PARENTAL PULL-OUT
Parents: Please remove this centrefold carefully to avoid damaging the staples!

Tools of Resilience Programme - Parent Guide

This short booklet is designed to give parents a brief introduction to the "***Weaving Well-Being***" programme and to help them support their children as they complete the ***Tools of Resilience*** (Y4 / P5) section of the programme. The ***Weaving Well-Being*** programme is a well-being programme for children specifically designed to promote positive mental health and flourishing in children. The skills are based on current research from the field of ***Positive Psychology.***

What is Positive Psychology?

Positive Psychology is concerned with the science of well-being, personal growth and resilience. It is founded on the concept of identifying and developing personal strengths. Positive Psychology uses evidence-based activities which help people to flourish, grow and engage with life on an optimal level whenever possible. Our lessons and activities introduce children to many of these strategies and activities which can empower them to become active participants **in creating, maintaining and boosting positive mental health** throughout their lives. Activities have been designed in accordance with the well-being elements of the PSHE/PSE/PDMU curricula.

The ***Tools of Resilience*** programme consists of ten lessons which are designed to teach six specific skills of resilience. These are: ***Perspective, Distraction, Thought Disputation, Use of Authentic Character Strengths, Problem-focused Planning and Mindfulness.*** Each strategy has a specific 'tool' - represented by an image to help the children understand and remember the concepts involved. Each child has a Pupil Book, which gradually builds into a highly personal portfolio which reflects their use and understanding of each tool.

What is resilience, and how can we build it in our children?

Developing resilience is one of the key elements in positive mental health and well-being. All of us will encounter setbacks, failures and disappointments in life at some stage. Emotional resilience is being able to bounce back or recover from events or situations which may seem overwhelming at first.

Resilient people allow themselves to feel their negative feelings such as frustration, anger, sadness and disappointment. However, they do not get stuck in these feelings. This aspect of resilience is an important one to develop with children. Resilience does not mean suppression or avoidance of difficult feelings. It involves experiencing these feelings and then being able to regulate them in healthy ways. The ***Tools of Resilience*** are designed to give the children strategies for doing this.

What has been shown by researchers is that resilience is a *skill* which can be developed, rather than being a specific inbuilt ability. Once we teach children these practical skills, we can encourage them to select and use them appropriately. As they try them out and experience success, their confidence in their own abilities grows, which in turn should lead to increases in self-efficacy, self-esteem and overall well-being.

To gain maximum benefit from the skills, your child should be encouraged to use them as much as possible. There is a homework task each week which encourages practical use of the skills and tools. In order to help and encourage your child, you may find the following information useful.

Weaving Well-Being
THE MORE YOU WEAVE... THE BETTER YOU FEEL!

Lesson 1: What is Resilience?

In this lesson, children learn what resilience is and why it is so important. They learn that negative feelings are completely normal and necessary, but that it is important not to get stuck in them. They also learn that we are all resilient and that there are ways we can build our resilience.

How to support your child: Talk to your child about the importance of resilience. Reinforce the concept that disappointments, upsets and failures are all part of life, we really can't avoid them! Give examples of when you showed resilience in the past and encourage your child to think of lots of examples of when he/she showed resilience. Discuss famous resilient people you admire and also friends and family. Discuss situations in the future where your child might need resilience.

Lesson 2: The Jigsaw of Perspective

In this lesson children learn that, although they may sometimes feel overwhelmed by small disappointments, they can help themselves recover by using the ***Jigsaw of Perspective***. The children create their ***Jigsaw of Perspective*** by drawing or writing all the good things about their lives on a blank jigsaw. They leave the middle piece blank, and write 'My Problem' on it. When they lack perspective about a worry, their jigsaw provides a visual reminder of all the things that are still good in their lives. This helps each child to see the big picture of their lives, not just the problems. Deliberately thinking of, and appreciating, the positive aspects of life has been shown to help foster resilience.

How to support your child: Encourage your child to use their ***Jigsaw of Perspective*** any time they need to establish a sense of proportion or perspective on a problem or disappointment. This tool is especially helpful for small disappointments, e.g. losing a match, breaking a toy or having a dispute with a friend. The children can be encouraged to think of their friendships or family relationships as a jigsaw with lots of different pieces; a conflict or dispute is only one part of it. This should help them to get into a constructive frame of mind and come to terms with a disappointment or solve a conflict.

Lesson 3: The Lucky Dip of Distraction

In this lesson, children are introduced to the idea of healthy distraction, which can stop them from worrying or becoming anxious about things they have **no control over.** They create their own ***Lucky Dip of Distraction***, which they can be encouraged to use to help take their minds off anxieties. This should help to prevent rumination, a mental habit which has links to the development of depression.

How to support your child: Encourage your child to use the ***Lucky Dip of Distraction*** when they are over-thinking or worried about something that they can't do anything about. They can look at their list and choose one of their enjoyable activities from it.

Lesson 4: The Planning Pen

In this lesson, the children are introduced to their ***Planning Pen***. It reminds them of the steps required to make a helpful plan, the basis of problem-focused coping. Problem-solving involves identifying the problem, making an action plan, seeking advice and working through the problem one step at a time.

This is an alternative to the ***Lucky Dip of Distraction*** - children can be encouraged to think about whether or not they can do something about a problem or worry. It also encourages them to consider what to do if their plan fails - they learn that failure is part of the learning process. The ***Planning Pen*** reminds the children to ask themselves three questions when faced with a problem: *1. Who should I talk to about this problem? 2. What should I do first? 3. What will I do if my plan fails?*

How to support your child: The first question is really important as it allows your child to become aware of their circle of support. Discuss the value of talking about problems to get help instead of bottling things up. The last question is also vital, in that it allows the children to think of the possibility of failure, and learn that this is a completely normal part of the problem-solving process. You can discuss examples of people you admire who did not succeed first time. Children can be encouraged to think of failure as feedback and use it to decide what to do differently next time.

