

## Resilience and Well-Being: Teachers

Staffordshire County Council's Recovery Plan has been devised in the context of COVID-19. This plan incorporates a number of projects across SCC services including the Educational Psychology Service to support educational settings in the aftermath of emergency restrictions. The EPS has devised materials in a number of areas with the aim of providing educational settings with support that can be accessed immediately in the new academic year, without the need to refer into the service directly.

This leaflet is a quick reference guide and a 'conversation starter' designed to promote teacher resilience. The aim is not to be prescriptive as we know that teachers demonstrate resilience daily in their busy lives in the profession. We also know that resilience is often community-focused and therefore support is often best placed within pre-existing relationships. We hope this leaflet provides a framework, informed by psychology, to support what is likely to be happening in some capacity already within schools in Staffordshire. The suggestions that we make in this paper are based on evidence from research and practice.

**AIM:** This leaflet aims to provide Teachers with information to help build resilience and promote positive emotional mental wellbeing in the aftermath of COVID- 19.

This leaflet is divided into 4 sections:

1. What is resilience?
2. Promoting resilience after COVID-19.
3. Strategies.
4. Toolkit: Signposting to further resources.



## What is Resilience?

Resilience can be defined in several ways, most refer to overcoming adversity (Grotberg, 1997) and being able to bounce back and adapt (Rae, 2019).

More recently, research exploring resilience has looked at ways it can be promoted over time. Thus, this suggests that resilience is a process rather than an internal trait. Therefore, resilience can change over time depending on the context or situation. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have, it involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. Thus, resilience can be promoted and enhanced; it doesn't matter how resilient someone is now, they can change their behaviour to become more resilient tomorrow.

***Resilience is not a special quality, trait or special power that only some children are born with. It is in fact considered to be a type of 'Ordinary Magic' (Masten, 2004) and some level of resilience is within reach for everyone.***

## Promoting Resilience in Teachers after COVID-19.

Factors known to promote resilience can be fostered and drawn upon by teachers. There are many different factors that contribute to resilience. Researchers have listed many of the factors, including: good self-esteem, a sense of self-efficacy, positive values, talents and interests, secure relationships, social competences, and many others. It is helpful to group these factors into domains that influence each other and explain the specific factors that enhance a person's resilience. (*The 6 Domains of Resilience. Jurie Rossouw (2016)*)

**Vision:** This refers to your sense of purpose and what you want to achieve. Having clarity about your vision allows you to be decisive when faced with tough choices.

Clairity keeps you focused on what is important so you stay focused and achieve your goals.

**Composure:** This is about regulating your emotions to overcome the flight-fight response engendered by the brain when we face conflict. Maintaining composure means keeping calm so you can save your energy for what is important. It helps us promote positive interpretation bias, the positive interpretation of an ambiguous situation, which in turn leads to higher resilience.

**Reasoning:** Creative and innovative problem solving requires resourcefulness, composure and a vision so you know what goals to direct your actions toward. Anticipating and planning prevent things from going wrong in the first place. Having a plan on how you are going to react when a pupil is anxious and acting out enhances resilience. Being resourceful i.e., having the right information, knowledge, and skills, goes a long way to achieving your goals. Resourcefulness is a skill we can actively build. The more resourceful we are the more we can cope with change and the unexpected.

**Tenacity:** Persistence, learning from mistakes and having realistic optimism is what ultimately leads to successful outcomes. Being aware that your job is tough and full of challenges combined with the willingness to persist and not dwell on your mistakes enhances your ability to advance despite adversity.

**Collaboration:** The human brain has a fundamental need for connection with others to be able to thrive. Few of us can achieve anything meaningful alone. Teachers have reported that both seeking help and being able to give help significantly contribute to their own sense of resilience. All school staff should model help-seeking behaviours and contribute to decision making in school.

