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# 2. Understanding resilience and the whole school approach

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Resilience is most frequently described as ‘positive development despite adversity’ (Luthar, 2003) or ‘the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful’ (Walsh, 2008). Resilience researchers across the world seek to understand what processes take place for those young people and families who positively adapt to hardship, so that this learning can be applied to supporting others to do the same. A short background of the development of the concept of resilience can be found in *Appendix 1*, but suffice to say here that it is now seen as much more than personal qualities or “character”, and much more about the dynamic interaction between the individual and support available in their environment. This led to the development of socio-ecological approaches and models to understand resilience in context.

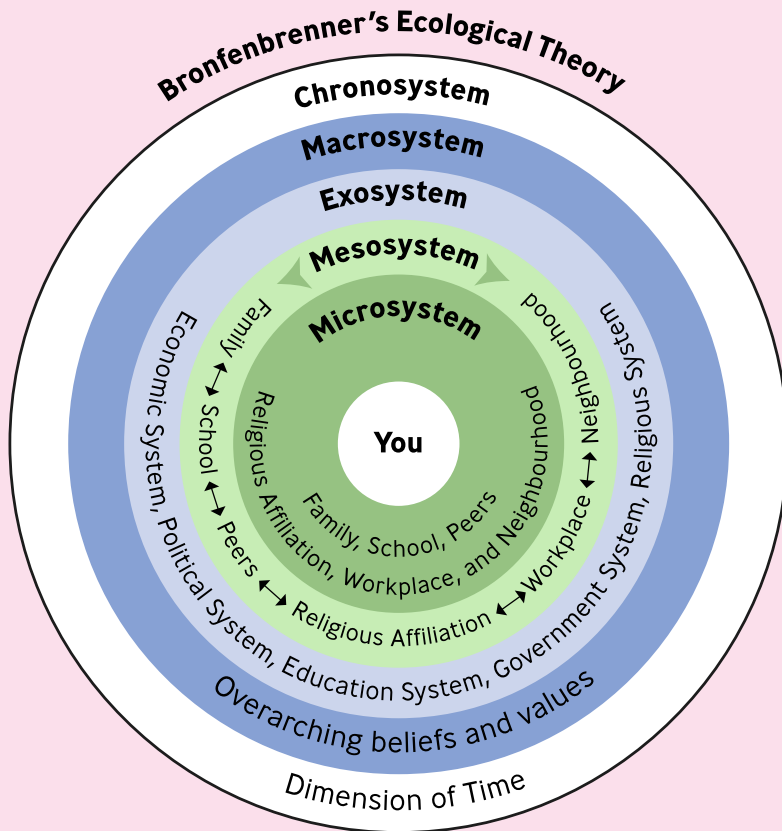
**Resilience is not a personality trait. Innate characteristics play a part, but resilience is something that can be promoted and developed, through the provision of support and opportunities for growth.**

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## Socio-ecological models

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Socio-ecological models were developed to further the understanding of the dynamic interrelations among various personal and environmental factors. The best-known socio-ecological theory is that of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979; see *Appendix 2*) and his description of the environment (or social ecology) at five different levels:



1. **Microsystem** (Child's immediate environment)
2. **Mesosystem** (How the different parts of the child's environment work together to support the child; the interaction between two microsystems)
3. **Exosystem** (People and places that have an impact on the child's life, such as parent's workplace)
4. **Macrosystem** (Government policies and cultural values)
5. **Chronosystem** (The influence of change and constancy in a child's environment)

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979; 2005)

These can be a useful tool for analysing a child's or young person's environment and context and helping us decide where to concentrate our effort. Working with a social ecological approach to resilience means paying attention to the way a child's environment (family, school, community and wider environment) can provide the support and resources needed for their healthy development, and targeting all of these dimensions when intervening.

Practitioners working directly with children, young people and families may think that their work relates largely to the microsystem. However, practitioners have an important role in relation to recognising and addressing inequalities and barriers at many different levels of the ecological system.

