
Utilising the noble truths to support work with children and young people on mental health issues

Accepting

When a child or young person is struggling they need to know that they are “accepted” fully for their struggles and not judged. This can be hard if they are managing those struggles in a way that is different to your own way of managing. Through “acceptance” we can try and empathise, step into their experience and be alongside them in their difficulties. Acceptance is also about finding a place where you can accept how you feel about something that you are faced with, and finding someone within your school with whom you can talk that through. Working with sensitive and challenging issues can take its toll and you may feel difficult feelings that are not beneficial for the child or young person to know about, yet equally are valid for you and important to express to someone with whom you feel safe. If all adults in your school are striving to make relationships with students who are struggling, it’s important to have a system for them to also get the support they need.

Commitment

Commitment emphasises the importance of trust, reliability and predictability. With so many demands it can be challenging to maintain the commitment and tough at times. The Resilience Framework highlights the importance of offering long-term commitment in supporting children and young people to overcome the odds. Before entering into a conversation or reaching out to a child or young person, consider whether you are in a position to commit and see the work through. It may be useful to get management acknowledgement of the time and focus that this commitment might involve. Hanging on in there and being consistent will be important to the child or young person and support the trust between you.

Conserving

Conserving supports the taking of positive and negative experiences that the child or young person has experienced and utilising them to the best effect. What has worked well in the past? Notice growth and change in their progress, and understand and embrace the mechanisms that supported that growth and change, in a way that they can use it to their advantage to make resilient decisions in the future.

Enlisting

Enlisting is the idea of not doing this on your own... who else is it worth getting on board to support the work? This needs to be considered carefully and strategically in terms of the benefit to the child or young person, and to ensure they don’t feel overloaded with other professionals or interventions. Enlisting also refers to how you can enlist the different parts of yourself; when do you bring in your fun side, when is the serious side necessary, do you feel able to stretch your comfort zone as a practitioner? Sometimes it is also important to enlist a different approach – if something is not working in a particular way, then how about trying to do it differently! Enlisting can expose us to a range of ideas and opportunities that are of benefit to you as a practitioner and ultimately the child or young person you are supporting.

Recommended further reading on the noble truths

Angie Hart, Derek Blincow & Helen Thomas (2007) *Resilient therapy: Working with children and families*. Hove: Routledge.

Kim Aumann & Angie Hart. (2009) *Helping children with complex needs bounce back: Resilient Therapy for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Further ways to use the Resilience Framework within your school

The following section gives examples of how you can use **Basics, Belonging, Learning, Coping** and **Core Self** across a whole school approach.

BASICS

Specific	Suggestions
Good enough housing	Make sure the classroom space is supportive of children and young people's vulnerabilities and set up to meet their emotional and psychological needs. This may be a space to take some time out or an area of the room that feels safe.
Enough money to live	Basic necessities are really important and can encourage family life to be stress-free as possible. Does your school respond to the social inequalities that exist for the school population, and can further support be provided, e.g. through the provision of uniform subsidiaries or breakfast clubs.
Being safe	Promote the school environment as one that is accepting of mental health difficulties and make it clear that it is everybody's responsibility within the school to support mental health, from the caretaker to the lead principle.
Access and transport	Be aware of how overcrowded buses and transport can affect a child or young person who is experiencing mental health problems, and provide additional support where needed. For external appointments, it can be helpful to consider if they can access that appointment, as this can act as a barrier.
Healthy diet	Ensure that children and young people have access to a healthy diet within school, as there are inextricable links between food and mood. Do students receiving free school meals get enough to eat, or are they disadvantaged in comparison to other students?
Exercise and fresh air	Promote exercise and fresh air as important resilient moves. When children and young people take part in exercise and have access to fresh air, it increases the level of serotonin in their bodies, which reduces their stress levels. Ensure children and young people have access to a range of activities inside and outside of school. It is also important to involve parents in such activities wherever possible.

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Enough sleep</i>	Children and young people often do not get enough sleep and find it hard to relax. Encouraging children and young people to think about why sleep and relaxation is important can help them see that it can affect the way they feel, their ability to learn and cope with stress, and has an impact on their levels of resilience. During times of exam stress, enough sleep is vital!
<i>Playtime and leisure</i>	Explore with the child or young person how they spend their leisure time and ensure within the school environment there is a diversity of options for leisure or break time. Different people will have different needs, particularly if they are struggling emotionally. Check if they have access to leisure opportunities; financial restrictions at home may prevent such opportunities. When children and young people are revising for exams, ensure they are making time for fun and recreation, this is as important for their resilience as the time spent studying!
<i>Being free from prejudice and discrimination</i>	Promote positive mental health awareness within the school to facilitate a culture of acceptance and support. On an individual level, support them to develop strategies as to how they would respond to prejudice and discrimination.

