

# RESILIENCE



Resilience is a performance virtue. It is our ability to cope with change, challenge and adversity and it draws on different sources namely cognition (thinking skills), physical health, mental health and relationships. Some key texts to give an introduction to working on resilience are:

- \* *The Resilience Factor* by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté

## SESSION 1: Drawing you in.

### 1. Knowing what resilience you've already got around you.

- \* Ask students in small groups to discuss and write down a list of the adversities they encounter on an ordinary day: what are the things that get in the way of their day going as they want it to? (Record these somewhere, you'll need them for lesson 2).
- \* Feedback.
- \* Ask students to discuss and write down the biggest adversity that they themselves have overcome, or that someone they know has overcome.
- \* Feedback.
- \* Ask students to find the best stories of **overcoming** an adversity from the people in the room. Ask them specifically to find out **how** the person overcame the adversity. Remember that overcoming is not the same as avoiding or ignoring (perhaps spend time unpacking what it means to 'overcome').
- \* Feedback the strategies that people used to overcome the adversity they faced.
- \* Ask students in small groups to discuss which strategies for overcoming adversity they would use themselves.

### 2. The basic ingredients of resilience.

- \* Our ability to respond to adversity is known as

- \* *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations* by Jules Evans
- \* *How to Deal With Adversity* by Christopher Hamilton

Resilience (as with all performance virtues) must be balanced by moral and civic virtues: it would be possible to be resilient in an immoral way, or in a way that is not civic-minded. 'Immoral ways' here includes sticking at things that are neither fine, noble nor worthwhile.

resilience. It goes beyond coping: it is an ability to respond constructively to the challenges that we face (and grow in the light of those experiences).

- \* Four of the principal ingredients of resilience are Awareness, Thinking, Reaching Out and our Fitness/Health. Our awareness is our ability to notice as much of what is going on as possible; our thinking is our interpretation of the events that are happening; reaching out is how we call upon others to help us respond to adversity and our fitness is our physical and mental ability to respond without buckling under the strain.
- \* Ask students to look back at the resilience strategies they have already identified and try to categorise them according to the 4 main ingredients mentioned.

### 3. Learning from an expert: analysis of Chesley Sullenberger.

- \* There are a number of very good interviews with Captain Chesley Sullenberger, the pilot who landed his plane on the Hudson River in New York available on the internet.
- \* Ask students in small groups to watch the video and try to identify what he did that enabled him to overcome the adversity he faced; they should try to fit these strategies into the four categories.
- \* Feedback.



#### 4. Plenary.

- \* Ask students in pairs to identify one (or more) things that they can do differently in between lessons to try to respond more constructively to adversity.

### SESSION 2: The ABC and Thinking Traps: awareness.

#### 1. The A – B – C.

Psychologist Albert Ellis, inspired by the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus, recognised that how we think in any given situation has an effect on what we feel/our emotions, and on what we do. He came up with the simple model of the A – B – C, which stands for Adversity – Beliefs – Consequences: we find ourselves in challenging situations (Adversity), which our mind interprets and generates Beliefs about and those Beliefs lead to Consequences comprising emotions/feelings and behaviour/actions. This is not true of all situations: primary emotions such as fear and disgust operate very quickly and bypass cognition to get us away from the threat, however there may of course be examples of fear and disgust that are generated by thinking.

- \* A good place to start is a video or story about someone facing an adversity. There are some good videos of people about to do a bungee jump for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj-slNvmFYA> [available 02/15].

- \* Ask students to identify three things from the stimulus (perhaps separate them out into columns).

**1. What happens: the Adversity faced:** the facts of the situation (who, what, where, when) the things that everyone can agree on.

**2. The Beliefs in the mind of the person facing the Adversity:** you will need to speculate here (because our Beliefs are not necessarily obvious).

**3. The Consequences:** what the person **felt** and what the person **did**: these two things should be obvious.

- \* Feedback.

- \* Feedback on what individual students are going to do and what situations they can already foresee they can use these strategies for.

- \* Go back to the everyday adversities mentioned during the last lesson. Ask students in small groups to identify the A – B – C present in situations like these, focusing on what a person might Believe/Think and what they might Feel/Do.

#### 2. The Link Between Beliefs and Emotions.

The next step on the road to developing resilience is to recognise that certain Beliefs lead to certain Emotions.

“I have lost something/someone.”

Sadness/depression

“I have been harmed/my rights infringed.”

Anger

“I have harmed someone else.”

Guilt/shame

“I am not as good as...”

Embarrassment

“There’s a threat in my environment.”

Anxiety/fear.

