A Brief Guide to Increasing Resilience

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Having worked with over 600 communities and 160,000 young people on increasing resilience, we have worked with areas with high levels of abuse, violence, drug use and despair. We have also worked with areas that have measurably abundant levels of resilience. These are some of the lessons that we have drawn from Resilient Youth's research and our observations of resilient schools and communities.

Compassion and love are our some of our oldest medicines. When we add in hope and connectedness, we have the four most powerful ingredients of healing.

Each ingredient alone may not cure a case of the flu but together they will help you resist disease, lower stress, lower blood pressure, avoid a heart attack, protect against depression, increase your longevity and help you live a happier life.

What creates resilience varies at different stages of our lives. To outline this we need to take you through the main findings of Resilient Youth's research.

Resilient Youth's research

There are 40 key predictors of wellbeing and resilience in young people. The more of these 40 resilience assets a young person has, the more likely they are to:
Achieve academic success
Be motivated to learn
Experience positive relationships
Complete schooling
Be persistent problem solvers
Show constructive leadership

The more of these 40 assets a young person has, the less likely they are to:
Experience alcohol and drug problems,
Be violent
Leave school early
Have behavioural problems
Experience depression and anxiety.

Assessing the levels of resilience assets in schools and communities provides a powerful way to plan how to increase the wellbeing and resilience of young people while also building on their strengths.

How to assess resilience

Resilient Youth has developed and validated a 99 question, online resilience survey incorporating a series of reliable gold standard measures including: The Developmental Assets Profile, The General Health Questionnaire and The Children's Hope Scale.

Creating Lives where People are Connected, Protected & Respected

Building resilience involves creating the three things every parent wants for their children and every teacher wants for their students. This is for our children and teens to be:

Connected
Protected
Respected

Resilient Youth's **CPR** approach helps young people them to create success and positive relationships while also protecting them

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against mental health problems, substance abuse and involvement in destructive extremist groups. Feeling connected, protected, respected are the pre- conditions for what can be described based on this research, as the "Resilient Mindset".

In Years 3-4, 59% of students (67% of girls and 52% of boys) have good or high levels of resilience. However there is a steady drop from 59% to 27% of students having good or high levels by Years 11-12 (29% for girls and 25% for boys).

Connected

The percentage of girls and boys reporting high or medium levels of positive relationships in their lives is relatively steady across the year levels. The percentage of students reporting that they have 2 or more groups of friends remains steady with two notable low points- Years 3-4 and Years 7-8 indicating the need for diversifying friendship groups and broadening social connected-ness especially at these times.

Across all year levels, boys exhibit lower levels of social skills than girls. Having social skill powerfully protects against relationship problems and alcohol and drug use.

Students consistently value diversity and are interested in actively helping others. Even young people with very few assets themselves want to help other people.

What possibly prevents young people from connecting with a broader range of people is their low levels of trust and forgiveness. While the feeling of being able to trust others is found in 34% of Year 3-4 students it steadily declines to a low point of 17% in Years 9-10.

A similar trend is found in their preparedness to forgive other people. The overall picture suggested by this research is that young people are good at establishing positive relationships and deriving support from them but when relationships fall into troubled times, they have little idea of how to repair them.

Most students have positive values, are engaged in school, are motivated to learn, are connected to the adults in their lives and feel safe at home and at school. The strength of relationships between students and their teachers frays and lessens in secondary/high school and with that comes a slowing of momentum.

Protected

To live in a home where at least one parent or caring adult loves you, cares for you and listens to you is a gift that lasts a lifetime. The majority of students feel safe at home and at school.

However there are times of disconnection and disengagement. Feeling encouraged by school sits at around 86% in primary school and then falls to 67% in Years 7-8 before rising to 68% in Years 9-10 and to 73% in Years 11-12. Generally boys feel less encouraged than girls.

Connectedness to adults also varies markedly over the school years with 79% of Year 3-4 students saying they have an adult in their lives who listens to them. This remains steady in Years 5-6 before declining in Years 7-8 to 67% and 63% in Years 9-10 and by Years 11-12 reduces again to 61%.

Belonging – our sense of belonging is the most powerful antidote we have to suicide, violence and to drug abuse.

