

ENHANCING RESILIENCE RESOURCE SERIES

How to become more resilient

EDUCATOR GUIDE

What is resilience?

Resilience is a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of adversity or challenge. This process involves the capacity to negotiate for and draw upon psychological, personal, social, cultural and environmental resources. (Brewer et al., 2018)

History

Early researchers tended to view resilience as a fixed personality trait or personal attribute. In the latter part of the 1980s, however, researchers began to argue that resilience was a process, rather than a trait: resilience is created when protective factors initiate certain processes in the individual.

Researchers also began to insist that resilience is both variable and heavily influenced by context. Luthar (2006), for example, emphasised the variability of resilience using the example of an academically successful student who suffers emotional distress and social isolation—this student is deemed educationally resilient, but not emotionally or socially resilient.

Contemporary researchers tend to view resilience as a dynamic process (Eavolino-Ramirez, 2007) that can be developed or enhanced (Stephens, 2013). Further to this, some researchers

including Gillespie et al. (2007) have proposed that resilience doesn't occur in spite of adversity but because of it. That is, individuals aren't born resilient; rather, they develop resilience in response to adverse events that challenge them.

Why is resilience relevant to higher education students?

Resilience has been found to be positively associated with:

- academic success (Beauvais et al, 2014),
- improved mental health (Jayalakshmi & Magdain, 2015; Kajbafnezhad & Keshi, 2015),
- career decision making (Shin & Kelly, 2015),
- career adaptability (Buyukgoze-Kavs, 2016),
- professionalism (Tempski et al., 2015),
- happiness (Sood, 2013),
- coping with stress (Ahern, 2007),
- persistence (Verdinelli & Kutner, 2016),
- acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude (Gupta & Kamar, 2015), and
- wellbeing (Sharma, 2012).

Resilient individuals also experience reduced levels of anxiety and depression (Tempski et al., 2015).

Researchers have found higher levels of resilience in students whose parents have a lower education level, students from a rural background and students who have a strong interest in rural practice (Eley et al. 2017).

Based on their own and others' research, Delany et al. (2015) claimed that an explicit focus on building student resilience may be a useful pedagogical strategy to help students transition from being passive learners to becoming professionals with a degree of agency (agentic professionals). In their review of the literature on resilience in nursing education, Howe et al. (2012) found that resilience is associated with:

- the determination to succeed rather than retreat in the face of challenges,
- persistence when addressing staff bullying, and
- successful completion of their degree.

Howe et al. also found that resilience is associated with hope and optimism among both students and educators.

Gupta and Kuma (2015) posit that resilient people can utilise their capabilities and strengths to cope and recover from problems

and challenges; these might include job loss, financial problems, illness, natural disasters, medical emergencies, divorce, or the death of a loved one. Resilient people are aware of their own emotional reactions and the behaviour of those around them and they are better able to manage feelings and think of new ways to tackle problems.

When to use this resource

As stated earlier, the extant research indicates that resilience can be developed. Raising students' awareness of resilience is most useful within the curriculum if introduced:

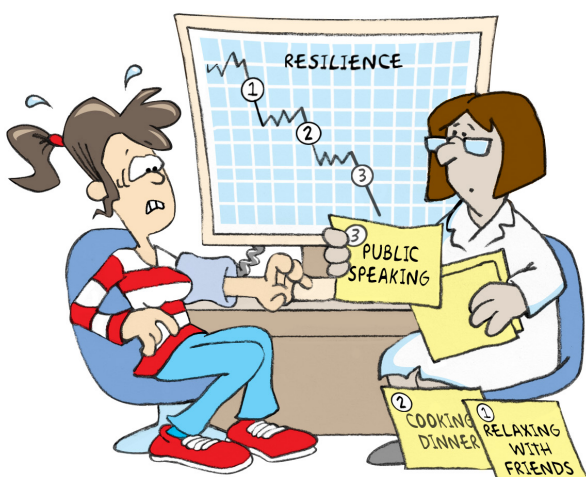
- Prior to a new challenge,
- Prior to an assessment likely to require resilience, or
- Prior to a new experience such as a work-based placement, which is challenging for many students.

Time allowance

Allow students 15 to 20 minutes to complete the [student resource](#) as an individual reflection and use this reflection as the basis for a classroom or online discussion. Advise students that they are not obliged to share the details of their reflection with anyone; instead, they can choose to discuss resilience more broadly.

What else can you do?

The www.enhancingresilience.com website houses many resilience resources, including a leadership development program for staff and a resilience curriculum for higher education. You may also like to consider some of the strategies on the next page.



What else can you do?

- 1. Create an optimal education environment for developing resilience** by facilitating social connection with peers and others. For example, organise interactive social events for students or create stress-free peer zones in which students can share academic experiences and help each other work out solutions to challenges faced during course or placement work.
- 2. Expose students to positive role modelling of resilience.** Have students look for examples of resilience in others (e.g. peers, practitioners, famous people) and critique this within themselves. Invite graduates, professionals or community members to share their experiences with resilience and the strategies they have used to cope with stressful or challenging events. There are a number of career stories in the resources tab on the [developing EmployABILITY student website](#). [Here](#) is a resilience-based career story they could start with.
- 3. Provide opportunities for students to learn from the life experiences of other people** and apply these to everyday ways of coping. Some students will benefit from analysing how they deal with stress, using the following resource: <https://developingemployability.edu.au/tools/how-to-deal-with-stress/>
- 4. Enhance students' self-efficacy by engaging them in self-directed learning** and giving them some choice (i.e. control) over aspects of their learning. This will help to engender a belief in their ability to influence the system. Examples include allowing students to control the content of their reflections or the timing and focus of supervision feedback sessions.
- 5. Help students to set realistic goals**, working towards longer-term goals and giving feedback that builds their confidence. This will strengthen students' performance, persistence and commitment. [This resource](#) on our website introduces effective career goal setting and how to establish personal and career goals using the SMART principles of goal setting.
- 6. Facilitate graded exposure to uncertainty and difficulty.** This is important, particularly in relation to workplace learning where well-structured approaches to overcoming difficulties and achieving goals are essential to internalising confidence and self-efficacy.
- 7. Have students work through common challenges and 'stretch' assignments.** This helps them to realise that improvement is possible and that successful progression is based on persistence and commitment, not merely innate ability. Encourage students to reconceptualise failure as an opportunity for quality improvement. <https://developingemployability.edu.au/tools/failure-as-an-opportunity-for-quality-improvement/>
- 8. Engage students in simulated, real-life case studies** (for example, in mock interviews, ethics training or dealing with a difficult client). This helps students to become more comfortable with discomfort (cognitive dissonance) and to transform their view of uncertainty from a threat to a challenge or learning opportunity. Case studies must be genuinely challenging if students are to understand that moral challenges are inevitable in their chosen profession.

Create a learning environment that promotes self-management by establishing clear rules and reinforcing students' responsibilities. For example, research suggests that rarely granting assessment extensions reinforces to students that they need to meet their obligations, manage their stress, and be proactive and responsible in their decision-making.

9. Support students while giving them challenges to build their performance and resilience. That is, make students feel 'safe' as much as possible so they can experiment (have-a-go) before they're exposed to major challenges.

Other resources in the 'Enhancing Resilience' series:

[Growth Mindset](#)

[How to deal with stress](#)

[How do I develop my support networks?](#)

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