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| **Unit No. 8** | ***Resilience***  |
| **Unit objectives*** To understand the concept of resilience and its importance in children’s current emotional well-being and future life outcomes
* To identify the potential barriers to looked after children developing resilience
* To explore the importance of emotional literacy in developing resilience
* To consider ways in which looked after children’s resilience can be fostered and developed.
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| **Outline of Unit*** Introduction
* Resilience
* Video Clip Donna Carrigan
* Emotional Literacy
* Activity: Case Example
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| **Introduction** Welcome to the unit on resilience. This unit focuses on developing and building upon strengths rather than dealing with problems. It will remind you that even if they have suffered traumatic experiences children have strengths and abilities that can help them manage their lives well. The advantage of a positive resilience perspective is that it concentrates and builds on the child’s strengths and the positives in the here and now. When adults adopt a conscious resilience perspective, the process of education in the widest sense provides a plethora of opportunities to help children become more resilient.The unit builds on previous ones in particular *Attachment* and *Health and Wellbeing.* It examines the concept of resilience with a particular focus on emotional literacy. You will have the opportunity to explore ways to promote emotional literacy and resilience with looked after children. |

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| **Resilience**Download the PowerPoint slides associated with this unit. We shall use them as the basis for exploring resilience.So what is resilience? There are a number of definitions and the hand-out associated with this unit provides us with several of these. Fundamentally, however, it is an attribute that allows people, including children, to do better than might be expected when facing adversity. Slide 2 describes three types of resilient children. You will probably recognise all of them from your work with looked after children. It is important to be aware that adaptive coping mechanisms that have helped children survive in very difficult situations may become problematic if they continue when a child is in a more positive environment, A neglected child searching for and stealing food is evidence of resilience – the same behaviour in a foster home could lead to rejection. It is important that such behaviour is understood as evidence of resilience but children need to be helped to learn new strategies. This may take a considerable time.Until relatively recently resilience was seen as an attribute that could be identified in children and the factors that characterised resilient children were recognised but little work had been undertaken to understand how children could be helped to become more resilient. Recently the focus has moved to identifying strategies for developing resilience in children.Slides 3, 4 and 6 outline the factors that are associated with resilient children. As you examine them consider how many of these factors exist for children before they become looked after. Now look at the slide that outlines the risks to children. How many of these factors exist for the looked after children with whom you work? The reality is that looked after children have few of the protective factors and many of the risk factors Resilience does not, however, develop in response to a life without stress. There is evidence that children in the UK today are less resilient than children were some years ago. Many researchers believe that this is a result of the over protection of children which prevents them from developing effective problem solving mechanisms. Although looked after children have often been exposed to unmanageable levels of stress many of them have developed survival mechanisms that can be reframed and built upon to enable them to become resilient.One essential area that contributes to the development of resilience is educational success. Look at slide 7, which shows the life time impact for looked after children of success in education. Children who did well at school were more successful as adults across a range of dimensions. **Video Clip Donna Carrigan**Donna is talking about work done in South Lanarkshire on attachment and resilience, which connects directly with the model outlined on slide 8. It is essential to make an accurate assessment in order to develop an effective plan for enhancing a child’s resilience and this model is helpful in identifying the crucial components of such an assessment. Many of the factors highlighted in this model relate to emotional literacy. This focus on assessing and supporting resilience is central to the *Getting it right for every child approach* and you may also wish to read the *GIRFEC Practice Briefing* : (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/national-practice-model/resilience-matrix> ).**Emotional Literacy**This section links in to the units on attachment and trauma. You will remember that we identified the importance of helping children to develop the capacity to become aware of and manage their own feelings and accurately recognize the emotions of others.To a great extent, Daniel Goleman popularised the term ‘emotional intelligence’ in his book of the same name. (Emotional Intelligence, 1996). He believed that it was more influential than conventional intelligence in shaping success in education, work and personal life. Many refer to the term ‘competence’ and ‘social and emotional competences’ as a more easily understood way of untangling the complexities of such intelligencesEmotional literacy is interlinked with social and emotional competences as it is about our ability to understand emotional states and our ability to manage express and act upon them. Katherine Weare defines emotional literacy as follows:*…the ability to understand ourselves and other people, and in particular to be aware of, understand, and use information about the emotional states of ourselves and others with competence. It includes the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions, and respond to the emotions of others, in ways that are helpful to ourselves and others.*Weare, K. 2004 *Developing the Emotionally Literate School*Weare groups the key competences that ‘make up’ emotional literacy into three basic categories as a means of helping the reader understand the finer points but does indicate that it might be a false division, given that there is so much overlapping among the categories.The three categories are: * Self-understanding
* Understanding, expressing and managing our emotions
* Understanding social situations and making relationships

Look at slides 10, 11and 12. Do the looked after children with whom you work have these emotional skills? Some children certainly have at least some of these skills but many are unable to understand or manage themselves, others or social situations very well at all. Think about the adults you know personally and professionally. Do you know anyone who is unable to control their emotional responses, or is unable to feel empathy for others? Such adults are usually uncomfortable to be with as we assume that these are some of the fundamental skills required for managing the adult world. Self-awareness, emotional regulation and empathy are skills that most of us begin to develop as toddlers. Helping looked after children develop these skills is a basic responsibility of all adults involved with them whether in their home setting or at school. It is important to remember, however, that such capacities are developed in the context of meaningful, warm and secure relationships not through just being told what to do or how to behave. Empathy can only develop in children who are dealt with empathically.**Case Example Activity**Read the accompanying hand-out. This is a rich resource that provides an excellent overview of resilience and a number of practical ways that adults can help to build resilience in looked after children. Think about a child with whom you work who is vulnerable and/or facing adversity.Consider the following questions:* Identify factors that make this child vulnerable and the adversities they are facing in life.
* Identify factors which make this child resilient or could be developed to make him/her more resilient.
* How emotionally literate is this child?
* What strategies could you put in place to increase the child’s resilience and level of emotional development at home and at school?

Discuss your ideas with colleagues and try them out in practice**Key Messages*** It is vital that as much, or even more, consideration is given to building on children’s strengths and resilience as on alleviating their problems and difficulties
* Emotional literacy is a key building block for developing resilience
* All children have strengths.
* Resilience can be developed. Carers and teachers can contribute to its development in looked after children.
* A positive resilience perspective means considering what you can do to assist a child or young person now, not waiting for an uncertain long-term plan to take effect.
* New research suggests that some children who are genetically very sensitive to poor environments can thrive and **surpass** their apparently more resilient peers if their environment becomes more positive and nurturing. Not only are they hyper sensitive to negative environments they are particularly responsive to positive ones.
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