

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH

### PROGRAMMING RESILIENCE AMONG STUDENTS: FACTORS AND A FRAMEWORK



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#### **Abstract :**

In a world that is beset with conflict, students are burdened the whole gamut of 'the need to succeed'. Alongwith high parental expectations goal confusion also form a matrix. With all these issues students find it extremely difficult to maneuver and move forward through these intricate webs. The solution for facing these lies in the development of resilience in students at a programme level for which a theoretical sound approach is important. Resilience is the process of adapting well in the phase of adversity, trauma, tragedy and threats which are all significant sources of stress. This study covers the various factors from different perspectives that are involved in developing resilience and also describe the compensatory, as protective and challenge models at different levels for creating a frame work within which resilience can be developed. This frame work can be usefully incorporated into a research based module which can be used for training teachers, teaching students resilience. Developing a module from this frame work will go a long way in ameliorating the status of our children as they face anever changing and some times very traumatic world situation.

**Keywords:**Programming , resilience, framework for resilience.

## Programming Resilience Among Students: Factors And A Framework

### INTRODUCTION

The world has become the playground of the troubled. Conflicts and crisis are so commonplace that it is difficult to recognize or identify when the next tragedy will occur. In addition, students are burdened with the whole gamut of 'the need to succeed' if they are to be in the reckoning for a good future. All of this along with parental expectations and goal confusions form a matrix that the student will find extremely difficult to maneuver and move forward. A few examples from the world around are given for us to understand the dimensions of conflicts and their effect on the lives of children around the world.

- One hundred and thirty two children were gunned down in Pakistan.
- Bodo rebels killed over sixty villagers.
- A mentally deranged father called his son home from school in Kerala and killed him by cutting his throat.
- Children were witness to the killings of thousands in riots in Maharashtra and Gujarat by both communities.
- Over hundred girls were kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria.
- ISIS has affected over a million children in the Middle East.
- Natural disasters like the tsunami, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions are innumerable and uncertain.
- The Ebola virus, dengue, chikungunya, cancer, hepatitis, HIV are all with us and around us.
- Alcoholism, divorce, crime, drugs, and life style changes created by changing value systems are breaking down the traditional understandings of life.
- Technology changes have resulted in the world coming home to children in a distorted manner, earlier than they can deal with its implications.

Apart from these, children go through their own transitional crisis from one stage in life to the other creating a cumulative cascade of psycho-social-cognitive developmental crisis. These include issues like emotional insecurity, familial conflicts, academic stress, and peer pressure which impact on the lives of the child.

When we consider the matrix of interactions resulting from these factors on the emotional and intellectual experiences of a young child or adolescent, it becomes apparent that children's lives can be devastated, unless they are equipped to deal with the implications of these issues as they impact on their lives. However, it is also a fact that children can be taught to deal with life situations however tragic, so that they can move forward with life. This requires that children develop resilience in life to deal with the storms that can derail their development. Resilience to deal with the difficult situations in life as explained in an American Psychological Association brochure is as follows:

...think of resilience as similar to taking a raft trip down a river. On a river, you may encounter rapids, turns, slow water and shallows. As in life, the changes you experience affect you differently along the way. In traveling the river, it helps to have knowledge about it and past experience in dealing with it. Your journey should be guided by a plan, a strategy that you consider likely to work well for you. Perseverance and trust in your ability to work your way around boulders and other obstacles are important. You can gain courage and insight by successfully navigating your way through white water. Trusted companions who accompany you on the journey can be especially helpful for dealing with rapids, upstream currents and other difficult stretches of the river. You can climb out to rest alongside the river. But to get to the end of your journey, you need to get back in the raft and continue. (APA, accessed 2014)

### WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is defined as, "...the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means 'bouncing back' from difficult experiences." (APA, accessed 2014) Resilience is ordinary not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience as in the response of many Americans to the September, 2011 World Trade Center attack. Resilient people also experience difficulty and distress; emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. Developing resilience involves considerable emotional distress, and consists of behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. (APA, accessed 2014)

The American Psychologist Association has identified a combination of factors that contribute to resilience. The primary factor is having a caring and supportive relationship within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and trust and provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance help to strengthen and reinforce resilience. Other factors include: ability to make plans and take steps to carry them out, a positive view of oneself and confidence in one's strength and abilities, communication and problem solving skills, capacity to manage strong feelings and emotions. These are skills and abilities that people can develop especially if initiated in childhood.