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The sense of belonging at school is strong in the primary years with girls having a stronger sense of belonging than boys (81% and 69% in Years 5-6). Over the secondary/ high school years it drifts so much so that by Years 11-12, 21% of girls and 25% of boys have a low levels of school belonging.

Bullying – The pattern of face to face bullying steadily declines with the proportion of students reporting having been bullied in the past year reducing from 26% in Years 3-4, to 22 % in Years 5-6, 20% in Years 7-8,17% in Years 9-10 and 11% in Years 11-12. Conversely, the rate of online or cyber bullying rises from 5% in Years 3-4, 5 % in Years 5-6, 8% by Years 7-8, 9% in Years 9-10 and declines in Year 11 -12 to 7%.

Respected

The perception that your family, friends, school and country respect you as a person is a powerful predictor of both the sense that you belong and your resilience.

Obviously, feeling alienated, unvalued and worthless does not lead to good outcomes either for the people who feel that way or also for the communities they live in.

In Years 3-4, 69% of young people feel valued and appreciated by others. This steadily and sadly decreases across the high/ secondary school years. Being included in important decisions is related to feeling respected and involved. A similar decline is found with 72% of Year 3-4 feeling included but by Years 9-12 only 65% feel involved in important decisions.

Being given useful roles and responsibilities is a reflection of how much young people are respected and relied upon. It is an indirect measure of the level of trust that is placed in

young people. This too declines from 68% of Year 3-4 students being given useful roles and responsibilities to only 53% of Year 11-12 students.

There is also a decrease in reported levels of confidence from 78% of Year 3-4 students feeling confident to 62% of Year 11-12 students.

The Resilient Mindset

The modeling of the Resilient Youth research indicates the existence of a resilient mindset. This involves taking a positive approach to challenges, mistakes and developing ideas and a preparedness to utilize opportunities to improve and succeed. The resilient mindset can be contrasted with anxious and avoidant mindsets.

A more detailed exploration of the ideas and strategies that teachers and parents can use to help young people shift from either an anxious or avoidant mindset into a resilient mindset will be published later this year.

Establishing a resilient mindset in students increases motivation and engagement in learning as well as academic results. The resilient mindset includes eagerness to achieve, motivation to learn and feeling supported by parents and teachers to succeed at school.

This is combined with hopefulness. If learned helplessness is a key predictor of the likelihood of depression, "learned hopefulness" is an antidote. While most students are hopeful and can anticipate good things and plan ways to get the things they want, about 8% of students have very low levels of hope.

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Implications of this research for building resilience

This research points to different strategies and needs at different stages of schooling.

Years 3-4

Two main priorities seem apparent. Firstly, focus on the development of positive relationships. Broadening and deepening friendships increases the sense of being connected to, and respected at, school. By practicing how to create, maintain and repair friendships we can build values, social competencies and emotional intelligence while protecting against violence, drug abuse and bullying. This requires schools to employ relationship-based approaches to behavioural incidents where there is an emphasis on forgiveness and the maintenance of attachment rather than consequences.

Secondly the introduction of Resilient Mindset programs in Years 3-4 to help students' learn about their brains and how to optimise them. Students' engage when they experience success.

Resilient Mindset programs involve: -
teachers, parents, grandparents, carers and students in sessions building concentration, creativity, learning and memory skills.
-actively building creativity and imagination through exploration of intriguing ideas and phenomena in the world.
 -emphasising the essential ingredients of brain power- sleep, healthy eating, movement and exercise.
- reducing the emphasis on homework and replacing it with investigations, math quests, reading for fun and research.
-developing ideas through conversations.

Years 5-6

Years 5-6 is a great time to consolidate resilience. The relative turbulence of Years 3-4 is past and transition is yet to occur. Students are overwhelmingly positive, engaged and raring to go and we need to capitalise on that momentum. Firstly, implement the Student Transition and Resilience Training **(START)** program and use building resilience curricula http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/tea**chers/transitions/Pages/start.aspx**

Secondly, build learning engagement through resilient mindset programs to help students and parents learn how their brains work and develop the skills that build academic success. Specifically build skills in:
Memory
Concentration
Note making
Visual representations
Using graphic organizers
Identifying similarities and differences
Utilising feedback
How to practice well
Creativity
Decision-making
Problem solving
Persistence.

