

Building Resilience in Children and Young People

A half day training course

Medica CPD – 6th November 2014

Dr Pooky Knightsmith

pooky@inourhands.com

www.inourhands.com

Introduction

The ideas within this workbook are designed to complement your work on building resilience and self-confidence. By themselves they are each fairly meaningless but incorporated as part of a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the 7Cs of resilience, they can be a fun, meaningful and memorable way of developing relevant skills and knowledge.

When using these activities, they will work best if you adapt them to meet the specific needs and dynamics of the young people you're working with, but where time does not allow, many of them will work well 'off the shelf' too.

This workbook is adapted from work kindly shared by Stephen De Silva whose work I would highly recommend – www.sdesilva.com. Stephen, in turn, draws on the work of Jo Adams, a major source of resilience work and a leading practitioner.

The 7Cs of Resilience

The 7Cs of Resilience are just one way of scaffolding our learning about resilience. You can learn more by reading Kenneth Ginsburg's work "Building Resilience in Children and Teens" which is aimed at parents but provides useful ideas for practitioners too.

Competence

Competence is the ability or know-how to handle situations effectively. It's not a vague feeling or hunch that "I can do this." Competence is acquired through actual experience. Children can't become competent without first developing a set of skills that allows them to trust their judgments, make responsible choices, and face difficult situations.

In thinking about children's competence and how to fortify it, ask yourself:

- Do I help children focus on their strengths and build on them?
- Do I notice what they do well or do I focus on mistakes?
- When I need to point out a mistake, am I clear and focused?
- Am I helping them build the educational, social, and stress-reduction skills necessary to make them competent in the real world?
- Do I communicate in a way that empowers children to make their own decisions? In other words, do I lecture or do I facilitate thinking?
- Do I let children make safe mistakes so they have the opportunity to right themselves or do I try to protect them from every trip and fall?
- If try to protect them, does the interference mistakenly send the message, "I don't think you can handle this?"
- Do I recognise the competencies of each child in the class without comparison to each other?

Confidence

True confidence, the solid belief in one's own abilities, is rooted in competence. Children gain confidence by demonstrating their competence in real situations. Confidence is not warm-and-fuzzy self-esteem that supposedly results from telling kids they're special or precious. Children who experience their own competence and know they are safe and protected develop a deep-seated security that promotes the confidence to face and cope with challenges. When parents support children in finding their own islands of competence and building on them, they prepare kids to gain enough confidence to try new ventures and trust their abilities to make sound choices.

In thinking about children's degree of confidence, consider the following questions:

- Do I see the best in children so that he can see the best in themselves?
- Do I clearly express that I expect the best qualities (not achievements, but personal qualities such as fairness, integrity, persistence, and kindness) in them?
- Do I help them recognise what they have done right or well?
- Do I treat them as incapable children or as young people who are learning to navigate the world?
- Do I praise often enough? Do I praise honestly about specific achievements or do I give such diffuse praise that it doesn't seem authentic?
- Do I catch children being good when they are generous, helpful, and kind or when they do something without being asked or cajoled?
- Do I encourage them to strive just a little bit farther because I believe they can succeed?
- Do I hold realistically high expectations?
- Do I unintentionally push them to take on more than they can realistically handle, causing them to stumble and lose confidence?
- When I need to criticise or correct them, do I focus only on what they're doing wrong or do I remind them that they are capable of doing well?
- Do I avoid instilling shame?

Connection

Children with close ties to family, friends, school, and community are more likely to have a solid sense of security that produces strong values and prevents them from seeking destructive alternatives.

Some questions to ponder when considering how connected a child is:

- Do we build a sense of physical safety and emotional security within our school?
- Do children know that we care about them?
- Do we allow children to have and express all types of emotions or do we suppress unpleasant feelings?
- Are children learning that going to other people for emotional support during difficult times is productive or shameful?

- Do we do everything to address conflict within our school to resolve problems rather than let them fester?
- Do we create opportunities for children (and adults) to share time together?
- Do we encourage children to take pride in the various ethnic, religious, or cultural groups to which they belong?

Character

Children need a fundamental sense of right and wrong to ensure they are prepared to make wise choices, contribute to the world, and become stable adults. Children with character enjoy a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. They are more comfortable sticking to their own values and demonstrating a caring attitude toward others.