### THEORIES ON RESILIENCE

There are several models dealing with resiliency. Theories, on which these models are based deal with aspects

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as to how promotive factors may counteract, protect against or inoculate youth from the negative effects of risks. (Maaten et.al., 2007). The most commonly studied models are the compensatory model and the protective model (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). A third model, 'The challenge model of resiliency' (Rutter, 1987) has limited empirical support. Resiliency theory (compensatory and protective models) focuses on positive variables called promotive factors (which are contextual, social, and individual) that interfere or disrupt developmental trajectories from risk to problem behaviors, mental disorders and poor health concerns. Promotive factors operate in opposition to risk factors and help youth overcome negative effects of risk exposure. Two types of promotive factors are assets and resources. Self-efficacy and self-esteem are positive factors defined as assets, and reside within the individual (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Resources are factors outside the individual such as parental support, adult mentors, youth programs that provide youth with opportunities to learn and practice skills. These assets and resources provide individual and contextual attributes for healthy development.

The third model of resiliency 'the challenge model' operates as inoculation where the person is exposed to modest levels of risk which help youth to overcome subsequent exposures that make them vulnerable to negative outcomes. The initial risk exposure must be challenging enough to help youth develop coping mechanisms to overcome its effects. However it should not be stressful so as to overwhelm any effort to cope (Rutter, 1987) .

Need and factors to be considered for developing resilience

As defined earlier resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. Students face a lot of stress and resultant trauma due to personal and environmental factors which are ongoing. Open access to the media makes diverse violent and traumatic events that are occurring every day in the world public knowledge, and children are most vulnerable victims of these events. It is our responsibility to protect children against these and give them a chance at life. This can only be done through developing resilience in children to deal with such traumatic life events that can occur at any time in an uncertain world. In fact, the program for developing resilience should be made a part of the curriculum in such a manner that children would get the benefit of the program on a progressive basis at every age level. This paper aims to make a brief outline on two aspects of developing resilience in children: 1. Factors to be considered in a program of resilience development (Daniel & Wassell, 2002). 2. A framework for developing resilience among students.

### 1. Factors to be considered in developing resilience. (Daniel & Wassell, 2002).

The factors can be divided into two groups (during school years and during adolescence) in three areas (Individual, family and wider community factors). These are provided below:

#### a. Summary of factors associated with resilience during school years

##### i. Individual factors associated with resilience

• Female • Sense of competence and self-efficacy • Internal locus of control • Empathy with others • Problem-solving skills • Communication skills • Sociable • Independent • Reflective, not impulsive • Ability to concentrate on schoolwork • Autonomy (girls) • Emotional expressiveness (boys) • Sense of humour • Hobbies • Willingness and capacity to plan

##### ii. Family factors associated with resilience

• Close bond with at least one person • Nurturance and trust • Lack of separations • Lack of parental mental health or addiction problems • Required helpfulness • Encouragement for autonomy (girls) • Encouragement for expression of feelings (boys) • Close grandparents • Sibling attachment • Four or fewer children • Sufficient financial and material resources

##### iii. Wider community factors associated with resilience

• Neighbour and other non-kin support • Peer contact • Good school experiences • Positive adult role models

#### b. Summary of factors associated with resilience during adolescent years

##### i. Individual factors associated with resilience

• Male • Responsibility • Empathy with others • Internal locus of control • Social maturity • Positive self-concept • Achievement orientation • Gentleness, nurturance • Social perceptiveness • Preference for structure • A set of values • Intelligence • Willingness and capacity to plan

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### ii. Family factors associated with resilience

• A close bond with at least one person • Nurturance and trust • Lack of separations • Lack of parental mental health or addiction problems • Required helpfulness • Encouragement of autonomy (girls) • Encouragement of expression of feelings (boys) • Close grandparents • Family harmony • Sibling attachment • Four or fewer children • Sufficient financial and material resources

### iii. Wider community factors associated with resilience

• Neighbour and other non-kin support • Peer contact • Good school experiences • Positive adult role models

### 2. A framework for developing resilience among students.

This framework has been developed from, 'Building Resilience in Preschool Children- Preschool Teachers' Manual 2005 (Baum & Anchor, 2005).