More detail of Bronfenbrenner's approach and a case example can be found in *Appendix 2*.

Ecological approaches are now widely recognised as fundamental to an understanding of a child or young person's need and ways in which to support them effectively, for example in the following illustration:

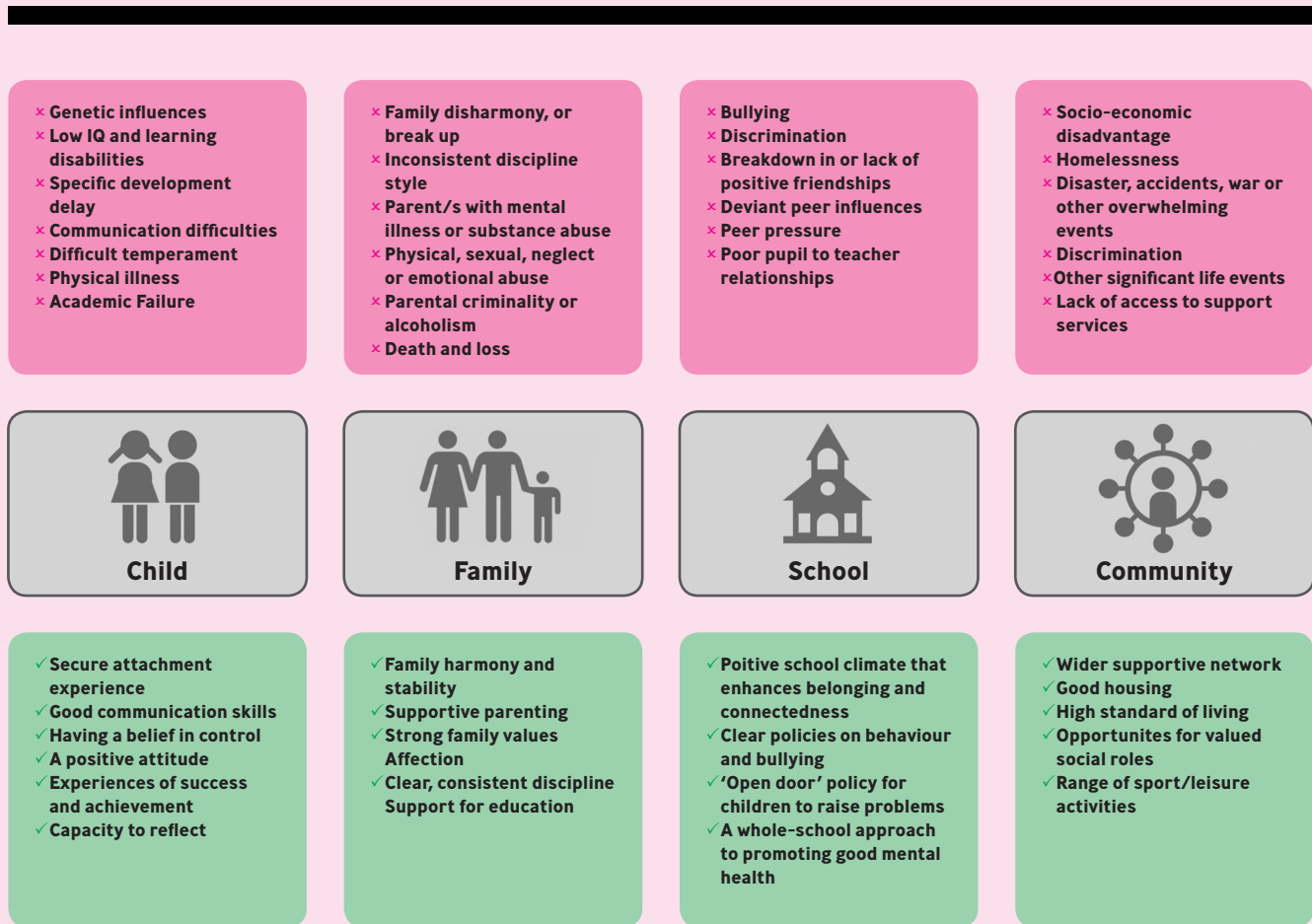


Figure 2: Risk and Protective Factors for poor/good mental health (Source: Public Health England, 2016).

