

Fostering Resilience in Schools

What is resilience and why does it matter?

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- ❖ Resilience is a process that happens when a child is able to adjust positively after experiencing significant adversity^{7,1,3}. *Every child* has the capacity to be resilient. Below we list ways that educators can help foster resilience.
 - ❖ Experiences of significant adversity, including child maltreatment, can alter the way the brain and body develop and function.¹ Changes can impact children's learning, emotions, behavior, and social interactions.
 - ❖ Child maltreatment impacts the stress response system, which is responsible for responding to danger to keep us safe. Prior or current experiences of child maltreatment can cause children to have stress response systems that are under- or over-active.⁸ Child maltreatment may also lead to over-activation in brain areas associated with fear.^{2,4}
 - ❖ These changes to children's bodies and brains can show up in different ways in the classroom, including withdrawal and internalizing symptoms, aggressive behaviors and acting out, or having trouble thinking and participating in school work.
 - ❖ It is important to understand when challenges stem from child maltreatment. Strategies can be implemented in the classroom to promote resilience and help children thrive.



How can educators promote resilience in schools?^{5,9,11}

Foster relationships

- ❖ Build supportive and caring relationships with students. It may help to designate a supportive adult to check in with individual students as needed.
- ❖ Foster healthy peer interactions, such as through learning groups, classroom bonding activities, and peer mediation.
- ❖ Use structured activities to build connections and foster a sense of belongingness, including daily check-ins, circle time, highs and lows, and office hours.
- ❖ Promote active listening, including listening without judgment or interruption, and validating emotions.

Promote personal development & self-efficacy

- ❖ Provide students with opportunities to make choices and exercise autonomy.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for student contributions, such as assigned classroom jobs. This can help students feel efficacious and valued in the classroom, leading to a sense of belongingness.
- ❖ Incorporate socioemotional skills into learning, including topics like cooperation, healthy conflict resolution, assertiveness, communication, problem-solving, and stress management.
- ❖ Teach and practice self-regulation and relaxation strategies (ex. zones of regulation, feelings faces, sensory grounding techniques, coping boxes, calm down corners, mindfulness, take space passes).

Establish consistency and routine to create a safe and predictable environment

- ❖ Create a daily schedule and display it visually.
- ❖ Maintain high yet attainable expectations for students. This communicates that all students are capable of success.
- ❖ Set clear and consistent boundaries; this keeps all students safe.
- ❖ Be aware of potential triggers for students who have experienced maltreatment. For example, triggers may include loud noises, being approached from behind, or being touched.



Connect to resources

- ❖ Know available community resources to help meet students' needs and to connect them to positive peers and adults in the community.
- ❖ Know when to refer students to behavioral healthcare, such as when emotions and behaviors are extreme, last a long time, or interfere with academic or social functioning.

Remember to take care of yourself!

Educators who interact with children who have experienced trauma like child maltreatment are susceptible to experiencing **secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue**. This can negatively impact teacher mental health and contribute to challenges completing job responsibilities.⁶

To help care for others, it is essential to also care for yourself. Consider the following:

- ❖ Take stock of your professional quality of life. Here is an inventory that may guide you: https://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html
- ❖ Establish and commit to self-care strategies that improve well-being. These may include regular exercise, connecting with friends and loved ones, meditation, journaling, etc.
- ❖ Engage in reflection. For instance, before you go to sleep each night ask yourself, "What are three things that went well today, and what was my role in making them happen?" Write down your responses!



Secondary Traumatic Stress: experiencing traumatic stress symptoms in response to working with those directly impacted by trauma

Burnout: feeling overwhelmed in response to stressors and work tensions over a prolonged period of time

Compassion Fatigue: having decreased interest and ability to help and care for students

What organizational supports are in place?

Schools, at an organizational level, also play a role in supporting those at risk of experiencing secondary traumatic stress. The Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organization Assessment Tool (STSI-OA)¹⁰ can help schools assess strengths and areas for growth in supporting employees. Check it out: <https://www.uky.edu/ctac/stsioa>

Additional Resources for Educators:

- ❖ The TRANSFORM Research Center: <http://thetransformcenter.org/>
- ❖ Resilience Fact Sheet: http://thetransformcenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Transform_Resilience%20fact%20sheet.pdf
- ❖ The Mt. Hope Family Center: <https://www.psych.rochester.edu/MHFC/>
- ❖ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <https://www.nctsn.org/>
- ❖ Check out the educator toolkit: <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/child-trauma-toolkit-educators>
- ❖ The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): <https://casel.org/>
- ❖ Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment: <https://www.theshapesystem.com/trauma/>



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