

# Module 5

## Building Student Resiliency

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JCSH School Well-being Toolkit



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# Module Overview

This module provides an overview of practices that promote resiliency among children and youth in the school setting. Content areas define resiliency in students, types of resiliency assets, and ways to build resiliency through student engagement, inclusion, social-emotional learning and positive youth development. Resiliency considerations regarding online safety are explored. In addition, several strategies and approaches are suggested for promoting resiliency in the school, home and community.

Objectives of this module are:

- To gain an understanding of resiliency and its relevance to safe and caring school environments
- To become acquainted with resiliency strengths or assets that are related to student well-being
- To identify the characteristics of resilient school environments

# Student Resiliency Assets

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Resiliency is defined as the capacity to *adapt and realize positive outcomes* in daily living despite challenging circumstances.

Resiliency is also the ability to *persist in the face of adversity* and to bounce back when challenges are encountered.

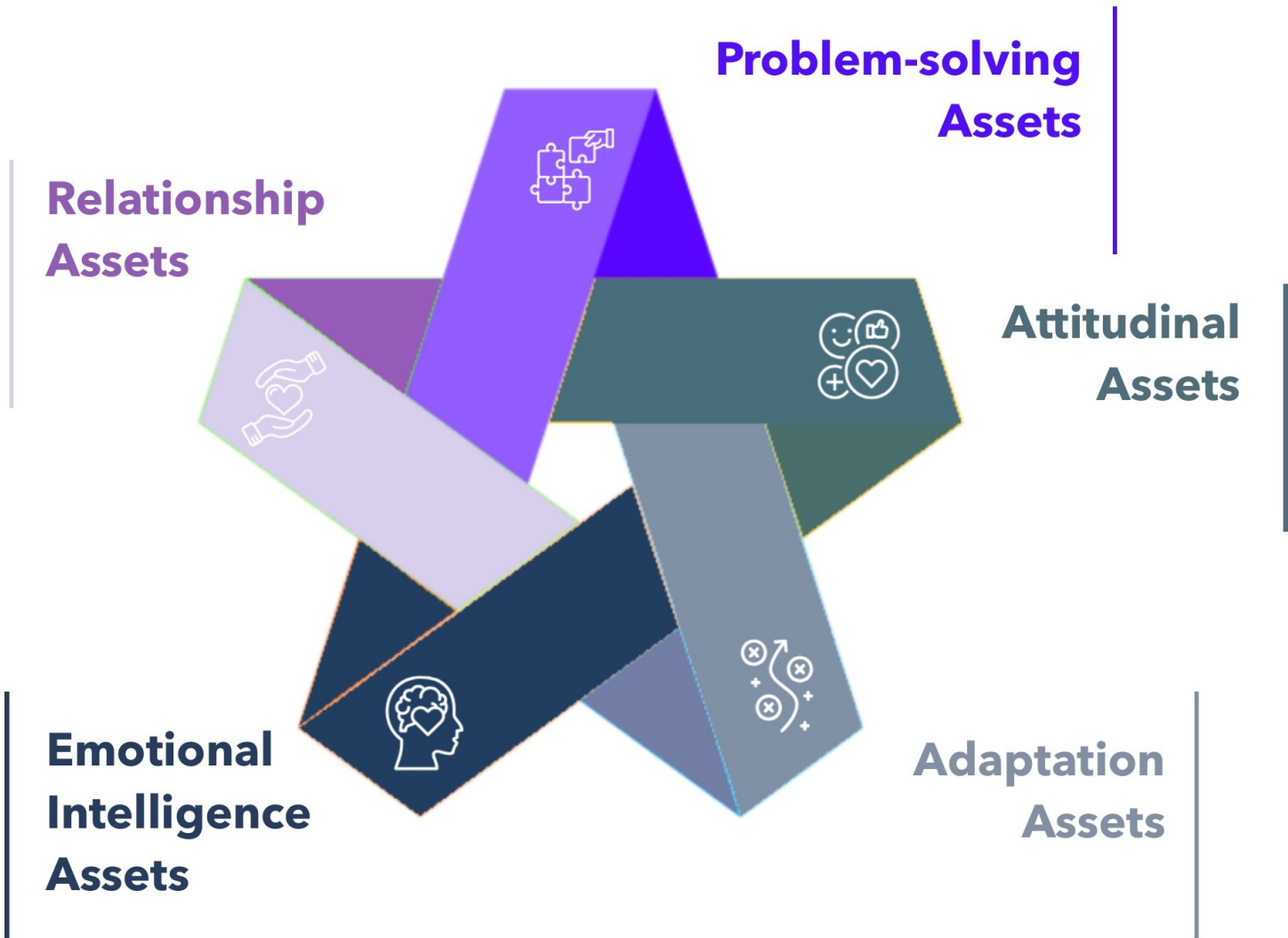
Resiliency refers to people's capacity to navigate and apply resources (psychological, social, cultural and physical) that sustain their well-being.

Teachers play a critical role in the development of resiliency skills among students. Within schools, the fostering of positive relationships and classroom environments that support resiliency is increasingly considered to be as important to child and youth development as academic achievement.

## Resiliency Assets

- Resiliency helps us to cope and thrive during difficult times and during periods of change or transition.
- Resiliency strengths or *assets* come from a combination of positive attributes we develop through our families, schools, social and cultural connections, and other life experiences.
- Resiliency asset practices may reflect both student and school strengths that facilitate agency, positive coping, healthy transitions and learning.

# Types of Resiliency Assets



Classroom environments and practices that promote resiliency are characterized by intentional efforts aimed at building student skills in each of the five resiliency asset areas. Strategies for building resiliency assets are included in the downloadable PDF. **Click each Asset to learn more.**

Download  
Strategies for  
Building  
Resiliency Assets



# Building Resiliency

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## Building Resiliency through Engagement

Student engagement is the extent to which students feel connected and valued as part of the school community. The provision of opportunities for students to engage in **meaningful participation in both academic and social activities** at school is a key resiliency factor for children and youth.

The kinds of activities in which the student is engaged can be almost anything - sports, the arts, music, volunteer work, politics, social activism - and these can occur in almost any kind of setting.

Engagement activities are most successful when they draw on students' **strengths, interests** and **gifts** and include the collaboration of supporting and caring adults from their schools and communities.



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# Building Resiliency through Inclusion

**Inclusive educational approaches** value diversity, promote social cohesion and well-being and contribute to students' sense of relatedness or belonging within their classrooms and schools. Inclusive educational practices bring out the best in students, creating unique learning experiences that reflect their diverse identities, languages, strengths, needs, interests and abilities.

Learner diversity reflects the differences and similarities in students' learning preferences and capacities. Learner diversity takes into account physical and learning disabilities, learner preferences, and the various ways in which students learn and reach their potential.

Diversity represents the many aspects of life that add to the richness of social and academic experiences. **Schools that prioritize the creation of environments that foster respect and appreciation for diversity add to students' capacity for resiliency and well-being.** When students' learning strengths and challenges are understood, schools are better able to adapt and accommodate instructional methods and learning routines. When students experience success at school, both school connectedness and positive mental health are enhanced.

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Download  
Inclusive  
Practices for  
Teachers



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## Creating Inclusive Classrooms

In inclusive classrooms, students with a spectrum of learning styles and abilities learn together. Inclusive classrooms are welcoming and support the diverse academic, physical, social-emotional and communication needs of all students. The following strategies can support teachers in ensuring inclusive classroom environments.

- Arrange the room to support students with diverse mobility needs. All students benefit from a well-organized, tidy classroom with plenty of room to navigate. Create workspaces that are large enough to accommodate the presence of Education Assistants or other support personnel.
- Create teaching and learning opportunities that allow all students to participate. Don't assume that a student with a disability would not want to take part in class presentations, field trips, or other activities. Find a way to make it happen through consultation with students and their families.
- Talk to students about their strengths and learning preferences. No one wants to be defined by the things that they cannot do – explore strengths and gifts together! Learn about the assistive technologies that the student might use in order to build their capacity for developing new skills.



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- Provide multiple means for students to demonstrate knowledge. Students with learning differences or disabilities benefit when assessment practices are flexible and allow for various ways for them to demonstrate concept and task mastery.
  - Apply universal design principles in the development and use of physical spaces. Such principles reinforce the importance of full inclusion and the appreciation of diversity.
  - Create opportunities for understanding and appreciating diversity in the school. Diversity may include a wide range of individual differences related to personal preferences, gender, sexual orientation, cultural backgrounds, and specific physical, emotional or mental health needs.
  - Explore areas of student strength, interest and potential. Such exploration is critical for enhancing student engagement in classroom activities and relationship building.
  - Create expectations around the use of language – including humour – that is sensitive to students’ needs, abilities and cultural identity.
  - Think about any existing barriers – physical, cultural, ideological – that might impact the inclusion of students of diverse backgrounds, abilities or lifestyles. Develop a plan to address these barriers and increase awareness across the school.



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# Building Resiliency through Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

**Including Social-Emotional Learning** across the curriculum and in targeted learning activities has a positive impact on students' capacity for resiliency, and on their:

- Social-emotional competence
- Positive orientation to self and others
- Academic achievement

Social-emotional learning involves the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills that assist students in:

- Identifying and managing their emotions
- Communicating caring and concern for others
- Forming and sustaining positive relationships



The development of SEL competencies is critical for assisting students in calming themselves, managing their emotions, initiating friendships and resolving conflict. SEL competencies include **capacities that help with problem solving and making choices that are healthy, safe and respectful of others.**

The University of British Columbia's [Social and Emotional Learners Resource Finder](#) provides a collection of SEL resources for educators. Click on the title to explore this resource.



The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) leads school-based teams through the process of systemic SEL implementation. The *CASEL Guide to Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning* (2020) is designed to help schools coordinate and build upon SEL practices and programs, incorporating these principles into all aspects of students' school experiences.

"Schoolwide SEL helps students excel academically,  
build stronger relationships, and lead happier,  
healthier, more fulfilling lives."  
(CASEL, 2020)

With a focus on equity and inclusion, CASEL suggests that:

- SEL is relevant for all students in all schools and affirms diverse cultures and backgrounds.
- SEL is a strategy for systemic improvement, not just an intervention for at-risk students.
- SEL is a way to uplift student voice and promote agency and civic engagement.
- SEL supports adults to strengthen practices that promote equity.
- Schools must engage students, families and communities as authentic partners in social and emotional development. (CASEL, 2025)



[Click here to link  
to the CASEL  
Guide](#)

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# Building Resiliency through Positive Youth Development

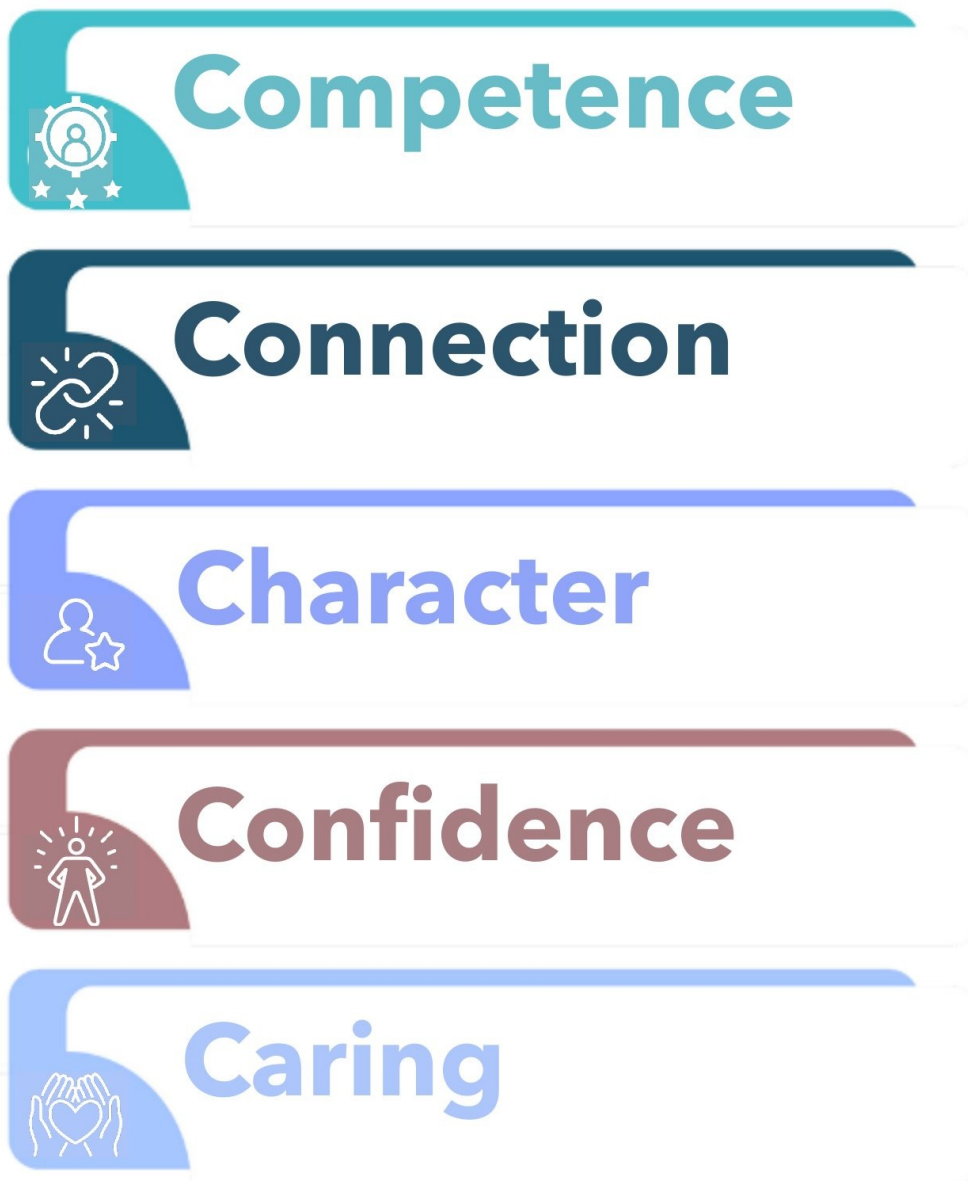
**Positive Youth Development** (PYD) does not assume a singular path to success or personal growth. According to Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2024), "Every person starts their journey from a unique position and may likewise be headed toward a unique destination. Individual attributes, life choices, and environmental factors interact to set a young person's general direction in life". Schools play a crucial role in contributing to positive youth development through the creation of autonomy-supportive environments that foster hope, self-determination and respect for individual differences.

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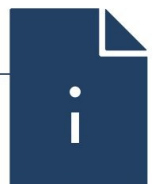
## The 5Cs

In terms of PYD, *thriving* has been conceptualized as an outcome resulting from opportunities for youth to develop behaviours called the 5Cs, including: competence, connection, character, confidence, and caring/compassion (Lerner, 2012). Click on each of the 5Cs on the following page for a definition.

## The 5Cs of Positive Youth Development



*Click any title to learn more about The 5Cs*



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# Resiliency and Online Safety



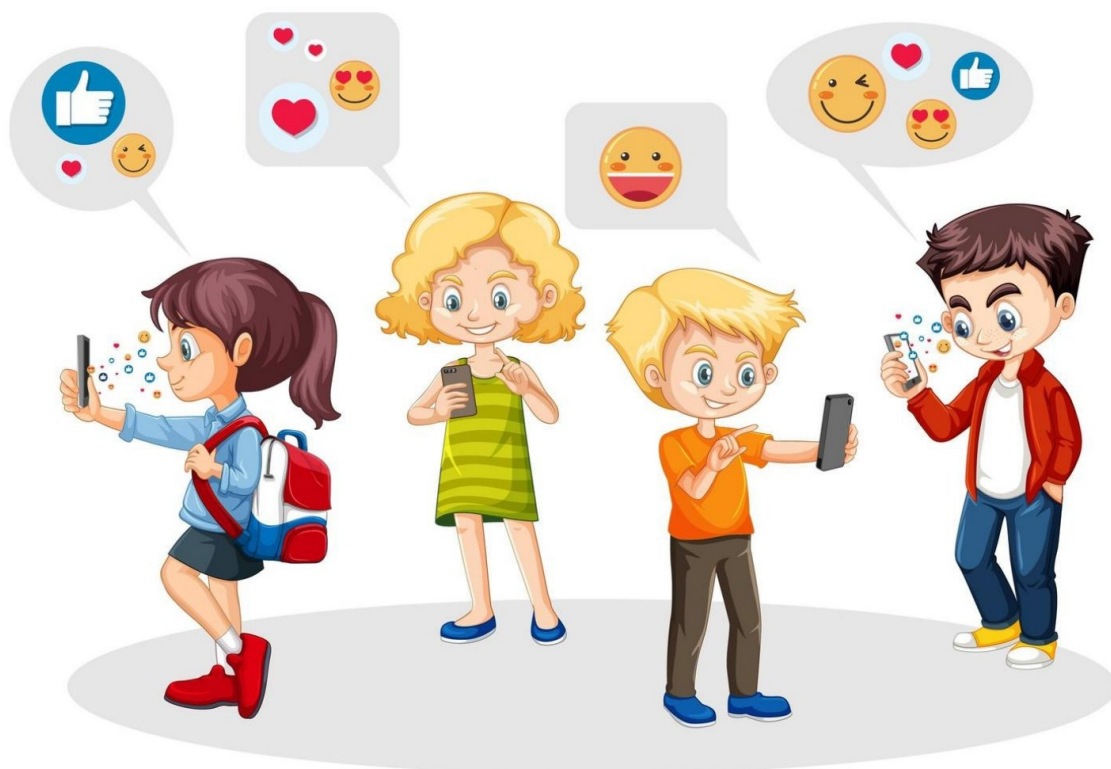
Increasingly, children and youth connect and engage with their friends online. Schools can play an important role in both raising awareness among students of the risks in using social media, and helping families develop language and approaches for discussing these risks with their children. Public Safety Canada (2025) suggests that essential information for schools and families to share with children include:

- It may be fun to share photos and ideas online, but students should be careful what and where they post. Take a moment to consider who is going to see it and how others might feel about it.
- Students should not publicly share personal information online. That includes where they are or will be, the name of their school, their phone number or email address, usernames or passwords, photos and videos they wouldn't want strangers or anyone else to see.
- Not everyone online is who they say they are and some people may want to harm others. Encourage students not to accept friend requests from strangers.
- Students should treat everyone with respect and avoid saying things online they wouldn't say to someone's face. Do not say mean things, make fun of others, share secrets, gossip or lies, exclude or gang up on someone.

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**Cyberbullying** is an intentional act that harms another person through social media. Suggested school strategies for addressing cyberbullying include:

- Holding information sessions for parents/caregivers that increase their awareness of cyberbullying and warning signs associated with their own children's practices related to technology
- Establishing mentoring programs that involve older students assisting younger peers in understanding cyberbullying and learning about responsible technology use
- Assessing the seriousness of cyberbullying comments and intent with the support of school-based student services personnel
- Creating clear policies on cyberbullying and sharing these with students and parents during school orientation meetings
- Developing interactive lessons on appropriate technology use to be presented by media specialists in collaboration with school counsellors and teachers



# Strategies for Promoting Resiliency

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The following strategies may be helpful for building resiliency in children and youth. Each resiliency strategy is discussed in more detail on the following pages.

- **Mindfulness and calming strategies** that encourage students to focus on the present moment and to calm feelings of excessive concern or worry
- **Practices for focusing on positives** that help students to experience a more optimistic and hopeful outlook
- **Proactive approaches** that help students be resilient through targeted supports, advanced planning and healthy lifestyle activities
- **Accessing additional supports** when students need more intensive resources to build or restore resiliency

# Mindfulness and Calming Strategies

Practicing **Mindfulness** contributes to both **social and emotional resiliency**. Mindfulness encourages students to develop their own inner calming strategies, and to manage stress, anxiety and changes that occur throughout life.

Mindfulness refers to specific practices used to focus a person's attention, such as meditation, breathing, or single-pointed concentration on an object. When students **pause and reflect on their thoughts and emotions**, they are more likely to be open to discussing areas of concern.

Benefits of mindfulness include:

- Enhanced problem-solving skills
- Increased impulse control
- Stronger relationship building
- Decreased emotional distress and behavioural concerns
- Greater capacity to manage stress

Download  
Mindful  
Breathing,  
Anxiety Canada



Being mindful involves paying attention to the **present moment, exactly as it is**. We are less likely to feel anxious if our senses are alive and fully focused on the present moment. Example mindfulness activities provided by [Anxiety Canada](#) include:

## **Come Back**

When you catch yourself being caught up in worries about the future or guilt and regret about the past, just notice that it is happening and simply and kindly say to yourself, "Come back." Then take a calming breath and focus on what you are doing right now.

## **Three Senses**

Notice what you are experiencing right now through three senses – sound, sight and touch. Take a few slow breaths and ask yourself:

- What are three things I can hear? (clock on the wall, car going by, music in the next room, my breath)
- What are three things I can see? (my desk, that sign, that person walking by)
- What are three things I can feel? (the chair under me, the floor under my feet, my phone in my pocket)

Think of these things slowly, one sense at a time. It's impossible to do this exercise and not be present and mindful!



## Relaxation Exercises

The use of relaxation exercises provides a strategy for calming oneself and can be used in a variety of settings. Such exercises can be done using a guided script and can be applied in groups or individually.

## Cool Down Passes

When stress or anxiety builds within young people, being able to leave the situation briefly to get a drink of water or wash their face can allow them to clear their heads and return to class on a less anxious track. Since children or youth may be hesitant to ask for this and risk being the centre of attention, using an orange card that they simply place on their desk or on the teacher's desk may serve as a signal that they need a short break to regroup and return to the given task with decreased stress or pressure.



Download  
Progressive  
Muscle  
Relaxation,  
Anxiety Canada



# Proactive Approaches

**Assigning a Positive Adult Connection at School:** Having one person at school who understands a young person's worries and anxieties may make the difference between a student attending school or staying home. A guidance counsellor, resource personnel or teacher may serve as a safe point of connection for children and youth with anxiety. Daily check-ins or dropping by to see how things are going can serve as a reminder of positive supports in the school environment. This adult may be a person for the child to check in with briefly (5-10 minutes) during the day to help dispel worrisome or anxious thoughts or emotions.

**Change in Routines:** Changes in schedules or routines may be stressful for young people with anxiety concerns. When such changes are expected, it is helpful to be proactive in identifying specific strategies for adapting and coping with new circumstances. Alerting parents to upcoming changes may also help to ensure sensitivity to and support for young people during times of transition.

**Regular Exercise:** Encouraging engagement in daily physical activity is an important consideration in managing anxiety. Exercise boosts mood, enhances sleep, reduces tension, and calms stress. It often provides a *mind-break* away from worries and anxieties. Regular exercise also contributes to more energy, and the capacity for problem solving and addressing anxiety in constructive and effective ways.

# Focusing on the Positive

In many cases, the key to resiliency lies in the way we think about and respond to challenges. Students' beliefs or self-statements concerning the problems they face can be reframed in ways that focus on the positive, and can **change the way they process their thoughts about challenging situations**. The following approaches may be helpful in helping students to develop strategies for **reframing their thoughts and emotions during difficult times**.

**Modeling and coaching positive self-talk:** Teachers and school personnel can encourage the use of positive self-talk by **modeling** how it can be applied during times of challenge. Students can also be coached in the development of positive self-talk. For example, prior to starting a new task or challenge, students can be invited to take a deep breath and to build confidence by saying to themselves: "I can do it. It's important to try," or "It's okay to make mistakes." Display posters in offices, hallways or classrooms with positive slogans, sayings or empowering words and refer to them when students are going through times of challenge or stress.

**Exploring strengths and gifts:** Encourage students to explore and engage their personal strengths and gifts. Integrating strength areas in daily learning routines or social activities contributes to *positive emotions*, increased *readiness for positive change*, enhanced *adaptation* and the development of positive *social relationships*.