**A. Building Resilience:** The teacher needs to build resilience within before dealing with resilience in children. Things that teachers need to be aware of:

1. What is resilience?
2. What is a long term and short term emergency?
3. How to cope with emergencies Coping with emergency requires skill, resources and a knowledge base to deal with the situation.

**B. Test Your Resilience Level:** Teachers and caregivers need to test their own level of resilience. Research has shown that there are a number of characteristics and traits that allow a person to have greater resilience when faced with stressful life conditions, and help a person to recuperate from a negative situation such as stress or trauma.

**C. Providing Hope and Meaning:** Teachers should be able to provide hope and meaning in life and should be aware of the importance of providing hope and meaning. They should be aware of how to provide meaning and hope in life. Questions that deal with issues like why am I here, and how do I want to be here in future, are two of the most important tools for building and achieving resilience. Children need to learn to develop attitudes of hope and find meaning in life even in the most trying circumstances. This is where the teacher can be a good role model.

a. Hope is one of the more efficient tools we have at our disposal.

b. Meaning, or significance, is trying to find a reason for our existence, and for our having to face difficulties, such as traumatic events.

**D. Some more ways to improve resilience:** Research has proven that there are a several factors that help us cope more effectively with stressful and traumatic situations. These factors help to improve our natural resilience and allow us to feel more secure. Aside from hope and meaning the following have been found to be helpful in building resilience. Teachers can acquire these skills and these can also be can be imparted to children:

1. Devote time to relationships - People who have close and meaningful ties with family and friends tend to cope better during times of distress. Teach children the importance of developing good and meaningful relationships.
2. Acquire knowledge about the situation - Accurate knowledge about the situation in which the child is will help the teacher make more informed decisions and help her/him feel more in control of the situation. This knowledge can also help diminish fears, which often stem from the unknown. It can also help in the process by preventing misinformation and false beliefs.
3. Talk about your feelings with people close to you - Every one of us sometimes feels the need to relieve some of the stress that accumulates during rough times. It is important to teach children that they can share their feelings without fear and apprehensions and they would be understood.
4. Maintain physical health - There is a proven link between nutrition, physical activity and stress. Stressful situations present taxing demands on our bodies, and gradually deplete our physical resources. Emphasize the need for health, hygiene and good life attitude in children.
5. Use your sense of humor - Laughter allows us to see the brighter side of reality, and helps us emerge from situations of anxiety or stress. A sense of humor also improves our physical health and allows us to find creative solutions to difficulties. Teach children to enjoy humor and cherish the beauty of life.

**E. How teachers deal with trauma:** Students' reactions to traumas are influenced greatly by the manner in which their teachers and the school staff cope with crisis and handle the aftermath of traumatic events. Self awareness of emotions,

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physical reactions, thoughts, and actions are important.

### F. What can be done in the classroom to help youngsters cope?

#### A few suggestions on how to cope with difficult situations and prolonged periods of stress:

**a. Creating a sense of safety :** Children look to adults as their source of security and safety. We need to give them the feeling that we are watching over them and protecting them and that we know what to do in difficult and abnormal situations?

**b. Routine:** Routine is the most important way to provide a sense of security. Stick to regular eating and sleeping habits, continue to engage in activities the children are used to, maintain discipline and the routine of the home and school environment as much as possible. Finding the middle road between being sensitive to your child's needs and maintaining routine and rules is the goal.

**c. Information and explanations:** During times of crisis all people, including young children, need information. The youngsters need our help to make sense out of all the bits of information they hear. It is imperative that the adult in charge gives them as reliable, trustworthy, and reassuring information as possible at a level that is comprehensible to them. A few guidelines on how to give information:

**Do:** Tell only as much about the situation as the child is interested in.  
Answer questions that are asked.  
Answer all questions even if they are difficult or frightening to us.  
Limit the child's exposure to media coverage.

