



# Teaching resilience to children under six



ECE resources

Resilience is the capacity to adapt well when faced with adversity or stress. It helps children deal with challenging experiences. It involves continuing to persist despite difficulty and learning to interpret challenges in a positive way by increasing effort, trying a different strategy, or learning how to work through disagreements and conflict.

## What is resilience and why is it important for children?

There are several critical abilities associated with resilience, including:

- **emotional regulation**, or the ability to keep calm and express emotions in a way that helps the situation
- **impulse control**, which involves the ability to make a conscious choice to act on a desire (or not), as well as to delay gratification and persevere
- **causal analysis**, or the ability to analyse problems and identify causes
- **empathy**, or the ability to understand the feelings and needs of another person
- **realistic optimism**, or the ability to keep a positive outlook without denying reality
- **self-efficacy**, or the belief in one's ability to solve problems and handle stress
- **opportunity-seeking**, or the ability to take new opportunities and reach out to others

In general, children with higher resilience tend to have more positive outcomes, including greater wellbeing, and exhibit fewer problem behaviours at school and later in life.

Resilient characteristics in early childhood include cognitive understandings about working within rules, controlling impulses and finding alternative ways to solve problems. Resilient children are also beginning to develop understanding of feelings, and are learning to put them into words and talk to others about things that are frightening or distressing. They are able to seek help when needed and assert the rights and responsibilities of themselves and others.

Resilience varies with age and developmental stages, but it is not a characteristic that children are born with – rather, it is something that can be learned and developed. There are a number of ways that teachers can intentionally support children to build their resilience, such as:

- Offering opportunities for well-developed **make-believe play** that helps children develop the intentional and self-regulatory behaviours that are part of coping abilities
- Offering opportunities for children to experience **true mastery by providing choices**, allowing children to take measured risks, and identifying and reinforcing competence by highlighting small accomplishments ('You remembered to ride your bike in the right direction so you didn't bump into people')
- **Demonstrating positivity** by guiding children to identify the positive parts of a situation and verbalising positive thoughts
- Modelling and teaching **calming and focusing** strategies

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## References

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Vicki is a teacher, mother, writer, and researcher. She recently completed her PhD using philosophy to explore creative approaches to understanding early childhood education. She is inspired by the wealth of educational research that is available and is passionate about making this available and useful for teachers.