

Developing Students' Resilience and Coping Skills

Resilience is the ability to face and adapt to challenging experiences and circumstances (APA, n.d.). According to Cassidy (2015), resilience is “an asset or strength, a desirable and advantageous quality, characteristic or process that is likely to impact positively on aspects of an individual’s performance, achievement, health and wellbeing” (p.2). There are many ways that educators and school leaders can foster resilience in their students. Ungar and colleagues (2014) share that teachers can promote resilience by making themselves accessible to students and actively listening to their concerns. Additionally, students can have empathy with students’ difficult challenges and circumstances and provide them with coping skills and strategies to positively deal with those challenges (Ungar et al., 2014). Gardner and Stephens-Pisecco (2019) share that educators can promote resilience by creating a safe environment, building relationships, teaching students how to regulate their emotions, promoting students’ healthy self perceptions, and by helping them build cognitive skills, coping strategies, fortitude, and positive personal qualities. We encourage teachers to use some or all of these strategies to help build student resilience. Additionally, the Resilience and Coping intervention will help students face and overcome adversity by allowing them to share their personal challenges and work together to develop coping strategies and solutions.

Grade Level: All. Lessons should be adapted to students' needs and abilities.

Materials: Paper, pencil. See the [Resilience and Coping Intervention Guide](#) for additional materials needed. This resource is also provided in Spanish.

Duration: At least three, 45-minute sessions.

Implementation:

1. Introduce the concept of resilience to your students and set group rules for the discussion about topics that can be addressed and appropriate, respectful behavior.
2. Give students a few minutes to share previous challenges and coping strategies.
3. Assist the students in identifying a problem they can discuss as a group.
4. Have students discuss aspects of the problem:
 - Describe specific examples of the problem and when/why it occurred.
 - Describe thoughts and feelings regarding the problem.
 - Consider possible ways to change the problem.
 - Consider the consequences and outcomes of each of those possible solutions.
 - Help students create an action plan of how they can cope with or change the problem using the solutions discussed.
 - Have a follow-up session to assess student progress and participation with the action plan, and repeat this process with additional problems as needed.

Does it work?

The Resilience and Coping intervention(RCI) was initially tested by Allen and colleagues (2016), as part of an after-school program for children and adolescents living in at-risk neighborhoods. The study sample included 74 students between ages 5 and 19, all of whom were African-American students. These students were divided into a few groups according to their age, and each group of students received five sessions (administered weekly) as part of the intervention. Each

session was led by a facilitator who assisted students in their discussion. After learning about resilience, children and adolescents were encouraged to share challenges they have faced, coping strategies they have used in the past, and brainstorm other coping strategies they could use in the future. They also selected a topic as a group to discuss and then create an action plan to overcome that particular issue. Some of the topics addressed were bullying, conflict with peers, teachers and family members, anger, and death of loved ones. Though it is difficult to determine causality without a control group, surveys administered prior to and following the intervention indicate that this intervention contributed to an improvement in participants' coping strategies, as well as a sense of hope in the future. Parents of participants also reported that following the intervention, their children seemed to get into less trouble at school and had an improved ability to express emotions and walk away from difficult situations (Allen et al., 2016). This study was replicated a year later, however, as a randomized control trial with undergraduate college students ages 18 to 23 (Houston et al., 2017). 64 students were assigned to the intervention and received three, 45-minute RCI sessions. RCI participants reported significantly lower levels of stress and depression, and higher levels of hope following the intervention as compared to the control group which did not participate in the intervention.

References:

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