**Health:** Good health means looking after your body through what you eat, getting quality sleep and regular exercise. Good health is the foundation of resilient behaviour and enables you to achieve your personal vision. The Greeks understood the connection to a healthy mind and a healthy body, "*Mens sana in corpore sano*", the underpinning credo of the Physical Education movement in the UK.

**We have the capacity to build and improve in each domain and therefore develop our resilience.**

## Strategies

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has presented and will continue to present challenges for Teachers. The aim of this leaflet is not to be prescriptive as we know that Teachers demonstrate resilience daily, in their busy lives in the profession. This section explores strategies in fostering teacher resilience in relation to three areas known to be key in enhancing teacher resilience:

- Belonging;
- Help-seeking;
- Learning.

### PROMOTING BELONGING

Research has identified four important teacher relationships:

- Teacher – Headteacher (or Leadership Team);
- Teacher – Teacher;
- Teacher – Student;
- Teacher – Personal relationships.

**Headteacher – Teacher** relationships can be enhanced by:

- Using existing communication routes to check in with staff often;
- Encouraging teachers to check in with each other;
- Continuing to recognise Teachers' efforts to promote the sense of feeling valued and "held in mind";

**Teacher – Teacher** relationships can be enhanced by:

- Creating a "buddy" network so individual teachers have a group of colleagues they can contact when needed;
- Setting up regular, short staff briefings;
- Using online technology to create a 'virtual staffroom' where teachers can chat and check-in with each other.

**Teacher – Student** relationships can be enhanced by:

- Checking with students to see how they are getting on;
- Providing an online learning platform where students can communicate with their class teachers;
- Checking in with those students who are more vulnerable;
- Using school systems for those children who may not have access to remote technology.

**Teacher - personal relationships** can be enhanced by

- Taking regular breaks;
- Following a routine/structure to your day;
- Going out for exercise or other enjoyable activities with others;
- Prioritising time with family and friends;
- Differentiate work and leisure time;
- Limit how much you check your work emails.

## PROMOTING HELP-SEEKING

All school staff should model help-seeking behaviour. Staff should be asked explicitly if they need additional support and what it would look like. Teachers should seek and give help to and from others and engage in activities that promote team reflection. (see notes on Appreciative Enquiry)

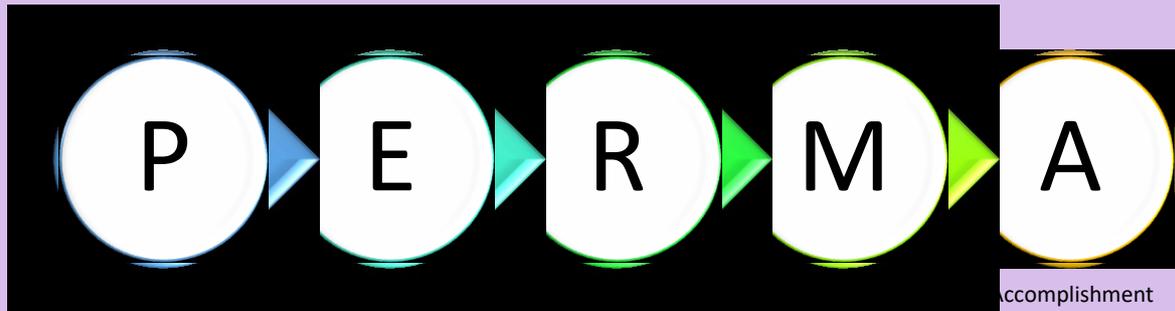
## PROMOTING LEARNING

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic it may be useful to explore how teachers can enhance their resilience at this time – supporting positive adaptation in the face of significant challenge. At the current time more formal opportunities for learning and development e.g. courses or INSET occasions might not be possible, but this doesn't mean that the desire for learning cannot be fulfilled.

Staff teams will be learning from successes and failures every day, adjusting plans, trying new things out and reflecting on this. Here are some areas that individual teachers might find interesting and useful.

