An Introduction to Resilient Thinking
RIRO ECE COLLEGE CURRICULUM MODULES

Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT
... helping children learn to Reach IN to think more flexibly and accurately and Reach OUT to others and opportunities.
Reaching IN … Reaching OUT (RIRO)

An Introduction to Resilient Thinking:

RIRO ECE COLLEGE CURRICULUM MODULES

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**Instructions for attached DVD:**

The DVD included in this publication contains the PowerPoints for all three modules as well as the *Skills Videos* mentioned in Module 2 (p. 22) and Module 3 (p. 39).

After inserting the DVD into your computer, it should load the “play menu” automatically. If the menu does not load, please do the following:

1) Go to “Start”
2) Go to “My Computer.”
3) Go to “DVD drive” and right click
4) Click “Autoplay” on the menu.
5) Choose program to play DVD (e.g., Windows Media Player)

The RIRO “play menu” should now load. If it still does not load, then do the following to access:

**Skills Videos:** open “Windows Media Player. On upper left side of screen, click on “down arrow” to the right of “Now Playing.” Then choose CD/DVD and click. The Skills videos “menu” will appear.

**PowerPoints:** open “MS Office PowerPoint.” Go to “File,” then “Open,” and select your DVD drive and click. The files for each module’s slides will be listed.
Contents

Preface 5
  References 5

Module 1: The Importance of Resilience 7
  Learning outcomes 7
  What is resilience? 8
  Why is resilience important? 8
  Why is it important for adults working with young children to be resilient? 9
  What can I do to be more resilient? 10
  Suggested activities 11
  References 11
  PowerPoint slides 13

Module 2: Cognition and Emotion: The ABC Model 15
  What is the relationship between cognition and emotion? 16
  Are thoughts always involved in emotions? 16
  How are cognition and emotions related to resilience? 17
  What is the ABC model? 18
  How can the ABC model be used? 19
  How do I identify my beliefs? 19
  What do I do when my beliefs are not accurate? 20
  Suggested DVD segment 21
  Suggested activities 21
  Handout 2-1: Generating alternative beliefs 25
  References 29
  PowerPoint slides 30

Module 3: Explanatory Style and Putting It in Perspective 33
  Learning outcomes 34
  What beliefs are involved in resilient thinking? 34
  How is optimism related to resilience? 34
  How is self-efficacy related to resilience? 34
  How is hardiness related to resilience? 35
  Why are our explanations of negative events so important to resilience? 35
  What are the dimensions of explanatory style? 35
  Why do people feel compelled to explain negative events in their lives? 36
  Why do we develop reflexive habits of thinking? 37
Why do some people develop a negative explanatory style? 37
How can we increase the accuracy of our explanations of negative events? 37
How do I put it in perspective? 38
Suggested DVD segments 39
Suggested activities 40
References 43
PowerPoint slides 45

Project Overview 47
What is the Reaching IN . . . Reaching OUT project? 47
What research has been conducted so far? 48
What are the research results thus far? 48
What is the purpose of the RIRO ECE College Program Curriculum? 49
Where can I find additional resource materials about resilience and the RIRO project? 49
Preface

Resilience in development has been described perfectly by Ann Masten (2001) as “ordinary magic.” Resilience in children does not come from rare or extraordinary qualities, but from everyday basic human resources, such as relationships with competent and caring adults in the family and community, cognitive and self-regulation skills, positive views of oneself, and the motivation to affect the environment. The extraordinary protection offered by these ordinary processes is magical.

The Reaching IN . . . Reaching Out (RIRO) ECE College Curriculum Modules provide opportunities for students to examine their own resilience. Students are encouraged to explore their own reactions to stress and to develop further the accuracy and flexibility of their thinking.

These draft modules have been designed to be used within the ECE college curriculum wherever they might best fit. They by no means purport to encompass all that ECE students will learn to do in order to promote the development of resilience and flexible adaptation in young children. The student’s ability to develop caring and responsive relationships with children, to understand child development, to support families, to respect individual differences, and to engage each child in active exploration are all fundamental to the nurturing of resilience.

The aim of these draft modules is to increase the salience of thinking skills as an integral part of resilience. The modules introduce students to the concept of resilience and to the role thinking plays in overcoming the inevitable stress and adversity of life. Showing how our thinking affects our emotional responses and our coping skills is a good first step in helping early childhood education students to develop their own resilience and to model accurate and flexible thinking for the children and families they serve.

We welcome your comments. Please visit the RIRO web site at www.reachinginreachingout.com for contact information.

References

Module 1: The Importance of Resilience

A young, athletic, spirited teenager who loved sports was returning home after an afternoon of fishing with his friends when the truck he was riding in went out of control and crashed. He survived the accident but was told he would never walk again. He was 15 years old. Imagine how that would change a person’s life.

At first he was deeply despondent, but somehow he persevered. With hard work and determination he finished high school and was the first student with a physical disability to graduate from the University of British Columbia with a degree in physical education. He went on to win 19 international wheelchair marathons and compete for Canada in the 1984 Olympics.

Realizing that he might be able to change the way that people with disabilities were perceived, and inspired by his friend Terry Fox, he toured the world in his wheelchair to raise awareness of, and money for, research into spinal cord injuries, rehabilitation, and wheelchair sports. He founded the Man in Motion Foundation and the Rick Hansen Institute, which have raised more than $118 million for a wide range of charitable and research activities associated with spinal cord injuries.

