

Understanding anxiety and resilience to support your child

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Anxiety

Everyone has a level of anxiety, of being anxious, which within a range helps them to perform and anticipate what might be. To always be calm would be unrealistic.

If anxiety dramatically impacts on a person's life, is out of proportion and anticipates only bad outcomes, then clinical anxiety



may be being experienced. In that case an assessment and treatment from a mental health professional can be really helpful.

Parents and schools can support children when they are feeling anxious by helping them to name their feelings, learn coping skills and gain a better perspective about the situation. These approaches will enable a child to become more resilient in the face of their anxious feelings so that they are able to continue to cope with a wide range of situations at home and school.

Resilience

- Some characteristics that we might expect to see in a child who is coping well or is resilient include:
- using positive self-talk for encouragement
- capably expressing their feelings and thoughts
- not hiding away from strong feelings
- having helpful, age-appropriate strategies to manage their emotions if they are upset
- rearranging their plans to work around an unexpected situation
- using a trial-and-error approach in their daily life
- remaining hopeful and keep on trying if something doesn't work out
- knowing when to stop trying if they decide the effort is not worthwhile
- actively asking for help if they need it.

Children may have learned to behave in ways that are acceptable to the adults around them and can appear

resilient on the outside but not actually be resilient. A child like this might:

- not openly express their feelings
- put on a front (even though it's obvious they are struggling)
- not fully engage in what's happening around them
- not fully connect with other children and adults in their lives
- tend to give up if things don't go well in the first instance
- not appear confident in dealing with situations themselves (but might not make a fuss about it).



We all experience a range of stressors in our day-to-day lives and children are no exception to this. Variability in what individuals find stressful is variable - what is stressful to one may not be stressful for others.

Experiencing stress or feeling anxious does not mean that the child is less resilient. Preparing for known stressors e.g. transition or change of schools and learning to manage stressful times can be part of the ongoing process of becoming more resilient.

The ability to cope with stress will depend on the

- degree of stress
- supports or buffers that are protective, and
- the type and helpfulness of coping skills children have developed.

Building resilience comes through the [development of social and emotional skills](#) (VCSPB *Bulletin*, Term 2, 2013), which include coping skills. Schools have a range of social and emotional learning initiatives they use to explicitly teach these skills and practise them throughout the school day and at home with the assistance and modelling of parents and significant adults. It's also important not to ignore basics like helping children sleep and eat well as we know these are associated with stress.

Children learn (and take cues) from the adults around them, so it's important for adults to be mindful of how they approach stressful situations and the skills they use to resolve challenges. They can also play an active role in supporting children during stressful times.

Resilience comes from both internal and external factors to a child and is something we all keep working on over the course of our life

The focus on social and emotional skills is really important for children's resilience. Teaching children to accept that all feelings are okay is an important aspect of this, and enables them to express things such as frustration or worry. It is also key to help children feel in charge of their own responses to feelings, and to have confidence in their ability to solve problems that arise, with support if necessary. If we understand resilience

Internal factors	External factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social and emotional competencies for their age that help them to name their feelings, manage their emotions, be aware of other people, solve problems, and make good decisions • their own unique temperament or personality • how easily a child may learn social and emotional skills • the level of support a child requires how easily upset or distressed than others a child may be when confronted by a difficulty • their ability to seek and accept help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support around them from family, school, community • modeling of resilience by adults around them • by explicitly teaching and practising the social and emotional skills • parents who manage their own stress and build their own resilience so they can best support their child • opportunities at school and home for children to confront and learn to deal effectively with the many day-to-day stressors that arise • a planned and strategic approach to help children develop skills, gain a sense of connectedness, and really act as a protective factor for children, for example the Catholic Education Office Melbourne's Student Wellbeing Strategy

There are children who experience more significant challenges and, in these circumstances, resilience takes on quite a different meaning. For some children life can be uncertain and threatening and their basic human needs may not easily be met. Resilience can be more like survival, and signs of resilience can include getting to school each day and being able to sit still and concentrate for short periods of time. When children have gone through a crisis, resilience really does mean being able to bounce back from a situation that was or could have been life threatening. Significant losses may have been experienced and their lives may have been changed in many different ways. Most children do very well even after these events although some children may require some additional support if they are still having difficulties several months after the event. This highlights the human capacity to be resilient and even grow through big challenges. Again, the role of adults in the lives of children is important here as they provide support and security for children.

as partly about being able to seek and accept help when required, we will be able to normalise the range of experiences we all have, including on bad days.

Resources

- The Building Resilience model has been developed as an online portal, to assist schools to easily access a wealth of programs, tools and resources which enhance the resilience of children and young people. All new materials, as well as relevant existing Department and external resources, have been made available to all Victorian schools and stakeholders through this portal, demonstrating how key current policies, frameworks, programs and resources work together to enhance resilience. Access the Building Resilience online portal at: www.education.vic.gov.au/resilience
- The Power of introverts Susan Cain Ted2012
Filmed Feb 2012 (19.04 minutes)