Lesson 5: Helpful Thinking Helmet

In this lesson, children are introduced to the concept of ***Automatic Negative Thoughts - A.N.T.s.*** They are encouraged to observe their thoughts and realise that their thoughts are often inaccurate - this is especially true of ***Automatic Negative Thoughts***. By accepting and acting on ***A.N.T.s***, a spiral of negative thoughts and feelings can begin. The ***Helpful Thinking Helmet*** encourages children to challenge their ***A.N.T.s*** by asking three questions: *1. Is this thought true? (Can I be sure it is true?) 2. Is this thought helpful? (Is accepting this thought going to help me solve the problem or feel better?) 3. Is this thought kind? (kind to myself and/or others?).* If the answer is no to **some** or **all** of these questions, the child is encouraged to replace the thought with a more accurate and helpful one. They are not simply swapping a negative for a positive thought - that may be unrealistic. Instead, the child is encouraged to be more accurate, e.g. instead of replacing *'I can't'* with *'I can',* try replacing it with *'I can try'*.

How to support your child: Help your child to become aware of his/ her ***A.N.T.s***. Encourage them to ask themselves the three questions before they accept a negative thought. It is crucial for children to develop this skill at an early age, as research shows that patterns of pessimistic thought can become very well developed and hard to change by the time they become teenagers.

Lesson 6: Key of Character Strength

Identifying and using individual ***Character Strengths*** is one of the major pillars of Positive Psychology. Twenty four character strengths have been identified. These are listed in your child's Pupil Book.

Identifying and developing individual character strengths has been linked to positive outcomes, such as thriving and healthy development. In this lesson, children are introduced to all of the ***Character Strengths***, and they think about their own top five strengths. They are then encouraged to use their ***Key of Character Strength*** to unlock and use their character strengths whenever they may need them.

How to support your child: For homework this week, help your child to identify and record their own top five strengths. This can provide an immediate boost to their self-esteem, as they can now be encouraged to think of their strengths as opposed to their weaknesses or difficulties. You can encourage your child to draw on and use their strengths frequently, and reinforce the idea that the more they use them, the stronger they become. An online survey is available to measure these strengths in 10-17 year old children - the VIA Youth Survey (www.viacharacter.org). An adult survey is also available online at VIA Character. You may wish to try this to identify your own top strengths. If your child is 10 or over they may like to take the online test; please do this after you have allowed your child to discuss and identify their own strengths - it may be interesting to compare the results!

Lessons 7-8-9: Mindfulness Switch

These lessons introduce children to the powerful concept of mindfulness. Mindfulness can be thought of as a particular form of meditation. It can be defined as ***'Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way - on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally'*** (Jon Kabat-Zinn).

Research shows that regular mindfulness practice brings many benefits, including: Greater life satisfaction, Higher levels of emotional regulation, Higher self-esteem, Longer and healthier life: Decreased anxiety, depression and irritability.

The tool we use to teach children about mindfulness is the ***Mindfulness Switch***. As this is a complex and vital skill, it is spread over three lessons. The first two lessons explain the concept of mindfulness to the children through use of imagery - they learn that there are two levels of the mind:

'Bee Level' is used to describe the active, busy level of the mind, which is concerned with thinking and planning.

'Flower Level' is used to describe the 'being' level of the mind which mindfulness is associated with - this level of the mind is described as sensing, non-judging, accepting etc. Children learn that at 'Flower Level' our attention is always in the here and *now*.

The third lesson on Mindfulness introduces the ***Mindfulness Switch Tool of Resilience***. This tool shows children how to switch from 'Bee Level' to 'Flower Level' by concentrating on their breathing and connecting to their bodies. The script for this activity is included in the children's Pupil Book.

How to support your child: Discuss the differences between the two levels of the mind with your child. Follow the script in your child's Pupil Book daily to allow your child to practise short, simple mindfulness sessions. As well as giving time daily for ***formal*** mindfulness practice, mindfulness can be ***informally*** used throughout the day. This means bringing our attention to what we are doing in the present.

New research on stress: As part of the ***Mindfulness Switch*** lessons, the children learn that there are good aspects of stress. This is in line with new research which suggests that a certain amount of stress is completely normal and an inevitable part of everyday life. We can interpret stress as feedback, linked to our values, goals and what we care most about. Stress can be seen as an energising force which we should not try to completely avoid, or interpret as a problem.

Lesson 10: N.A.B.B. (Name, Accept, Breathe, Body)

N.A.B.B. is not a ***Tool of Resilience***; it is a self-calming technique designed to help children calm down when they are overwhelmed by a strong emotion (amygdala hijack). The letters stand for ***Name, Accept, Breathe, Body***.

How to support your child: Discuss what your child has learned about an amygdala hijack. Encourage them to use the ***N.A.B.B.*** strategy when they need to. If they are overwhelmed, they may need time to go through this technique before they are able to choose an appropriate ***Tool of Resilience***. Now that your child is familiar with all the tools you can encourage them to use their tools in everyday situations. It is important to note that these tools are designed to help children to cope with ordinary disappointments and setbacks, not major traumas or challenges. It's also important to give children time and space to feel, name and accept their difficult emotions, before they are encouraged to use an appropriate tool to gently move on, and not become stuck in that feeling for an inappropriate amount of time.

The goal is to equip your child with resilience skills and strategies which they can use now and throughout their lives.

More information on the ***Weaving Well-Being*** programme can be found at www.otb.ie/WWB
For ideas on how to support your child if they seem anxious, see this article – ***Ideas for Supporting an Anxious Child*** -- www.otb.ie/wwb-anxious-child