## The PERMA model (Seligman, 2011)

The PERMA model derives from the area of Positive Psychology. Seligman suggests that our sense of well-being can be promoted by positive actions in five areas: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment.



**Positive emotion** – Building positive emotions by spending time experiencing happiness, joy, fun, gratitude, hope etc.

- Engage in daily exercise
- Model optimism/hope – e.g. talk about something you are looking forward to each day
- Look for ideas on the Action for Happiness calendar  
<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/>
- Tell a joke/watch something funny
- Engage in calming activities (e.g. yoga or breathing exercises)
- Notice and acknowledge your worries.

**Engagement** – Applying a your strengths to a partiular task and participating in a task that absorbs you.

- Identifying and using **character-based** strengths, e.g. being organised, being kind, being persistent, being curious
- Identifying and using **skill-based** strengths e.g. sport, playing an instrument, drawing

**Relationships** – Connecting with others and receiving support from others that promotes feelings of connection and security.

- Encourage and promote acts of kindness;
- Play team games;
- Join a group activity;
- Positive qualities – with colleagues, take it in turns to write your name on a piece of paper and pass around a group to write a positive comment for each person.

**Meaning** – Having a clear sense of purpose. Acting in accordance with values or goals.

- Finding ways to be helpful;
- Doing one good deed each day (random acts of kindness);
- Encourage partner/colleague check-ins;
- Setting personal, achievable goals.

**Accomplishment** – Achieving goals, no matter how small. Managing setbacks.

- Creating something;
- Think about learning something new;
- Reading a book;
- Set an exercise target;
- Completing a piece of work;
- Take on a new responsibility in school;
- Talk about and share successes.

## Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a philosophy for change that is based on a set of Assumptions:

- In every organisation or group, something works;
- What we focus on becomes our reality;
- Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities;
- The act of asking questions influences the group in some way;

- People have more confidence to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known);
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should what is best about the past;
- It is important to value differences;
- The language we use creates our reality.

Start by choosing a topic. Remember, once you have chosen a topic, what you study becomes your reality, so it needs to be the right topic. Start thinking about the questions you might ask to find out what works. We want to uncover what works so that we do more of what worked. Here are some examples.

### **The Classic Questions:**

1. Think through your career in this organisation. Locate a moment that was a high point, when you felt most active and engaged. Describe how you felt and what made the situation possible.
2. Without being humble, describe what you value most about yourself, your work, your organisation.
3. Describe your three concrete wishes for the future of this organisation.

### **Trust.**

Describe a time when you were part of a team that had a high level of trust and respect among the members. How was this communicated and what made it possible to establish trust in that group?

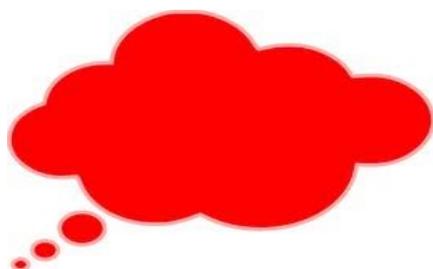
### **Teamwork.**

1. Describe a time when you feel the group/team performed well. What were the circumstances during that time.?
2. Describe a time when you were proud to be member of a team/group. Why were you proud?
3. What do you value most about being a member of this group/team? Why?

This is just a brief introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, if it has piqued your interest follow the reference in the Toolkit.

## Challenging Negative Thought Patterns

This strategy will help you to challenge negative thought patterns. Our thoughts can impact on how we feel and behave in any situation. If we feel negatively about a situation this can affect how we think and feel in a situation. This can sometimes result in feelings of sadness, anxiety and stress. Therefore, if we challenge our negative thought patterns this can help us manage difficult situations and have a positive impact on our emotional well-being. Firstly, it is helpful to think of thoughts as being red and unhelpful or green and helpful (Rae, 2020). Rae (2020), suggests that we need to challenge red unhelpful thoughts by collecting evidence that challenges these negative thought patterns.



I can't do it!



I will get there in the end!

