Resilience

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Building Resilience in Children and Young People: A positive and proactive approach to resilience-building

1. Resilience levels of Australian students

A study* of 44,000 Australian school students aged 8 to 18 years between 2013 and 2015 has identified that fewer than half the students surveyed reported higher levels of resilience. That is, reported having ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’ levels of resilience. While 60 per cent of younger students (Years 3 to 6) reported higher levels of resilience, only 37 per cent of older students (Years 7 to 12) reported higher levels of resilience. The apparent decreasing levels of resilience as students get older is concerning.

2. Why is resilience important?

Resilience is a key building block for young people to be healthy, caring, principled and productive. It contributes to three types of healthy outcomes:

- Increased protection against risk factors (e.g. substance abuse, violence, antisocial behaviours, delinquency, anxiety, and depression).
- Increased thriving behaviours and attitudes (e.g. affirmation of diversity, the proactive approach to nutrition and exercise, prosocial behaviour, school engagement and attendance, more hopeful, and stronger sense of belonging).
- Improved academic performance through higher school engagement, motivation, effort, aspirations, and grades and standardised test scores.

3. What does this research tell us about resilience?

The capabilities that underlie resilience can be strengthened at any age. Children aren’t born with a

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**FAST FACTS**

- Australian school students’ levels of resilience tend to decrease as they get older.
- Only 37 per cent of secondary students report higher levels of resilience.
- Resilience is a key for young people to be healthy, caring, principled and productive.
- Resilience helps protect students against risky behaviours, helps increase thriving behaviours, and improves academic performance.
- Resilience-building activities focus on increasing students’: empowerment, sense of belonging, hope, support, social skills, emotional skills, and positive values.
- A key to increasing resilience in students is through student-led programs enabled and support by adults/teachers.

*Building resilience assets in children helps to increase thriving behaviours, and protect against high risk behaviours. A proactive focus in policies and practices on building resilience assets could help more disadvantaged children reach their full potential.*
4. Strategies that can help build resilience

Strategies to improve resilience include: providing opportunities for children and young people to gain a sense of empowerment; creating a culture of thriving; and showing them that they are valued and respected, and seen as an asset to the community.

Policies and programs can increase resilience by involving children and young people as partners rather than clients, and by focusing on their evolving developmental needs.

Student-led programs have been demonstrated to be very effective in building resilience in young people.

Projects or programs which allow students to take ownership of the project, with the support of a guiding adult, are shown to help build empowerment and belonging.

Activities need to be a focus on developing assets and competencies in a holistic and positive way. This includes creating opportunities and activities that enhance children and young people’s competence, connections, character, confidence and contribution to their community.

Involving the families, schools and the broader community in children and young people’s projects and activities further helps to create an environment that supports them and build their resilience.

* This summary was developed by Phil Janz at QFCC and is based on the following paper. J-F; Fuller, A; Swabey, K; Pullen, D; Waldrip, B; Wicking, A; Wicking, P. (2015) Resiliency among Australian school students: A report on 43,799 students.

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