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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. | |
| **Outline of Unit**   * Presentation: Resilience * Video Clip Donna Carrigan * Presentation: Emotional resilience * Small group activity: case discussion | |
| Resources required for this Unit   * PowerPoint Slides * Video clips: Donna Carrigan; *Supporting Emotional Literacy* * Hand-outs: * *In Residence Resilience Practice Paper SIRCC* * *FAIR leaflet* | |
| **Resources required to support this unit**  *Guide to developing and maintaining resilience in residential child care*  *Resilience GIRFEC Practice Briefing:* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/national-practice-model/resilience-matrix> | |
| **Introduction to trainer**  This unit is an important balance to the one on trauma. Participants may have felt quite overwhelmed by the enormity of young people’s experiences and this unit provides a hopeful perspective that concentrates on the development of strengths rather than managing problems. 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. If staff and carers adopt a conscious resilience perspective, the process of education in the widest sense provides a plethora of opportunities to help children become more resilient. | |

**Presentation: Understanding Resilience (20 minutes)**

Using the slides and hand-outs create a PowerPoint presentation on the concept of resilience. Point out that until relatively recently resilience had been seen as an attribute that could be identified in children and the factors that characterised resilient children had been recognised but little work had been undertaken to identify ways in which resilience could be actively developed in children. More recently the focus has moved to identifying strategies for developing resilience in children.

Discuss with participants the various factors that contribute to the development of resilience and the risk factors that make children vulnerable to emotional ill health. Looked after children rarely have many protective factors in their lives but they are much more likely than their peers to have several of the vulnerability factors. Point out, however, that resilience does not 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. 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 showing 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.

One essential area that contributes to the development of resilience is educational success. Point out the life time impact for looked after children of success in education and that it is associated with positive adult outcomes across a range of dimensions.

The importance of assessing and developing resilience is highlighted in the guidance on *Getting it right for every child* and the Resilience Matrix is a key component of the *GIRFEC Practice Mo*del.

Show slide 8 and discuss the importance of making an accurate assessment of the existing supports, skills and attributes in order to develop an effective plan for enhancing a child’s resilience. Point out that many of the factors that are highlighted in this model depend on developing emotional literacy.

**Video clip:** Donna Carrigan. (10minutes)

Donna talks about the work undertaken in South Lanarkshire on attachment and resilience which links directly with slide 8.

**Presentation: Emotional literacy (10 minutes)**

Link this in to the units on attachment and trauma, and remind participants of 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 intelligences.

Emotional 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 othe*rs.

Weare K, 2004 *Developing the Emotionally Literate School*

At this point, it would be helpful to make use of Weare’s grouping of the key competences that ‘make up’ emotional literacy. She divides them 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. Remind the group of this as you explain Weare’s categories.

The three categories are:

* Self-understanding
* Understanding, expressing and managing our emotions
* Understanding social situations and making relationships

Each category is expanded a little in accompanying slide.

**Case example activity. (45 minutes)**

Give out the ***In Residence Resilience*** paper and suggest participants read it and use it in the following exercise.

Either on your own or with a colleague, who works with some of the same children as you, identify 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?

If any participants have insufficient background information about a child to undertake this task, suggest that they use one of the case studies or focus on Craig.

Ask the participants to volunteer to give feedback. Depending on the time you have left, it may be possible for three or four participants, or pairs/groups, to feed back. Ask them to concentrate particularly on point 4.

**Final comment** (5 minutes)

Relatively new research has identified some fascinating and encouraging differences in susceptibility to environmental influences among children. Boyce and Ellis (2005) used the metaphor of ‘dandelions’ to indicate the large number of children who are genetically or prenatally programmed in a way that they would survive and function rather robustly within almost any environment. The smaller number of ‘orchids’ however would wilt quickly in neglecting circumstances but bloom in a spectacular way when raised in the most optimal environment. What seems to be a genetic risk factor in an average or bad environment, e.g. biological reactivity to stress or a reactive temperament, turns out to promote **optimal development in a nurturing context.**

**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.