Thought	Support	Challenge	Others	Revised thought
What is the thought?	Evidence for this thought.	Evidence against this thought.	What would my Head/Head of Dept. say?	What do you think now?
I am going to struggle to settle my new class(es) in.	The children have been away from school for months. The children will be anxious. I haven't had the opportunity to build a relationship with the children.	I normally manage to introduce the class to my rules and routines. I usually get on well with children.	He/She would remind me of my previous successes. She/He would remind me that we are all in this together.	I think it might be a challenge, but I am likely to do okay settling in my new class.

## Using mindfulness techniques to promote positive emotional well-being

'Mindfulness helps train your attention to be more aware of what is actually happening, rather than worrying about what has happened or might happen' (Mindfulness in Schools Project). Therefore, mindfulness is paying attention to the here and now (Association for Mindfulness in Education) and helps develop self-acceptance.

### Mindful activities

**Mindful walk-** take a walk either alone or with a family, friend. As you walk, pause reflect and listen to the sounds around you. What can you hear e.g. birds chirping? Can you smell anything e.g. flowers?

**Meditation-** this is when you sit comfortably in a quiet place and focus on your breathing. Mindfulness exercises for adults on  YouTube<sup>GB</sup> include:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEfs5TJZ6Nk>;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZToicYcHI0U>; Alternatively, there are mindful apps such as Calm and Headspace.

**Being grateful-** finding time to reflect on three things you are grateful for every day can help to improve mental well-being. Create a happy journal or gratitude diary. The diary could be a homemade book, traditional diary or blank notebook. For a  YouTube<sup>GB</sup> approach to creating a gratitude diary see:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZqhu\\_xFRM8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZqhu_xFRM8)

# Toolkit



Apps

Bounce Back – The Resilience Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFZWUxAMugM>

Supporting Resilience: [https://youtu.be/eHyv\\_LFXkVU](https://youtu.be/eHyv_LFXkVU)

What are Resilience and Adaptability Skills: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDPCPmBY4Pw>

Resilience Cartoon: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=qIwICIR03q8>

Meditation Activities:  YouTube <sup>GB</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEfs5TJZ6Nk>;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZToicYchIOU>



Websites

**The Anna Freud Centre has lots of resources aimed at both staff and young people:** <https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-schools-and-colleges/>

**The British Psychological Society offers a framework for fostering teacher resilience:** <https://www.bps.org.uk>

**Websites related to Mindfulness include:**

- <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/>
- <https://www.Alliancefordecisioneducation.org>
- <https://bwcharity.org.uk>
- <https://www.heartfulness.uk/mindfulness/meditation>
- <https://positivepsychology.com>

**MIND** has a range of information including:

- Time to Change: support for employees;

- How to be mentally healthy at work;
- How to be assertive;
- Relaxation: tips and exercises to help you relax;
- How to improve your mental well-being;
- How to cope with sleep problems;
- Physical activity and your mental health;
- Food and Mood.

**Local Government Association:** Has a useful wellbeing guide for staff working in schools and trusts, including a Staff well-being survey. <https://www.local.gov.uk>

**Barry Carpenter** was recently appointed to the UK's first Professorship in Mental Health in Education, at Oxford Brookes University. His website contains a wealth of information for teachers

<https://www.barrycarpentereducation.com>

**Tina Rae** is a Consultant Educational and Child Psychologist. Her You Tube provides access to over 30 years work and research,

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcYl81CpnbB7A1ETj5s5o-g>



MIND 0300 123 3393

Mental Health Matters 0191516 3500



The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry. Sue Annis Hammond (1998)

The 6 Domains of Resilience. Jurie Rossouw (2016)

<https://linkedin.com/pulse/6-domains-resilience>



Developed by:  
Dr. Vanessa Willis  
Dr. Mark Bowler  
Suzi Cresswell  
John Newton  
Dr. Mary Mullin

Educational Psychologists  
July 2020