Some basic questions to ask yourself include:

- Do I help children understand how their behaviours affect other people in good and bad ways?
- Do I help children recognise themselves as caring people?
- Do I allow children to clarify their own values?
- Do I allow them to consider right versus wrong and look beyond immediate satisfaction or selfish needs?
- Do I value children clearly in a way that models the importance of caring for others?
- Do I demonstrate the importance of community?
- Am I careful to avoid racist, ethnic, or hateful statements or stereotypes in all that I do? Am I clear how I regard these thoughts and statements whenever and wherever children are exposed to them?
- Do I express how I think of others' needs when I make decisions or take actions?

Contribution

It is a powerful lesson when children realise that the world is a better place because they are in it. Children who understand the importance of personal contribution gain a sense of purpose that can motivate them. They will not only take actions and make choices that improve the world, but they will also enhance their own competence, character, and sense of connection. Teens who contribute to their communities will be surrounded by reinforcing thank yous which can contribute greatly to their personal development and sense of wellbeing.

Before we can foster this sense of contribution, here are some things to consider:

- Do we teach the value of supporting others?
- Do I lead by example by modelling generosity of spirit and with my time?
- Do I make clear to children that I believe they can improve the world?
- Do I create opportunities for each child to contribute in some specific way?
- Are there adults within the local community who might serve as role models who contribute to their communities and the world? Can I use these adults as examples to encourage children to be the best they can be?

Coping

Children who learn to cope effectively with stress are better prepared to overcome life's challenges. The best protection against unsafe, worrisome behaviours may be a wide repertoire of positive, adaptive coping strategies.

Before we begin teaching children this repertoire of coping and stress-reduction skills, here are some basic questions to ask ourselves:

- Do I help children understand the difference between a real crisis and something that just feels like an emergency?
- Do I model positive coping strategies on a consistent basis?
- Do I allow children enough time to use their imaginations? Do I utilise children's imaginations as a means of problem-solving?
- Do I guide children to develop positive, effective coping strategies?
- Do I understand that for many young people, risk behaviours are attempts to alleviate their stress and pain?
- Do I model problem-solving step by step?
- Do I model the response that sometimes the best thing to do is conserve energy and let go of the belief that I can tackle all problems?
- Do I model the importance of caring for our bodies through exercise, good nutrition, and adequate sleep? Do I share relaxation techniques and discuss the importance of 'down time'?
- Do I encourage creative expression?

- Do I create a classroom environment in which talking, listening, and sharing is safe, comfortable, and productive?

Control

When children realise that they can control the outcomes of their decisions and actions, they're more likely to know that they have the ability to do what it takes to bounce back. On the other hand, if teachers and parents make all the decisions, children are denied opportunities to learn control. A child who feels "everything always happens to me" tends to become passive, pessimistic, or even depressed. They see control as external—whatever they do really doesn't matter because they have no control of the outcome. But resilient children know they have internal control. By their choices and actions, they determine results. They know that they can make a difference, which further promotes their competence and confidence.

Some questions about control:

- Do I help children understand that life's events are not purely random and most things happen as a direct result of someone's actions and choices?
- On the other hand, do I help children understand that they aren't responsible for many of the bad circumstances in his life (such as parents' separation or divorce)?
- Do I help children think about the future, but take it one step at a time?
- Do I help children recognise even small successes so they can experience the knowledge that they can succeed?
- Do I help children understand that no one can control all circumstances, but everyone can shift the odds by choosing positive or protective behaviours?
- Do I understand that discipline is about teaching, not punishing or controlling? Do I use discipline as a means to help the child understand that his actions produce certain consequences?

Self-esteem – a diamond nine ranking activity

This is an introductory exercise for working with young people to discuss self-esteem and focus on what it means for them in their lives. Its aim is to stimulate discussion and, if possible, to find some consensus within the group on which to base further work

What do teachers mean when they talk about “Resilience”?