- \* Give students the list of beliefs on the slides and ask them to speculate on how certain beliefs would make us feel and what actions those beliefs might lead to. There is ambiguity here: for example some children might find loss makes them angry because they believe they had a right to whatever was lost: the link between certain beliefs and emotions is right (e.g. between violation of rights and anger); it’s just that sometimes we don’t correctly identify our beliefs; we might not realise we believe our rights have been violated, even though our anger should tell us this.





### 3. Thinking Traps.

- \* Now that we know that certain beliefs lead to certain feelings, we are ready to explore whether or not our beliefs are flexible, accurate and reliable interpretations of events.
- \* Give students a simple challenge, such as making a house of cards or playing a quick board game (like Connect 4). Ask them to complete this challenge on their own (where possible)/in silence and ask them to notice the thoughts that run through their heads as they come up against this challenge.
- \* Feedback on some of the thoughts/beliefs that students had. You will get a mixture of resilient thinking (which enabled them to meet and cope with the adversity) and unhelpful/non-resilient thinking which made it harder for individual students to meet the challenge.
- \* Show students the types of Thinking Trap that they can fall in to. A Thinking Trap is a mistake in our

interpretation of an event, which can lead to our not responding well to it. All Thinking Traps are a form of assumption: believing something to be true before examining the evidence. The main 3 thinking traps are: Always/Never, Me and Them.

- \* Go back to the stimulus video for A – B – C, or any of the everyday adversities of their own. Ask the students to identify the thinking traps that might be present in these situations.
- \* Ask students to identify situations where they are prone to falling in to thinking traps. Ask them to devise ways of avoiding those traps.

### 4. Plenary.

- \* Emphasise that this lesson has been about developing awareness of how they think in certain situations. Next lesson will look at strategies for building resilience.
- \* Summarise the A – B – C, the link between Beliefs and Emotions and Thinking Traps.

## SESSION 3: Thinking About Thinking.

Two strategies for resilient thinking:

**Gathering More Information and Avoiding Misinterpretations (technically termed 'Catastrophisation').**

### 1. Gathering more information.

- \* Re-cap the ideas from the previous session:
  1. A – B – C;
  2. The link between beliefs and emotions;
  3. Thinking Traps.
- \* Central to the skill of gathering more information is the ability to pause and calm ourselves. A good way to do this is to focus on our breathing by counting 7 as we breathe in and counting 11 as we breathe out: lead the class in 3 or 4 minutes of calm breathing.
- \* Give students the following adversity: the whole class gets shouted at (severely) by a teacher. Ask

the students to individually write down the first thoughts they have about this 'A'. Ask them also to note down how they might feel and what they might do in this situation (the 'C').

- \* Ask students to compare notes with at least two other people. Do they have the same 'initial thoughts' as each other?
- \* An important element of resilience is, once calm, expanding our awareness to include a range of explanations for Adversities that we face: to see the bigger picture. Ask the students to complete the 'Bigger Picture' column: what are some other ways of thinking about this situation?
- \* Ask students to identify the most helpful way of thinking about the Adversity involving the teacher shouting. Which of their initial beliefs do they have to challenge or get rid of? How hard is it for them to let go of their initial interpretation?



- \* **Feedback.** What would be the ‘most helpful’ way of thinking about this situation? What does ‘most helpful’ mean? Most helpful for whom?
- \* Ask students in groups of three or four to come up with situations/challenges/adversities they have faced, which they are still a bit annoyed/upset/guilty about. Ask them to identify what they think about the situation and see if they can work together to find different ways of thinking about it, and perhaps a way of dealing with it.
- \* Feedback examples.

## 2. Avoiding Misinterpretations (‘Catastrophisation’).

- \* ‘Catastrophisation’ is a thinking trap where we make a mountain out of a molehill, or we make a Himalaya out of a mountain. It is where we perceive a threat in our environment and our imagination creates scenarios about what might happen as a result of it (rather like the opening scenes of an episode of Casualty). It tends to be step – by – step: our imagination creates increasingly elaborate or dark outcomes.
- \* Give students the scenario where they are called to a meeting with their Form Tutor/Head of House/ Assistant Head/Head Teacher at the end of school. Ask them to discuss what they would think, feel and do in that situation.

## SESSION 4: Being a resilient learner.

### 1. Adversities as a learner.

- \* Ask students, in small groups, to come up with the main adversities that they face as learners.
- \* Once they have these adversities on the table, ask them to think about what thinking traps might appear when these adversities present themselves.
- \* Knowing two strategies for avoiding or climbing out of thinking traps (gathering more information and avoiding catastrophisation) they are in a

- \* Feedback.
- \* Misinterpreting is more normal than we might think and there are ways of managing it so that we can calm down enough to respond to whatever threat we think is in our environment.

**Step 1: WCST.** Don’t try to squash the catastrophe. Go with it. Follow your imagination as it creates newer worst case scenarios.