BELONGING

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Find somewhere for the child or young person to belong</i>	It is important to help improve their sense of belonging. Help children and young people to identify a safe place or group where they can go when they are feeling vulnerable. Encourage them to have the right people in place to support them so that they feel protected.
<i>Help them understand their place in the world</i>	Value and welcome every child or young person in your class or tutor group and encourage them to develop their own individuality and explore their diversity. Encourage them to understand their roots and why it is important to identify where they have come from. It may be helpful for the child or young person to explore if anyone else in their family has struggled with mental health difficulties and to normalise such experiences.
<i>Tap into good influences</i>	Help the child or young person identify what qualities make a good friendship. Explore with them how positive role models can make a difference to someone's life. Encourage them to think about developing a relationship with a role model. This could be someone they already know, like a teacher, club organiser or an older student. Young people who are making the transition from primary school to secondary school may need additional support to create new positive influences to aid a potentially stressful transition.

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Keep relationships going</i>	Help the child or young person consider why it is important to have good relationships and why it is important to maintain them. Keeping relationships going can help children and young people have a sense of stability and constancy in their lives, and this in turn will help them feel more resilient. Support them to understand what helps to keep relationships going. You can also support them to think about how they are a friend to themselves, and identify self-care ideas they would find helpful when they may be struggling.
<i>The more healthy relationships the better</i>	It is important to help children and young people increase the number of good influences in their lives so they outweigh the bad ones. Encourage them to identify what makes a good relationship and whether they could develop those qualities themselves so that they could have more healthy relationships.
<i>Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope</i>	Help them to positively expand their network of friends. Children and young people need to consider different types of friendships and relationships that meet different needs. Encourage them to see that relationships are not just about building friendships – relationships can be built through activities or events, which can lead to something good. Encourage students to understand what they get from different relationships with adults in the school, some will be about learning, some support, and some fun, but all are valid.
<i>Get together people you can count on</i>	Help the young person to identify people who can help and support them and be a network of support. Encourage the young person to think about how their network of support could help them cope when they are going through a hard time. Support the child or young person to develop a plan as to how as a community they support each other during times of high stress.
<i>Belonging involves responsibilities and obligations too</i>	Children and young people who have appropriate roles and responsibilities, including running errands and doing odd jobs, develop positive self-esteem and a sense of being able to make their own mark on what happens in the world. Helping a young person identify their responsibilities and obligations can promote their sense of belonging.
<i>Focus on good times and places</i>	It is important to encourage children and young people to remember the good events that have happened and to revisit them. They are a reminder that, despite the difficult things, there are lots of good things too. 'Bottling up' good experiences can help a child or young person reconnect to people in their lives who have had some degree of healthy relationship with them. Helping the child or young person visualise and picture a favourite memory or place can help them feel safe, calm and more resilient.
<i>Make sense of where the young person has come from</i>	Help children and young people to understand where they have come from. Encourage them to understand their history and share who they think they are, what their good bits are and how they see the world.

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Predict a good experience of someone or something new</i>	Help children and young people to take a risk and try new things. Encourage them to set a challenge that will give them a good experience. Get them to plan it, do it and review it, and this will help them identify what works well and not so well.
<i>Make friends and mix with other children and young people</i>	Even if a child or young person has had quite a few negative relationships in their life, forming just one new positive relationship can be powerful. Help the young people in your tutor group to find out more about what each other like doing, their interests and activities. Encourage them to think about someone in their tutor group who might have a similar interest to them and could end up being a good friend.

LEARNING

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Make school life work as much as possible</i>	A positive school offers a stable environment for learning how to get along with adults and other children and young people, and finding out about established or accepted social ways of behaving – which in turn contributes to academic learning skills. As a tutor or teacher encourage those in your tutor group or class to consider how they could make their school life better, and what things they need to do to ensure they have a good experience while at school.
<i>Map out career or life plan</i>	Helping children and young people have a view to the future can help set them up for mapping out a meaningful adult life. Encourage them to think ahead and to have a strong sense of purpose in regards to school work and their life at school.
<i>Help children and young people to organise themselves</i>	Encourage children and young people to have structure in their lives as it can help their school life run more smoothly. Help them to identify how they can be more organised and how being organised can help them feel more resilient.
<i>Highlight achievements</i>	Taking notice of children and young people's successes, strengths, talents and interests will build their resilience and confidence. Help them to notice and feel good about what they have achieved. Encourage them to use what they have achieved as a way of helping them cope with stress and adversity. Build systems that focus on successes and communicate them, such as texts/postcards home or to a trusted adult.
<i>Develop life skills</i>	Developing life skills is about teaching children and young people the necessary skills for living. Successfully teaching life skills relies on breaking things down into small parts and encouraging children and young people to try out something new. Developing life skills is about relating learning to real life and then setting them a challenge so that they try and develop that life skill.