## Why whole school approaches to resilience are important

Mental health is a continuum and we are all on it somewhere. Our position on the continuum can move depending on what we are like, where we are and what happens to us. A clear focus on resilience is important because resilience can help us to move more quickly and effectively towards positive mental health, when things are difficult.

For these reasons whole school resilience-based approaches are more likely to have long-term positive benefits, than time limited individualised interventions (although there is a place for these within a school system for some people). Examples of both approaches are given in Section 3.

Even when a child has such complex or challenging needs that specialist support is needed, it is likely that there will be a long wait for that support and that the child will remain in school for the majority of their time, apart from a few hours a month when they are receiving this support. It is therefore important that the whole school system is equipped and organised to offer a resilience-building environment for the child, their family and the staff who come into contact with them on a daily basis.

**“A whole school approach means that ALL staff have a responsibility to promote resilience and mental health.”**

Our current statutory service system is funded and organised in such a way that there is a strong emphasis on the individual. Yet systems thinking tells us that ‘societies’ or groups of people or organisations actually think and behave differently from the individuals within them, and that communication, relationships and values are at the heart of effective flexible and responsive systems.

**When you translate this into a school environment, it means making resilience and mental health ‘everyone’s business’ (not just the pastoral team, or even just teachers, but all school staff) and**

providing additionality. This additionality is achieved by everyone being able to make a positive difference ‘whilst they are there’ as they go about their daily work. An example of this would be the special school where every child has an agreed key person who will check in with them on a daily basis – that could be anyone from the Head Teacher to the Site Manager – whoever is the best fit for that particular child. In order to achieve this, the school has a set of child-centred values and has invested in training for all staff, as well as including this in job descriptions, recruitment and induction processes and information for parents.



Figure 3: Boing Boing academic resilience audit toolkit categories combined with Public Health England eight principles to promoting a whole school and college approach to emotional health and wellbeing

**“Foster an environment where all health issues, both physical and mental, are regarded and treated equally.”**

# Key ideas to build in to a whole school approach

There are some key ideas that underpin effective whole school approaches in line with the evidence of what builds resilience. These are outlined in Table I below:

Key idea	'Good' looks like...	Can be achieved by...
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	<p>Leaders and managers know that teachers pro-actively build rapport with more vulnerable children, young people and their families.</p> <p>Staff treat each other with respect and care, and model this for children and young people.</p>	<p>...asking the children, young people and their families and building this into performance review processes.</p> <p>...being led (modelled) from the top and achievements recognised and celebrated at all levels.</p>
<b>Curriculum planning, teaching and learning to promote resilience</b>	<p>All staff who are involved in teaching and learning know which children and young people are more vulnerable at any given time and adjust their interaction with them appropriately.</p> <p>Curriculum plans promote problem solving and imagining a positive future at every possible opportunity.</p>	<p>...good identification of need systems, excellent communication systems and a cultural expectation that this will happen.</p> <p>...curriculum leaders being required and supported to make this happen.</p>
<b>Pupil voice / co-production with students</b>	<p>All students have an equal voice in the school and steps are taken to ensure that disadvantaged and vulnerable students are appropriately represented.</p> <p>Students feel that they have a genuine voice in the school and there is evidence of this in policies, processes and the school environment.</p>	<p>....identify the more vulnerable students and ask them how they wish to be represented - change processes to make them accessible to all.</p> <p>....provide structured and resourced opportunities for students across the school demographic to be proactively involved in school development and design of the school environment.</p>