### G. Teachers and Parents: How to Talk to Young Children

Teachers can help children to mediate and assimilate the information they receive from their environment in a credible, controlled way in terms they understand. Children must also be able to feel a sense of security and have a "safe place" where they can express their feelings. Thus, an open discussion is invaluable during this time. Some guidelines on how to talk with your children:

- a. Provide accurate information
- b. Provide as much information as the child is interested in knowing. You do not need to provide all the details, as often the broad outlines are sufficient.
- c. Allow plenty of time and space for questions over the ensuing days.
- d. Answer all questions, even if they are difficult or frightening.
- e. Answer all questions truthfully; but remember, this doesn't mean that you need to overwhelm the child with details.
- f. Listen and respond without trying to take over or lead the conversation.
- g. Avoid giving dramatic or detailed descriptions of upsetting events.
- h. Limit children's exposure to the media.
- i. Be willing to provide explanations over and over again.
- j. Repetition helps the child understand the complexities of the world and makes him/her feel more secure.
- k. Deal with feelings

- i. Convey the message that feelings of fear and anger that your child may be experiencing are perfectly normal and acceptable and there is no need to feel embarrassed or ashamed of these or any other feelings. Say something like, "Many children feel this way," or "It's fine to feel this way."
- ii. Convey how important it is for the child to express his/her feelings so that the adults around them will understand them better.
- iii. Honesty
- iv. It is permissible and even advisable to say "I don't know."
- v. It is fine to share your feelings with the child, but not to overwhelm him/her with very strong feelings. Make it clear that if you are worried it is due to things that are going on around you and not because of the child or due to his/her behavior.
- vi. Young children tend to blame themselves when they see that their parents are upset.
- vii. Remember: A frank discussion with children during difficult times can do a world of good! It can: Clear up a lot of confusion and uncertainty. Show them that you are taking an interest in them and their thoughts and feelings. Prevent unnecessary fears. Encourage and develop a child's natural desire to understand the world around him/her. ? Provide a sense of control and capability.

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### H. How to help children cope during times of uncertainty

Recognizing your child's needs during prolonged periods of stress can be divided into three categories:

#### i. Cognitive Needs

Cognitively, children need accurate/reliable information provided to them by a person in a position of authority. Often children hear and use words they really don't understand the meaning of. Patiently explaining the meaning of such words at an age appropriate level will help to alleviate fear of the unknown.

#### ii. Emotional Needs

Emotionally, children need to have a sense of security and to feel that their parents are there to protect them. One way to ensure this is by sticking to a regular, stable routine which provides a measure of permanency and continuity in the child's life. Another great need a child has is to express the strong feelings that trouble him, and to know his parents will be there for him in order to contain those feelings. Problems arise when there is a gap between the cognitive and emotional needs of the child. That is, when his need for explanation and clarification of the situation are not in line with his need for security. In such cases the adult must use his judgment. We will try to give some guidelines to help deal with these situations.

#### iii. Fears

Apart from these children's fears need to be addressed. Fears are an inevitable part of childhood. This is due to the child's position in life: a newcomer in an adult's world which he does not yet completely understand. Every age has fears associated with it, according to the child's stage of development and the kind of challenges he is required to face. All fears, even ones that seem ridiculous or groundless may be very serious ones for the child and should be treated as such and taken seriously. In many cases the child may feel ashamed or helpless because of his fear, so it is important to be very sensitive and explain that fears are perfectly natural.

What is provided above is merely a framework for developing resilience in children. This framework should help the researcher to develop a module for teaching children resilience. It can also be used as a training manual for teachers. This module can be created with a research design based approach using student populations undergoing trauma under various circumstances.

### CONCLUSION

A theoretically sound approach is important for promoting resilience in students early in life and strengthening their spiritual, cognitive and emotional base. The compensatory, protective and challenge models have been covered at different levels in the framework given above. These can be usefully incorporated into a research based module. Developing a module from this framework will go a long way in ameliorating the status of our children as they face an ever changing and sometimes very traumatic world situation.

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