<i>Taking the best possible care of myself</i>	<i>Feeling in control of the life and the choices</i>
<i>Liking and knowing myself and the capabilities</i>	<i>Believing I deserve to be treated well by others</i>
<i>Feeling confident enough to cope with pressures and changes</i>	<i>Having high expectations for myself</i>
<i>Knowing I have rights and deserve love and respect</i>	<i>Being able to negotiate what I do and don't want</i>
<i>Feeling worthy of the own happiness</i>	

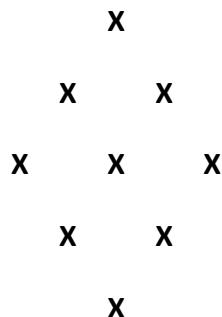
The Task:

Take the nine statements about self-esteem below (or make up your own – or use a mixture of these and your own to reflect the level and needs of the group) – and write each one on a post-it note/ card/slip of paper.

Break the group into smaller groups of 3 or 4 – and give each group a set of the 9 post-it statements you've prepared. Ask them to discuss these and decide which are the most important to them.

Their task is to rank the 9 statements in terms of their importance, putting the ones they think best describe what self-esteem is at the top of the diamond, and the ones they think are least relevant and important last.

At the end, the arrangement of their statements should resemble a diamond like this



Stress that there's no right answer – you don't have a crib sheet hidden away somewhere with the ideal Diamond on it! This is simply a way of helping them come to a working agreement about what constitutes self-esteem, offering an opportunity to explore its key elements and multi-faceted meanings.

A variation:

Give each group 2 blank post-its so they can put statements they think up for themselves on these if they want to add them on. Make sure they do at least 7 of yours though, as you need to set the agenda to some extent as to what self-esteem does– mean.

Unpacking the learning:

To take the feedback from this, some of the questions to stimulate discussion could be:

- Which statements and aspects of self-esteem did you have most discussion over?
- Which was hardest to agree about, and why?
- What was your reason for choosing the one which came top?

- Which ones did you add on your blank post-its and why?
- What interested you in particular about the discussion?
- Was there any new learning for you about self-esteem from doing the Diamond?

At the end of the exercise and the discussion – you may want to come up with a composite statement on self-esteem which you agree as a group is going to be your basic shared definition.

Activity: Knowing Ourselves

Part of emotional development lies in knowing ourselves and how we are likely to respond to different situations, being able to talk about our feelings and understand why events have the effect they do on us. Only when we have this self-knowledge can we become more in charge of ourselves and our feelings – welcoming those we find helpful and appropriate and trying to move beyond those which hamper us and adversely affect our sense of self. This is an exercise to do with young people to increase their self-awareness.

Produce some coloured cards, each one naming an emotion (plus a few blank cards too). It is important these are both positive and negative feelings, since we do not want to give young people the impression that only their happy, positive feelings are acceptable. The feelings on your cards could include:

<i>angry</i>	<i>confident</i>	<i>depressed</i>
<i>excited</i>	<i>pressured</i>	<i>insecure</i>
<i>proud</i>	<i>hopeful</i>	<i>happy</i>
<i>upset</i>	<i>nervous</i>	<i>scared</i>
<i>relieved</i>	<i>uncomfortable</i>	<i>shy</i>
<i>stupid</i>	<i>brilliant</i>	<i>lonely</i>

Then, cut up some cards of another colour and on each one write a situation. You may want to use ones relevant to the particular life circumstances of the young people you are working with, but you could for example include:

<i>I finish my homework....</i>	<i>I row with my mum...</i>	<i>I tell someone how I feel</i>
<i>A teacher picks on me.....</i>	<i>I get drunk....</i>	<i>The day after I get drunk</i>
<i>I stand up for myself</i>	<i>I snog someone I really fancy...</i>	<i>I meet new people....</i>
<i>I look in the mirror</i>	<i>Someone dumps me</i>	<i>I go out with my mates..</i>

Lay out the situation cards and beside them a pile of “emotion” cards. One at a time, ask each young person to pick up a situation card and find an “emotion” card to match it if they can. When they have done that and explained a bit about why they have chosen that particular feeling for that

particular situation, ask the other young people if they would make the same match between the situation and the feeling? If not. What would their “fit” be?

If young people cannot find an emotion card that they feel reflects the kind of feelings their situation would provoke in them, have some blank cards so they can write the feeling they *would* have on one and include it in the game. Make sure what they identify is a feeling, though. Sometimes young people will name an action instead – “I’d blow up”; “I’d cry”; “I’d have a great time”; “I’d be outrageous”. This is an opportunity for them to make a distinction between feelings and actions – and as they become more aware of their feelings, this will give them more control over their reactions rather than simply being at their mercy. Understanding their feelings, recognising and naming them will also enable them to talk about these with others and to have them taken notice of and attended to in this way – rather than having to act them out as the only way of expressing them.