**Step 2: BCST.** Now try to imagine what the best possible outcomes could be in this situation.

**Step 3: Most Likely.** Finally try to identify what the most likely outcome is and start to plan for how you will deal with it.

- \* Go through this process as a game (rather like the game where you are given the opening sentence of a story and each person has to add a new sentence). Use the scenario where you are called for a meeting but no explanation is given. Start with worst case scenario thinking and go through step by step asking what happened next; what happened next; what happened next, gradually getting worse and worse. Now go to best case scenario thinking and again, gradually get better and better. Lastly (and most importantly) think about the most likely outcome for this situation and make a plan for how to respond to it.

position to try to deal with the adversities they face as learners. Ask them to find solutions to the adversities they have chosen (examples should include appreciating evidence of good learning from class and home work; learning from feedback; ignoring feedback that doesn’t assist learning; knowing where to get help on how to make progress with learning; being open to finding out what specific activities will increase learning).

- \* Feedback.





- \* Ask students to work in pairs to identify their own learning adversities and develop a plan for how they will overcome them in the next month. Part of the plan should be a way of being accountable: who is going to check that they have done it?

## 2. Growth and fixed mindset.<sup>1</sup>

- \* Play students an example of a child prodigy (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3oNVmSaMsE> [available 02/15]) and ask them where they think intelligence and talent comes from: is it the result of nature, nurture or a mixture of the two? You could get them to stand in different parts of the classroom according to their opinion, get them to share their opinions with the group and offer students the chance to move if another person's opinion changes theirs.
- \* *The Tortoise and the Hare*. Ask students to tell each other the story of the Tortoise and the Hare. Once they are happy that they have the details right, ask them to do a character analysis on the two individuals in the story: what words best describe their virtues and vices?
- \* Introduce students to the ideas of the fixed and growth mindsets (explanation can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXhbtCcmsyQ> [available 02/15]).
- \* Apply the idea of the fixed and the growth mindsets to the story of the tortoise and the hare: do the mindsets help to explain how the tortoise was able to win (and why the hare agreed to race a tortoise in the first place)?
- \* Ask students to speculate on how fixed mindset beliefs can hamper their progress as learners (they become fixated on appearing clever, rather than doing what is necessary to master a discipline; they give up when learning becomes difficult, telling themselves they aren't a 'natural'; they underestimate the role of effort and good practice).
- \* What evidence would students need to convince them to hold a fixed mindset? Where can they go to find that evidence?

## 3. Plenary.

- \* Ask students to devise a plan to become more resilient learners in the coming weeks: to identify the thinking traps they have about learning and to have in place specific ways of avoiding or getting out of them.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Mindsets and the debate about nature vs. nurture, see *Mindsets* by Carol Dweck or *Bounce* by Matthew Syed.

## SESSION 5: Learning from resilience experts.

- \* There are inspiring stories of resilience in abundance in human communities. Every class of students will be able to draw upon examples of resilience from their own communities and this should be encouraged as a first port of call for this lesson.
- \* The following four examples are about individuals who have displayed resilience in some way and whose stories are well known and widely documented on the Internet. There are of course

others which schools may find preferable. Students can research these stories to apply elements of the learning they have done on resilience and identify strategies for developing resilience that may have been overlooked: the four principal ingredients of resilience are Awareness; Thinking; Relationships; Health. The main focus of this lesson should be upon story-telling and learning from the experience of people who truly possess the performance virtue of resilience.

**John Wildey**

John went on a day trip with a friend of his who was a pilot. Having flown off for lunch, they were on their return flight when the pilot asked John to take the controls and then fell unconscious. Aged 77, John had never flown a plane before, but under radio supervision from air traffic control, a flying instructor and a Navy search and rescue helicopter, John successfully landed the plane.

**Amy Williams**

Amy is an Olympic gold medallist in the skeleton bob-sleigh (2010 winter Olympiad); one of the most physically and psychologically demanding of all sporting disciplines. On a bob-sleigh the size of a tea tray, she travels at speeds of over 80 mph and can pull up to 5g.

**Wilko Johnson**

Wilko was a founder member of the British rhythm and blues band Dr. Feelgood. He developed a very distinctive guitar playing style which involved picking and strumming at the same time and stretching his thumb onto the frets. In January 2012 he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and he refused treatment. Since then he has gone on a sell-out tour and produced an acclaimed album with Roger Daltrey.

**Guy Martin**

Guy races motorbikes. He has competed in the Isle of Man TT races, probably the most feared motorcycle road race of them all, where good riders will average speeds of over 120 mph and reach 200mph in places. In 2013 he took part in a documentary series called Speed with Guy Martin where he attempted to break a series of world records for activities such as riding a motorbike across water, setting the land speed record for a pushbike and flying an aeroplane powered solely by his efforts. Each project was huge and required great persistence and hard work.