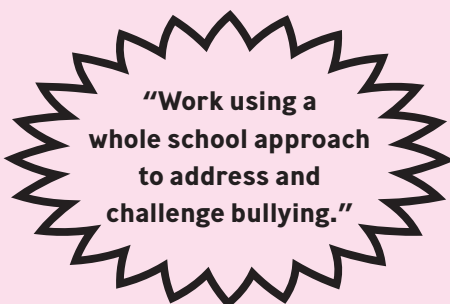
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Key idea	'Good' looks like...	Can be achieved by...
<p><b>Staff Development to support their own wellbeing and that of students</b></p>	<p>Structures and processes are in place to enable all staff time to reflect on and improve their own resilience and wellbeing.</p> <p>All staff are empowered to suggest and develop ways of improving the wellbeing and resilience of each other and students.</p>	<p>...whole school training.</p> <p>...an annual cycle of reflection, review and refine in line with Professional Development cycle.</p> <p>...mechanisms for all staff to be able to suggest and contribute to resilience-building activities for each other and the students.</p> <p>...formal and informal processes for staff to support and help each other.</p>
<p><b>Structures and Processes</b></p>	<p>There is a systematic way of identifying those children and young people who face greater adversity before things start to go wrong (proactive not reactive).</p> <p>Staff structures give people permission to become a trusted adult over time for more vulnerable children and young people as this is known to be the strongest protective factor against the onset of mental health difficulties.</p> <p>Plans for the more vulnerable children and young people in the school are made with them, are asset based and closely monitored so that every achievement, academic or otherwise, is recognised and celebrated.</p>	<p>...a risk informed data collection process. (Vulnerable Pupil Register - VPR)</p> <p>...embedding of this principle across the organisation of the school from recruitment through performance management to reward systems.</p> <p>...structured systems and monitoring processes. e.g. V.P.R</p>
<p><b>Provision of targeted pupil support and appropriate referral.</b></p>	<p>Children and young people in particular adversity have an appropriately trained and skilled adult who will check in with them over time - beyond the period of crisis.</p> <p>The school is aware of and uses all local resources available, including voluntary and community sector services, to support vulnerable children, young people and their families.</p>	<p>...the allocation of funds to training and the structuring of staff to enable this to happen.</p> <p>...the school having good local knowledge and positive relationships with the wider community.</p>

continued

Key idea	'Good' looks like...	Can be achieved by...
<b>Policy Development</b>	Policies are in place that practically support social inclusion such as the provision of uniform, PE kit, bus passes, food bank boxes etc.	...a social inclusion perspective on budget planning.
<b>School culture, ethos and environment</b>	<p>Policies are in place that practically support social inclusion such as the provision of uniform, PE kit, bus passes, food bank boxes etc.</p> <p>Everyone on the staff has a shared definition and understanding of mental health, wellbeing and resilience.</p> <p>Children and young people believe that staff care about them and about what happens to them as individuals</p> <p>There are safe, quiet accessible places for children and young people to go when they need to.</p> <p>Children and young people have strategies and places to go to calm down when things get stressful for them.</p> <p>Children, young people, parents and staff experience the school without discrimination or prejudice.</p> <p>Vulnerable children and young people are empowered and encouraged to take on responsibilities and obligations appropriate to their skills and aptitudes.</p>	<p>...a social inclusion perspective on budget planning.</p> <p>...whole school training.</p> <p>...whole school training and focus group activities with more vulnerable children and young people to get their perspective on what school is actually like for them and acting on what they say.</p> <p>...assessment of the use of the school estate and prioritising the provision of safe spaces.</p> <p>...teaching coping strategies and creating a culture where this is possible without stigma.</p> <p>...the values of the school being lived by everyone and anything other than this being challenged.</p> <p>...systems such as peer mentoring, class jobs, inclusion of this in individual plans, links with local community groups etc.</p>

Table I: Key ideas underpinning effective whole school approaches to resilience adapted from the Academic Resilience Audit Tool for Senior Leaders (Boingboing, 2013).