Ask them whether in future they would like to change any of the feelings triggered by the situations? If so, how might they do this? And what behaviour is likely to arise from the feelings they have identified? Are they happy with this or, again, would they like to change this. If so, how might they do this?

I have, I am, I can...

The table below lists ‘I have’, ‘I am’ and ‘I can’ factors which children and their care givers can use to promote resilience. No one person will use the entire pool of resilience factors, nor need they. Some use many; others use few. However, the larger the pool of possibilities before them, the more options children, parents, and care givers have and the more flexible they can be in selecting appropriate responses to a given situation.

You can use the table and its contained factors in a variety of ways to help promote resilience. Here are some suggestions:

A way in for those with low self-esteem

For those children who find it very hard to attribute any positives to themselves, ask them to look at the table and pick just one. With some thought most children are happy to choose one of the more neutral statements and assign it to themselves, this can be a way in to exploring other statements which may be true of them.

Work with friends

Having children choose a set of statements to reflect each other can be very affirming for each individual. Often, friends will really value traits that a friend was not consciously aware of having. Perhaps have each child pick five statements about their friend and then explain why they picked them. Friends can also share which traits they have in common or which traits they most admire in each other or that they'd like to learn about from their friend's example.

Class aspiration

As a group or class you could work together to decide what are the attributes which contribute to your class as a whole, or what your class would like to aspire too. Where there are gaps, discuss how these might be achieved, look for realistic and practical ideas for skills building and consider how you might implement these over the coming weeks before revisiting this activity.

Personal aims

This activity can also be carried out by individuals, either in a class setting or in a one to one setting with vulnerable children.

Trait ranking

When a child draws out their current or aspired traits from the table, a useful extension can be to have them rank these traits. Which are more important to them. If they had to lose one, which would it be etc. This can be a helpful reflective activity that helps children both to understand themselves and to consider what traits they would like to actively work on developing.

I am..... I have..... I can.....			
Good at meeting deadlines	Good at coping with change	Good at giving positive feedback	Good at solving problems
Bubbly	A good laugh	Animated	Empathise with others
Strong	Curious	A good cook	A good sister
Forgiving	Sentimental	Determined	A good mother
A dreamer	Ambitious	Warm	Supportive
Thoughtful	A good listener	Hopeful	Romantic
Understanding	Fun	Easy-going	Happy-go-lucky
Kind	Brave	A strong walker	Capable
Trustworthy	Purposeful	Good at maths	Sentimental
Easy to get on with	Sweet-natured	Funny	Compassionate
Quick witted	Generous	Strong beliefs	Efficient
Tenacious	Active	Sensible	Good planner
Practical	Articulate	A good driver	Fit
Appreciative	Hard working	A good parent	A great friend
Assertive	Impetuous	Bouncy	Passionate
Optimistic	Loving	Headstrong	Open minded
Reliable	Spiritual	Strong champion	Straightforward
Enthusiastic	Dramatic	Emotional	Committed
Creative	Adventurous	Clear thinking	Intuitive
Team player	Imaginative	A good swimmer	A good singer
Visionary	Good with money	Courageous	Intelligent
Good hostess	Good at writing	A good gardener	Young at heart
A nice smile	Good at handling stress	Flirtatious	Devout
Sporty	Stick up for my beliefs	Sensual	Fun-loving
Artistic	Achieve my goals	Rise to a challenge	Reflective
Lots of ideas	Playful	High standards	Gregarious
Powerful	Meticulous	Merry	Nice clothes
Sociable	Pursue my dreams	Clever	An enquiring mind
A positive risk taker	A tough battler	Good at design	A strong advocate

