resilience. Help your child focus on the good things in their life, spot things to be grateful for and be optimistic. (See the ELSA newsletter about [“Looking for the good”](#).) Be the hummingbird that looks for the good, rather than the vulture that looks for the bad!



Physical health

Getting enough sleep, exercise and a healthy balanced diet are all a solid base for your child feeling equipped to deal with challenges. Our resilience is lower when we're tired and our [“window of tolerance”](#) is smaller, meaning what our child can handle one day will be much harder to deal with the next if they have not had enough sleep. Exercise makes us feel good and boosts confidence, making it easier to bounce back from setbacks.

Model resilience yourself

Children are much more likely to adopt the strategies above if they see you modelling them. Let them see you deal with a problem constructively, learn a new skill, persevere rather than giving up, and having an optimistic outlook. If you are watching the news or reading, point out how people have overcome difficulties.

Useful links

[NHS Top 10 tips for resilience](#)

[MINDED: Building confidence and resilience:](#) (Shorter summary of this document [here](#))

[10 tips for raising resilient kids](#)

[Building resilience](#)

How big is my problem?

5

Emergency - you need help from an adult e.g. fire, someone needs to go to the hospital, danger etc.



4

Gigantic problem - you can change this with a lot of help e.g. someone hurting you, hitting, bullying etc.



3

Medium problem - you can change with some help e.g. having to work with someone you don't like, someone takes something of yours, you have to do something you don't want to do etc.



2

Little problem - you can change with a little reminder e.g. not being first in line, not taking turns, not winning a game etc.



1

Glitch - you can fix this yourself e.g. getting changed for PE, forgetting a favourite toy, cleaning up etc.

