

# School-wide Methods for Fostering Resiliency: *Support from caring adults is key to students' success in the face of adversity.*

*(adapted from the article "School-wide Methods for Fostering Resiliency" by Virginia Smith Harvey)*

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We usually think of adversity, such as poverty and highly dysfunctional families, as detrimental. This is certainly often true, but students can overcome adversity and in some circumstances can actually use adversity as a springboard to growth and success. This ability to succeed despite adversity stems from resilience, or coping effectively with difficulties that might otherwise lead to anxiety, depression, withdrawal, physical symptoms, or poor achievement. Considerable research has revealed that resilience results from positive social relationships, positive attitudes and emotions, the ability to control one's own behavior, and feelings of competence. Resiliency gives students the ability to deal with challenges and adapt to new or difficult circumstances in a positive, productive manner. The more resilient approaches and habits an adolescent develops, the better his or her ability to weather adversities encountered in life. There are a number of ways for schools and teachers to foster resilience.

**Provide a caring, supportive learning environment.** Feeling cared for and safe builds students' resiliency. Promote positive social connections between staff members and students, students and their peers, and home and school. Adults must deliberately, repeatedly, and genuinely communicate positive regard. It can be helpful to structure the school

setting so every student has adults in whom he or she can trust or confide.

**Foster positive attitudes.** Help students believe that they can succeed if they try. Provide situations in which students are able to succeed. Frame failure as a learning opportunity. Teach them to reevaluate and adjust strategies that may not be working. Adults can help students manage negative emotions by teaching them to name emotions and helping them understand that these emotions are normal yet do not preclude appropriate behavior. When administrators and teachers provide "emotion coaching," they help students become more aware of and able to label emotions, listen empathetically and validate feelings, and derive appropriate ways to solve problems or deal with an upsetting issues.

**Nurture positive emotions.** Demonstrate and give students the chance to practice positive emotions, such as optimism, respect, forgiveness, and empathy. Train staff members to reinforce emotional intelligence, praise students for successes, and avoid judgmental or harsh criticism for failure.

**Foster academic self-determination and feelings of competence.** Provide consistent clear expectations. Help students develop a menu of homework and study strategies. Encourage students to regularly attend

school and complete homework, as well as to develop talents in activities they enjoy. Teach them to set realistic goals and how obtain necessary resources.

**Encourage volunteerism.** Social competence and resilience are fostered by helping others at home, in school, and in the community. Create and promote a variety of opportunities for students to contribute to the well-being of others both on and off campus. Anti-bullying, peer mediation programs, and initiatives that encourage students to accept and sponsor less popular students all foster resiliency.

**Teach peace-building skills.** Learning how to be appropriately assertive without being aggressive fosters resilience. Teach conflict resolution and peer-mediation skills, strategies for standing up to bullies, and violence-prevention strategies.

**Ensure healthy habits.** Good physical health prepares the body and mind to be more resilient and contributes to school success. Encourage good nutrition through school food offerings, adequate sleep, and exercise through education, and increased opportunities for exercise. Facilitate stress reduction by incorporating positive stress control strategies, such as meditation, controlled breathing, yoga, and exercise into school curricula.