See page II for more information on whole school approaches

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# Introducing the resilience framework

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The Resilience Framework is freely accessible for anyone to use at <http://www.boingboing.org.uk/> and brings together knowledge from resilience research, with the experience of practitioners and those living with adversity, into five key sections, each containing a number of interventions.

The ideas in the framework are not hierarchical. Starting anywhere will be good enough and, in fact, wherever you start is likely to have a knock on effect and build other areas of resilience.

## The five sections of the resilience framework

**Basics** – ensuring the necessities needed for life are in place: like food, sleep, exercise, money, housing, a safe space and the right to be free from prejudice and discrimination.

**Belonging** – encouraging good relationships: concentrating on positive times and places, remaining hopeful about new connections and having people in your life you can count on.

**Learning** – having opportunities inside and outside school to develop interests, talents and life skills, including mapping out or having a view to the future.

**Coping** – embedding the skills needed to manage the knocks of everyday living, like problem-solving, staying calm and leaning on others if needed.

**Core self** – developing those things that help children and young people to develop a strong sense of themselves, including ways to build and nurture their confidence, self- esteem and character.

The different sections within the Resilience Framework are underpinned by a strong research evidence base and the corresponding interventions have been developed through a weave of the research and engagement with parents and carers, to translate the research into resilient “moves” (interventions) for professionals, parents and carers.

For more background on the theory and development of the framework see *Appendix I*.

The Resilience Framework is shown in Table 2 overleaf. You can also check out [www.boingboing.org.uk](http://www.boingboing.org.uk) for versions of the framework in many other languages, representations co-produced by young people, as well as an interactive version..

The Resilience Framework is underpinned by a set of key principles called ‘The Noble Truths’. They describe underlying values for resilience-building work and can be helpful when the complexity of practicing in multiple disadvantage threatens to overwhelm us.



# The noble truths (key principles for resilience-building work) framework

- **Accepting** – starting with exactly where a child, young person or family are at, even if it means being at a very sore point. Returning to ‘unconditional positive regard’, which means trying not to judge people and appreciating them or their basic humanity come what may.

- **Conserving** – holding on to anything good that has happened up until now and building on it. When there is so much difficulty around, ‘preserving’ the little positive that there is becomes even more precious.

- **Commitment** – staying in there and being explicit about what your commitment can be. Being realistic about what’s doable and not giving up or expecting things to change overnight.

- **Enlisting** – seeking others to help, and moving on from those who might have let us down in the past, noticing that we may not be enough or we may be too much. There is more about the Noble Truths in Section 3.

There is more about the Noble Truths in Section 3.

Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 - adapted from Hart & Blincow 2007 www.boingboing.org.uk					
SPECIAL APPROACHES	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong	Make school / college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
	Enough money to live	Help child/YP understand their place in the world		Being brave	
	Being safe	Tap into good influences	Engage mentors for children / YP	Solving problems	Support the child/YP to understand other people’s feelings
	Access & transport	Keep relationships going	Map out career of life plan	Putting on rose-tinted glasses	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
	Healthy diet	The more healthy relationships the better		Fostering their interests	
	Exercise and fresh air	Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope	Help the child / YP to organise her/himself	Calming down & self-soothing	Help the child/YP take responsibility for her/himself
	Enough sleep	Get together people the child/YP can count on	Highlight achievements	Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster their talents
	Play & leisure	Responsibilities & obligations		Lean on others when necessary	
	Being free from prejudice & discrimination	Focus on good times and places	Develop life skills	Have a laugh	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Make sense of where child / YP has come from				
	Predict a good experience of someone or something new				
	Make friends and mix with other children / YPs				
NOBLE TRUTHS					
	ACCEPTING	CONSERVING	COMMITMENT	ENLISTING	