Thirdly, develop social skills and personal identity through "***students create the future"*** projects (where teams of students take on a social issue and create a movement for change in their school, town, community or world for one week). Make sure students at this stage are empowered and that their voices are heard.

Fourth, develop an emphasis on experiential learning especially in Science, Mathematics and English. This requires additional

empowerment of teachers to utilise theatre sports and literacy methods, hands-on mathematics, STEAM and entrepreneurialism.

Years 7-8

By Years 7-8 too many students feel unsafe, disrespected and isolated. They have great capabilities but too many of them don't apply them at school. This represents a major opportunity lost. This is a time of maximal neuroplasticity but despite the great surge in cognitive ability, the engagement at school seen in Years 5- 6 slows and lessens, positive connectedness weakens and achievement levels in numeracy and literacy often languish.

Students need to learn about how to capitalise on the increased cognitive capacity of their brains and to develop a resilient mindset.

One of the gateways to engagement for this age group is the strength of positive relationships students form with one another and with their teachers. The resilience survey indicates that the current structure of school does not strengthen connectedness.

To capitalise on the enormous opportunities of this age range, we need to more powerfully implement the research findings on effective middle schooling, essentially fewer subject areas and fewer but more connected relationships.

The central intention of managing behavioural incidents should always be "how can we help this student to be a happy engaged learner". This means that relationships and forgiveness are at the heart of effective student management not rules and consequences.

Successful teachers of adolescents base their work on relationships rather than power.

Teachers need to "own" their own classrooms so they can develop support and routines, implement guided practice and create a visually interesting, engaging and safe learning environments. This is especially true in secondary/ high schools.

Years 9-10

Year 10 is when the lowest levels of resilience occur. It coincides with increased feelings of alienation and disconnection. While the origins of this low point may occur earlier through not establishing close positive relationships or having a sense of success at school, Year 10 is the pinch point. If we can make a difference in Years 9-10, we will substantially improve resilience.

By Years 9-10 we have a group of students who feel disengaged from school and are relatively impervious to classroom-based interventions. This means that while building resilience curricula should still be implemented, it will only go so far.

Increasing the knowledge of Year 9-10 students about creating and maintaining positive respectful relationships should be considered. This should be based on the characteristics of successful relationships- trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope and compassion.

Years 9-10 appears to be the ideal time to incorporate **"*students create the future* "** projects and the skills of entrepreneurialism into student-led businesses and initiatives. This helps to build positive identity through living values in action.

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This is the time to shift the balance of learning away from classrooms towards real–life, immersive, experiential challenge based learning.

A number of areas can contribute to this:
Robotics
Coding
 Commerce and entrepreneurial skills
Forensics
Drama
Community arts
Analysis of local businesses
Students create the future projects.
Virtual technologies
 E-publications

It is also highly desirable that parents see themselves as powerful participants in their teen's school success and brain development. Assisting parents to learn about study strategies, the teen brain and how to maintain motivation and a resilient mindset would be valuable.

Students Create The Future

Students' brains grow quickly when they are challenged to be curious and creative. Challenges also build dopamine – the foundation of motivation. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to involve young people in projects that make a difference in the world.

Years 11-12

Building resilience in Years 11-12 is about managing:
Organisation and time
Stress
Energy and
Aftercare

Organisation and time-

Compassionate individual mentoring and coaching of students so they achieve milestones and maintain motivation is helpful. The frame that needs to be authoritatively and caringly made, is that successful completion of Years 11 and 12 is a journey. There is a systematic way of doing it well and as teachers we will help you to follow that system. Parents need to be educated about the process of successfully completing Years 11 and 12.

Stress-

Incorporating anxiety reduction methods into these years is essential. 52% of Year 12 students have high levels of anxiety. Mindfulness approaches are useful for some but more active and therapeutic forms of anxiety reduction also need to be practiced. We need to manage expectations and catastrophic thinking. As part of the process of Years 11-12, "take care of yourself" times need to be scheduled. Developing a series of video clips of students who have coped well in Years 11-12 would be valuable.

Energy-

The results of the resilience survey show that many students are sleep deprived, overly dependent on social media, eating poorly and not exercising or looking after themselves. It is a recipe for fatigue and sadness.

As well as educating parents and students about how to maintain energy, we would like to suggest that each student nominates two "guardian angels" one in school, one out of school who check in with the student and also can contact the student welfare coordinator if they feel concerned.

