



MHFA England

Resilience

Top tips for building resilience in children and young people, the information below is from **Mental Health First Aid England**.

- 1. Make connections** - Teach young people how to make friends, including the skill of empathy, or feeling another's pain. Encourage them to be a friend in order to get friends. Build a strong family support network if possible to support the young person through his or her inevitable disappointments and hurts. Look out for the young person at school and make sure they are not isolated. Connecting with people provides social support and strengthens resilience.
- 2. Help them to help to help others** – Young people who may feel helpless and be empowered by helping others. Engage the young person in age-appropriate volunteer work, or ask for assistance yourself with tasks that he or she can help out with. Brainstorm with them ways they can help others.
- 3. Maintain a daily routine** – Sticking to a routine can be comforting to a young person, especially younger children who crave structure in their lives. Encourage young people to develop their own routines.
- 4. Take a break** - While it is important to stick to routines, worrying and sticking to schedules can be counterproductive. It's important we teach children to focus on things beside the worries. Be aware of what could be troubling the child or young person, it could be the news, social media, school, exams etc.
- 5. Teach self-care and concrete skills** – Make yourself a good example, and teach young people the importance of making time to eat well, exercise and rest. It's important young people have fun and not scheduled every moment of their life with no "downtime" to relax. Looking after oneself and even having fun will help the young person stay balanced and deal with stressful times.
- 6. Move towards your goals** – Teach young people to set reasonable goals and then to move toward them one step at a time. Moving toward that goal – even if it's a tiny step – and receiving praise for doing so will focus the young person on what he or she has accomplished, and can help build the resilience to move forward in the face of challenges.
- 7. Avoid "why" questions** – "Why" questions are not helpful in promoting problem-solving ask "how" instead.
- 8. Accept change is part of living** – Change can be very frightening for young people. Help the young people recognise change is part of life.



9. Nurture a positive self-view, help them manage their emotions and model resilience

– Help the young person remember ways that he or she has successfully handled hardship in the past and then help them build the strength to handle future challenges. Emotional management is key in resilience. Teach young people that all emotions are 'OK', including 'negative' emotions. It's OK to feel angry, sad and anxious from time to time. Adults need to try and lead by example in their behaviour by being calm and consistent, even though this is hard at times. Children and young people can control their emotions a lot better if adults around them are also in control of their emotions. If a child or young person throws a tantrum be clear about what behaviour is appropriate, children and young people learn very quickly powerful emotions get them what they want. It's also important to be honest when you make mistakes, so it's ok to admit your mistakes to a young person or child. E.g. "I am sorry I handled that poorly. Let's talk about a different way we can handle that in the future".

10. Avoid catastrophising – Adults need to pay attention to what they say to young people directly and what is said when they are around. When adults get anxious that could use catastrophising language around young people. For instance "It's really important for you to learn how to swim," they might say, "It's really important for you to learn to swim because it would be horrific for me if you drowned". If a young person is facing painful events, help them see a future beyond the current the situation and that the future can be positive. Be optimistic and hopeful this will help the young person to see the good things in life.

11. Let young people make mistakes and look for opportunities for self-discovery – Failure is not the end of the world, letting young people make mistakes is sometimes hard for adults, but it helps young people learn how to fix mistakes and make better decisions next time. Tough times are often when we learn the most about ourselves. Help young people look at whatever it is they are facing will teach them "what they are made of".

12. Don't accommodate every need – Over protecting children and young people will only fuel their anxiety.

13. Avoid eliminating all risk – We all want to keep children safe, but eliminating all risk take away the young person's ability of learning how to be resilient.

14. Teach problem solving skills – Give young people the opportunity to work out how they can handle challenges. Give them the opportunity, over and over, to figure out what works and what doesn't. When a young person is anxious you could sit down with them and go over some coping strategies, but let them lead on the problem solving.

For more information and training around wellbeing and mental health in schools contact:
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