COPING

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Understand boundaries and keep within them</i>	It is important to help children and young people learn about setting and keeping to limits. Setting boundaries can help children and young people feel safe, as can routine and structure. Encourage children and young people to explore what boundaries are, why people have boundaries and why some people's boundaries are different from other people's.
<i>Being brave</i>	Being brave invites us to help children and young people face their uncomfortable, scared feelings, and to actively work with them. Being brave enables us to experience that, and to confront our personal power, instead of passively relying on other people to sort everything out. Encourage children and young people to explore what being brave means to them, ways that they could feel braver and how this could make them feel more resilient. This can start by making brave moves with their learning in the classroom, such as having a go, speaking out, making suggestions etc.
<i>Solving problems</i>	Problem-solving is a learned skill. Helping children and young people to focus on one problem at a time can help them avoid getting overwhelmed with the size of the problem. As a tutor encourage children and young people to assess the type and size of a problem, what they need to do in order to resolve it and how they might work out who can help if necessary.
<i>Rose-tinted glasses</i>	Putting on rose-tinted glasses is an idea to put a resilient spin on things. It is about looking at bad things that have happened and adding a positive twist to them. This idea is about deliberately adopting a stance that helps make sense of something from the past in a positive way. It offers another view for the young person to make sense of an event and develop a more adaptive view of their lives. Sometimes it is about managing life rather than changing it.
<i>Fostering their interests</i>	Helping children and young people and children to develop their favourite interest can give them opportunities to feel that they can succeed, and as a result their self-esteem improves and they can have fun. The quality of their life improves. Succeeding helps children and young people feel they have control of their lives, which makes them happier and as a result stronger and able to deal with any difficulties that come their way. This can be an area where as a tutor, year head, classroom teacher, TA or lunchtime supervisor, you notice the things your children and young people do well and where they show real talent and creativity at managing difficulties.
<i>Calming and self-soothing</i>	Encourage children and young people to notice when, where and why they are feeling upset. Try to get them to notice and understand why they are feeling stressed and ways that can help them feel more relaxed.

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Remember tomorrow is another day</i>	Helping children and young people to remember that tomorrow is another day helps them find a solid place to stand and not feel overwhelmed by the stresses and challenges of a school day. Encouraging a young person to let go of worries can help them feel that their problems are more solvable and enables them to feel more resilient.
<i>Lean on others when necessary</i>	Encourage children and young people to lean on others and trust that others can help and support them when needed. It is important to encourage them to identify who to go to when they need support.
<i>Have a laugh</i>	Encouraging children and young people to have fun and have laugh can help them feel stronger and able to cope with life's challenges.

CORE SELF

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Instil a sense of hope</i>	Hope helps children and young people hold on to the possibility of change and the anticipation and wish that tomorrow will be better. When hope is present it can make the most difficult challenges feel manageable and survivable. As a tutor or teacher encourage children and young people to have aspirations and dreams about what would make school a better place, or as a teacher embed career aspirations into the learning and curriculum content.
<i>Teach the child to understand other people's feelings</i>	It is important that children and young people can understand and be aware of the feelings of others. It helps them get along with their peers, to care about others and to feel confident and happy in other people's company.
<i>Help the child to know themselves</i>	In order for children and young people to know themselves they need to feel good about themselves from the inside. Helping children and young people feel good from the inside is about encouraging them to learn about themselves while being accepting of the fact that there are bits that they may need to change. Children and young people who have a strong sense of themselves often have more confidence and higher self-esteem. They can manage situations more successfully because things are less overwhelming when they have some idea of the way they feel and why.
<i>Help the child take responsibility for themselves</i>	Help children and young people build their capacity to take responsibility for themselves. By knowing themselves they can see that they have a relationship to the things and people around them and can influence this, rather than assuming things happen to them. Help them know their own sense of usefulness and personal power. Grabbing hold of daily opportunities to help them control situations, and understand that they have the power to make choices and decisions in their life, helps them see they can take control of their lives rather than life happening to them.

Specific	Suggestions
<i>Foster their talents</i>	Build qualities and develop the good points which children and young people already have, maximising their influence. By fostering their talents, we give them a chance to understand more about their abilities. Often children and young people are good at things they don't notice or they don't value. Doing fun stuff and fostering talent is a way to begin to experience some choice in life, a sense of achievement and competence.
<i>Using tried and tested treatments for specific problems</i>	Encourage children and young people never to be scared of getting support for specific problems. Support that may be available is mentoring, counselling, anger management, teenage pregnancy support, drugs and alcohol support etc. This support can help children and young people to cope with the challenges and stresses of growing up.

Recommended further reading on the Resilience Framework and Resilient Therapy

Angie Hart & Kim Aumann (2017). Briefing paper: Building child and family resilience – Boingboing’s resilience approach in action. Totnes: Research in Practice.

Angie Hart, Derek Blincow & Helen Thomas (2007) *Resilient therapy: Working with children and families*. Hove: Routledge.

Kim Aumann & Angie Hart. (2009) *Helping children with complex needs bounce back: Resilient Therapy for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley.