

What Can Schools Do to Build Resilience in their Students?

After each school shooting, violent classroom episode, or student suicide—all too common today—there is talk about resilience in schools. Why is it that some students bounce back from adversity and others do not? Coping and functioning well despite adversity or trauma is resilience.

Schools are recognizing the importance of students' social and emotional well-being as well as a supportive school climate, more generally, in promoting positive academic and behavioral outcomes. In fact, at the September convening of the [U.S. Department of Education Safe and Supportive Schools](#) federal grantees in Washington, states presented data indicating improvements in both academic achievement as well as in student behaviors from three years ago—the point at which the federal grants began that enabled many high poverty school districts in 11 states to implement school climate surveys and programs. Numerous studies show that programs and practices that build resilience are particularly effective in improving the academic performance of low achieving students.

There are a variety of models of resilience out there, each with their research base, and many have interventions to go along with them. Many school districts are asking, “How can we sort through all of these models and interventions to choose the right one for our students?” Child Trends' researchers offered help to 11 states who have received federal Safe and Supportive School grants, by synthesizing the research and resources available on resilience in schools.

Common Components of Resilience

While each model has its favorite components of resilience, we looked across the various models and found that the following components kept re-appearing.

Individual Behaviors, Attitudes, and Competencies

- Physical health supports resilience, including getting enough sleep, eating well, exercising, and enjoying good health.
- Social and emotional competencies that promote resilience include stress management; a sense of control over one's life; positive relationship to self including self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-esteem; hopefulness and goal-setting with the motivation and perseverance needed to reach those goals; and social competence.
- Cognitive competencies that help include insightfulness and general skills such as problem-solving, information processing, and intellectual ability.

Family, School, and Community Support

- A positive and supportive family, including warmth, stability, cohesiveness, a positive parenting style, and high expectations.
- Presence of a caring adult outside the family, such as a teacher, counselor, coach, or mentor
- Belonging to groups and institutions, like schools, clubs, organizations, and religious communities.

Strategies that Build Resilience in Schools

Child Trends and our partners on the [National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/hot-topics/response-and-resiliency) have compiled resources that can help schools to build resilience in their students. They can be found at <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/hot-topics/response-and-resiliency>. Looking across these resources, here are some strategies that schools can use to build resilience in students.

- Promote positive social connections between staff and students, among students, and between schools and home.
- Nurture positive qualities, such as empathy, optimism, or forgiveness, and give students a chance to use them.
- Notice and reinforce qualities that are key to resilience.
- Avoid focusing on failure or negative behaviors.
- Teach by example, which is an effective approach; train staff to develop the same qualities.
- Apply restorative justice techniques can help schools by giving students a structured opportunity to work difficulties out by encouraging reflection and empathy.
- Foster feelings of competence and self-efficacy.
- Set high expectations for students; teach them to set realistic, achievable goals, and also how to reach out for help when needed.

Strategies to Help Students Recover from a Traumatic Event

In addition, here are strategies that schools can use to help students recover from a traumatic event:

- Supportive relationships are key to recovery: Make sure students have time to talk with caring adults and have the opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions.
- Schools can provide supports to parents by sponsoring parent meetings.
- Stay flexible! Children's responses to a traumatic event will be varied not just in intensity, but also in recovery time; it is important for schools to avoid a one-size-fits-all response to recovery.
- After a traumatic event, students may feel nervous, anxious, or unsafe so try to reassure students that they are safe, and keep to familiar routines.
- School administrators can provide extra support to teachers, such as training, time to unwind and ways to connect with other teachers for support.

Programs that work in schools to build resilience in schools can be found in the [Child Trends What Works](#) database as well as [SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence Programs and Practices](#) and the [Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#). Measures of components of resilience that can be used in surveys and program evaluations can be found on Child Trends positive indicators [website](#).

- See more at: <http://www.childtrends.org>