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Aftercare-

We know from previous research that students with high levels of school belonging are most at risk in the year after school. The resilience survey indicates that 16% of girls and 8 % of boys have high levels of school belonging. Linking these students with post-school mentors, past students or people in local industry should be considered.

What resilient schools, families and communities all have in common

There is one overriding principle that all resilient schools, families and communities have: they all follow the golden rule. Treat other people as you yourself would like to be treated.

One of the factors that can work against this is that humans are very tribal beings. If we are to truly thrive we need to think and act globally.

Building Your Tribe

The places where most of us feel love, compassion, hope and connection is in our families, schools and communities. To increase resilience we need to powerfully connect people with their family, school and community.

Resilient schools and communities enable people to feel protected, respected and connected.

Families treat one another with respect and help children to learn values like trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope and compassion.

Schools aim to cultivate character as well as academic success. The best ones do it by creating an intensely interactive community

that applauds success, forgives mistakes and helps people realise their potential. Communities support positive interactions and help people reduce abusive or destructive acts. They actively reduce loneliness and isolation. No one is on the outer because there is no outer. When people make mistakes they are not rejected or treated harshly but are helped to become an involved member of their group.

Communities can create a sense of belonging that generates the trust that underlies the golden rule.

Maintaining Your Tribe

In schools we initially build tribes in specific classes, then in mentor groups, then year levels or houses and gradually across the entire school.

Applying our knowledge of the process of group identity formation is essential. Almost all groups go through a process of forming, norming, storming and eventually, performing.

An awareness of these four stages is necessary otherwise the risk of becoming reactive and punitive when storming occurs can destroy resilience. The storming phase is the most vital time to show that this is a place where people are protected, respected and connected.

Expanding Your Tribe

An important question to ask yourself and others is, "How big is your tribe?" Is it your family? Your friendship group? Your school? Your sports team? Your country? The world?

Traditionally it has been estimated that people can't form close relationships with

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more than 150 other people. We overcome this by moving people from basing their tribe on how well they get on with others to basing it on their values and then applying those to all their relationships and encounters. People who embody the values of trust, forgiveness, integrity, hope and compassion can create positive relationships with almost everyone they encounter and therefore, create bigger tribes. They become global citizens and happier people.

When people feel embedded in a family, school or community they feel protected, respected and connected. When people feel protected, respected and connected it generates enormous trust.

When people trust one another they can think about long-term objectives. They can be creative and constructive.

Collaboration moves at the speed of trust. When we trust, we can collaborate and experiment and we can be open to new ideas and new approaches. This is the basis of the resilience mindset.

People who do not trust one another end up complying only under a system of formal rules and regulations that have to be negotiated, agreed to and enforced, sometimes by coercive means.

Trust cannot be commanded. It can only be nurtured and inspired within healthy relationships and communities. Trust is contagious but we have to first give it to receive it.

There is no restraint more powerful than thinking your family or friends will think poorly of you. There is no greater motivation than wanting your family and friends to think well of you.

Being part of a group has great survival value. It is the reason that we are all here.

We can reinforce the character building norms of healthy families, schools and communities by showing people the benefits of joining together. When we move from *do unto others* to *do with others* we build powerful tribes who can make a difference. This is why we have young people come together in "**students create the future"** projects. They collaborate and in doing so they become our next- generation leaders.

Resilient schools, families and communities are quite matter of fact about this. There is a sense of "this is the way we do things here".

The best solutions for building resilience aren't programs or major initiatives. The conditions that help people to feel protected, respected and connected aren't download-able. They are uploaded one relationship at a time. Applying the golden rule, developing values and applying them consistently in ever-larger tribal groups enables people to develop the resilient mindset.

Andrew Fuller can be contacted at inyahead@satlink.com.au or www.andrewfuller.com.au, to book sessions on the Resilient Mindset and to obtain free downloads. Andrew's most recent book is *"Unlocking Your Child's Genius"* (Finch, 2015)

If you are interested in enquiring about the Resilience Survey, please contact Dr. Andrew Wicking, General Manager **Resilient Youth** Phone: +61 400 113945 www.resilientyouth.org.au
We would like to thank the schools, teachers, communities and young people who have participated in the Resilience Survey to date.

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