

Resilience – what is it and how to develop it?

Resilience as a concept is something we hear a lot about, but what is resilience? Is it something innate or something we develop?

When something difficult or traumatic happens to children, you may have heard (or even said) the phrase, *'children are naturally resilient, they bounce back from these things'*. This, I'm afraid, is nonsense. Resilience is not something we inherently have in sufficient quantities to overcome adversity. Rather, it is something that can be fostered and developed as children develop into young adults. Both parents and school play a crucial role in this development.

To help understand resilience, it is helpful to think of a set on scales. On one side, we have risk factors or adversities, on the other, protective factors. Children are better able to overcome adversity (or be resilient) in situations where their protective factors are sufficient to 'outweigh' the adversities they are facing.



Protective factors to encourage resilience

1. Supportive adult-child relationships

The single most protective factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult. The knowledge that someone will catch you if you fall, without judgement or anger, gives children the courage to test themselves, to try and fail, and learn from that. In both a home and school environment this is crucial. To foster these protective relationships in school, we have moved to a vertical tutoring system, to give all pupils the chance to develop strong relational bonds with tutors.

2. Modelling emotional awareness

Children who have a better understanding of their emotions are more able to cope when things don't go right, or adversities are presented. Developing emotional literacy starts in infancy and continues to be shaped and changed throughout childhood, teen years, and early adulthood. Emotion coaching can be an excellent tool for parents to support their children in understanding their emotional health (<https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/>). At Warwick School, pupils are taught Protective Behaviours, to encourage each pupil to understand their emotions and how to keep themselves emotionally 'safe'. This is key to developing resilience.

3. Age-appropriate independence

Developing independence in thought and action supports pupils in developing their confidence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Resilient children can make age-appropriate decisions about the things that affect them. When parents make choices for their child and are over-involved in their lives, children learn that they can't trust themselves and grow up believing that others always know better. Part of being resilient is learning to become independent and to trust in our own abilities – whilst asking for help where appropriate. At Warwick School, pupils are encouraged to develop independence of thinking and action through curricular, extracurricular, and pastoral activities.

4. Embrace mistakes!

Children can become fearful of making mistakes if the environment they are in sees mistakes as negative, punishable, or shameful. Mistakes are actually excellent learning opportunities and should be allowed to happen (if it is safe to do so). Resilient children are less afraid of making mistakes and more prepared to take risks – because they can cope with having got it wrong. At home, as well as allowing your child the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them, also think about the behaviour you're modelling. If you make a mistake, don't beat yourself up about it – remove 'I should have...' from your vocabulary and change to 'I could have...' At school, we encourage pupils to take risks in their learning, to try and fail and learn from that.

Mrs Helen Leaf, Senior Mental Health Lead