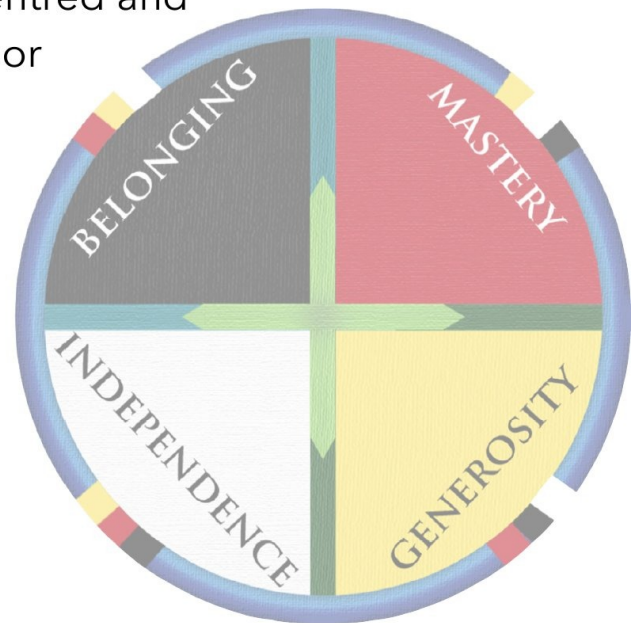
**Engaging in enjoyable activities:** Creating learning or social activities that reflect the interests or passions of students increases their motivation to become active participants in interactions with others. Enjoyable activities contribute to positive experiences and emotions, and to higher satisfaction with daily living activities. Work with students to develop a menu of activities that can be used within their schedules as a source of encouragement and positive reinforcement.

# Circle of Courage

Similar to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the Circle of Courage as delineated by Brendtro & Brokenleg (2005) asserts that all individuals share common needs that require the use and development of strengths. In other words, fulfilling key need areas provides opportunities for expressing and exercising personal strengths. These need areas include:

- ✓ **Belonging** (Similar to Relatedness): Opportunities to establish trusting connections
- ✓ **Mastery** (Similar to Competency): Opportunities to solve problems and meet goals
- ✓ **Independence** (Similar to Autonomy Support): Opportunities to build self control and responsibility
- ✓ **Generosity**: Opportunities to show respect and concern for others

Generosity places emphasis on being other-centred and playing a role in addressing the psychological or well-being needs of others.



# Positive Childhood Experiences (PECs)

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*Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)* and protective factors can mitigate the negative effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and promote healthy development in students. Breedlove, Choi & Zyromski (2020) suggest that fostering five key PCEs can enhance student resiliency.

## **1. Foster Strong Relationships**

- Children thrive when they feel supported by at least one caring adult, such as a teacher, mentor, or community leader.
- Peer relationships help children navigate challenges; friendships built on trust and support create a foundation for resilience.
- School environments should promote connection, ensuring students feel a sense of belonging.

## **2. Create Safe and Supportive Environments**

- Schools should implement restorative practices to resolve conflicts and avoid exclusionary discipline like suspensions.
- A safe school culture includes reducing bullying, fighting, and harassment while fostering a sense of community.
- Support systems should be in place to provide emotional and mental health assistance to children facing adversity.

### **3. Promote Emotional Stability and Coping Skills**

- Teaching children how to manage emotions and stress improves their ability to cope with life's challenges.
- Encouraging self-efficacy—helping children believe they can succeed—builds confidence and fosters independence.
- Structured routines, such as regular mealtimes and consistent school engagement, create stability and predictability.

### **4. Encourage Restorative Practices in Schools**

- Schools should shift from punitive discipline to restorative justice approaches, focusing on repairing harm and reconciliation.
- Restorative circles and peer mediation programs help students develop accountability, empathy, and communication skills.
- Schools should train staff to foster a restorative mindset, ensuring consistency in implementing these practices.

### **5. Use a Strength-Based Approach**

- Instead of focusing on what children lack, educators and caregivers should highlight their strengths and potential.
- Encouraging participation in hobbies, sports, and creative activities builds confidence and self-worth.
- Recognizing small successes and resilience-building moments reinforces a positive self-identity.

*Breedlove, Choi & Zyromski, 2020.*

# Digging Deeper

Positive Youth Development and Resiliency  
*Youth Collaboratory*



Supporting Vulnerable Students: Staff and Parents  
Speak  
*Doris Testa*



Compassionate Mind Training  
*Maratos et al.*



Mitigating the Effects of Adverse Childhood  
Experiences  
*Breedlove, Choi & Zyromski, 2020*



[Cyberbullying and Online Safety](#)  
*Government of Canada, Public Safety*



[Information on Cyberbullying](#)  
*Toronto District School Board*



[The CASEL Guide to Schoolwide Social and  
Emotional Learning](#)  
*Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning*