Big hearted	Musical	Smart	Extravagant
Good dancer	Careful	Attractive	Graceful
Political activist	A good brother	Responsible	Affectionate
Make things happen	Not afraid to challenge	Challenge constructively	Conscientious
Intellectual	Good handwriting	Canny	Jolly
Lively	Relaxed	Flamboyant	Considerate
A good mediator	Rigorous	Look after myself well	Shrewd
Good tempered	A good leader	Tender	Willing to experiment
Positive	Wise	Good memory	Energetic
Flexible	Clear thinking	Love to party	Resourceful
Sensible	Easy to get on with	Meet deadlines	Quick witted
Meet deadlines	Play the guitar	Analytical	Happy
Observant	A peacemaker	Competent	Honest
Professional	Cuddly	A good manager	Good at design
Empathise with others	Impulsive	A good friend	Manage my money
Independent	A great dancer	Good at languages	Good cook
Good at expressing myself	Good at giving affirmation	Good at interior decorating	Good at solving problems
A good planner	A good home maker	Bold	A loving daughter
Good with computers	Fearless	Contented	Good fun
Pride in myself	Vivacious	Feisty	Witty
Expressive	Easy going	Insightful	A great cook
A brilliant sister	At ease with myself	Amusing	A good writer
Challenging	Nice hands	Effective	Sexy
Empathic	A nice warm smile	Good at budgeting	Far seeing
Good company	Gentle	A thoughtful son	Sophisticated

Activity: The Life Tree

Key message:

Broaden young people's experiences: Get them to look to the horizon, consider new opportunities.

Have plenty of good quality art materials and paper to hand!

Ask participants to think of themselves as a tree – they might be willowy and light or solid as an oak or anything in between.

Ask them to close their eyes take them through a guided visualisation activity. Use the following stages:

- Imagine their roots stretching down and anchoring them in the soil
- Then try and imagine their tree trunk growing up towards the light
- Finally imagine their branches bursting out into buds, leaves, blossom etc.

Consider - What does it feel like to burst in to life like that?

Initially ask them to draw their own tree on a piece of A3 paper but this time think of the different parts of your tree as parts of you and your life:

- **Roots:** where they came from – places, people, events that have been important in your past
- **Trunk:** the resources they have both within themselves (strengths, skills, qualities) and who else they can turn to for support
- **Branches:** what they want to achieve in their next few years.

Allow time for ideas and feelings to be explored and the trees to take shape and be labelled

Then ask the group to work in pairs and talk through their tree drawings with each other

You can then either display all the different trees together on one wall as a “forest” or, better still, move in to a second activity which involves creating one big tree representing everyone present.

Activity: Wanted: Best Friend!

Key Message:

True friendships can be important protective factors – and young people need to learn to be discerning about their friendships

Ask children to work in pairs to draw up a short advert titled: “Wanted: Best Friend” – it should identify the main qualities someone might look for in a best friend.

Then ask pairs to read out their advert to everyone else and compare and contrast the different adverts.

Use some or all of the following questions to get the group to think about friendships:

- Do boys find it more difficult than girls to talk about friendship or identify someone as a best friend?
- Most girls would find it quite natural to talk about having a best friend. But sometimes when males do this they get labelled as “soft”, “gay” or some other intended put-down. Why?
- How can you judge when someone is a good friend or not?
- How does it feel if someone who you thought was a good friend let you down in some way?
- What, in your eyes, would be a test of true friendship?

Then get everyone into groups of four. Explain that they will be using a list of situations to encourage them to think about what a best friend should do to help someone.

Give each group a list and allocate all or some of the situations for them to discuss.

Ask them to identify more than one possible response to a statement and to try and agree which would be the best course of action. The point here is to encourage some thought about the complexity and consequences of various actions and responses.

If they cannot agree on a course of action they should go on to the next situation. They need to choose a person to feedback their decisions to the rest of the group. The feedback can include situations they could not agree on – and why this was so.

Take each situation in turn and hear the various responses. Did any people feel that some responses were better than others – and if so, why?

Activity: Friendship Situations

Discuss in pairs, groups or as a class, what would a good friend do when...?

- They hear someone criticising their friend?
- They see a friend being bullied?
- They know a new member of the group is feeling isolated?
- They are asked to keep a secret by their friend?
- Two of their good friends start fighting each other?
- A friend asks them to lie for them?
- They see a friend being laughed at for refusing a drink/smoke?
- A friend tells them they were “touched up” and they didn’t like it?
- They find a friend crying, worried or distressed?
- Their friend tells them their father has been hitting them?
- Their friend tells them they think they’re gay.

This can be a good way of exploring children’s feelings in the third person, making it easier and safer to explore how they feel about certain scenarios – some of which may apply to them. You can extend this by considering what a bad friend might do and why, and how they could be supported in becoming a better friend.