He is married and has three daughters. In British Columbia, a township and two public schools have been named after him. He was the National Disabled Athlete of the year in 1979, and he shared the Canadian Athlete of the Year award with Wayne Gretzky in 1983. He has received the Order of Canada, the Order of British Columbia, and many other honours and awards.

Rick Hansen’s story is one of enormous resilience. Why is it that some people are able to overcome such tremendous obstacles while others sink into depression and despair? What is resilience?

Source: Based on http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-74-698/people/rick_hansen/

Learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of Module 1, students will be able to:

- combine their knowledge of resilience with their concepts of health and well-being.
- apply their knowledge of resilience to their own lives.
What is resilience?

“Resilience is the ability to persevere and adapt when things go awry . . . to overcome obstacles . . . to steer through adversities, to bounce back from major setbacks and reach out to broaden your world” (Reivich & Shatté, 2002, pp. 1, 11). More simply put, resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity and take on new challenges. When things get tough, some people manage to carry on, whereas others are almost overwhelmed. The ones who are able to cope with difficult times and to bounce back from stressful experiences are more resilient than other people.

Our responses to stress involve biological, environmental, and psychological factors. There is wide variability in the pattern and intensity of people’s physiological responses to stress. Because of individual biological differences in the functioning of the autonomic, endocrine, and immune systems, some people are very vulnerable to stress and others much less so. Similarly, people’s environments differ in the number and nature of stressful events they encounter, the availability of supportive friends and relatives, and the cultural norms that teach us how to respond to adverse events.

Although exercise and relaxation techniques can strengthen our biological response to stress, and community action can help make the places we live less stressful and more supportive, the strongest influences on our response to stress are psychological factors, namely, the way we think.

Central to resilience are our beliefs. Studies of hardiness (Kobasa, Maddi, Puccetti, & Zola, 1985), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and optimism (Chang, 1998) have all found that our responses to stress are to a large extent determined by our thoughts and beliefs. The way we think about stress and adversity, our beliefs about our abilities, and our attitudes toward the future have powerful effects on how we cope. People who function well in the face of psychological and physical stress share three beliefs that distinguish them from people who do not.

These beliefs have been described as the three C’s of hardiness: commitment, control, and challenge (Kobasa et al., 1985). Resilient people believe that what they do is important (commitment); they believe that they can influence the outcomes of events (control); and they are more likely to regard the demands of a potentially stressful event as a challenge than as a threat. Those beliefs serve to protect them from stress.

Why is resilience important?

Research has shown that how we think about adversity and opportunity affects our success in school and work, our health and longevity, and our risk of depression (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). We know that people who are able to bounce back live longer; have better health
and happier relationships; and are more successful in school and at work. For example, a longitudinal study of 99 graduates of Harvard University found that the way people explained negative events in their lives at age 25 predicted their physical health at age 30 and age 60. Specifically, people who attributed bad events to permanent and serious personality flaws, rather than to external factors (e.g., “I will never make friends here because I’m just too shy”) suffered more health problems than people with more optimistic explanations of adversity (e.g., “It takes some time to meet people in a new place”) (Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant, 1988). Research also tells us that some of the ways of thinking that help people to bounce back can be learned by anyone.

People today are exposed to high levels of daily stress, and the incidence of depression appears to be increasing, especially in people born after 1960 (Seligman, 1995). Despite our best efforts we cannot prevent adversity and stress, but we can learn to be more resilient by changing how we think about challenges and adversity (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Seligman, 1991; Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995).

Non-resilient thinking is characterized by “ruts,” which are developed over a lifetime. These well-worn paths can prevent us from seeing stressful situations accurately and flexibly. In contrast, resilient thinking is characterized by creative problem solving, the capacity to see other points of view, and the ability to continue on with daily life despite obstacles. Resilient thinking is characterized by flexibility and accuracy. Those are habits that can be learned, and they help to reduce stress and to foster mental and physical well-being (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Seligman, 1991; Seligman et al., 1995).

**Why is it important for adults working with young children to be resilient?**

One of the ways we learn to deal with stress and adversity is by observing other people. When things go wrong, young children watch their parents, brothers and sisters, caregivers, and friends as one way of figuring out how to respond. Since they often imitate the reactions, explanations, and behaviour of those people, modelling is an important teaching strategy. If adults develop resilient and effective coping strategies, they can then model and talk about these strategies to the children in their lives. This increases the children’s chances of constructing their own resilient strategies right from the start (Seligman et al., 1995). The eminent researcher Sir Michael Rutter (2000) has said, “There is no single age that has a monopoly on risks and no age beyond which it is too late to intervene.” It is better to help children build their capacity for resilience in the early years than intervene after the fact.

Resilience programs for children have existed since the 1970s. Many of these programs have focused on building self-esteem, increasing school readiness, and supporting the parent-child relationship (Garmezy, 1991; Luthar & Ziegler, 1991; Werner & Smith, 2001). Other programs, which have focused on understanding children’s social cognitions, have
been found to help both children and parents to develop more effective social problem solving (Shure, 1999).

The approach taken by the Reaching IN . . . Reaching OUT (RIRO) program is based on the work of Martin Seligman, a social psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, and his colleagues, who have studied the development of resilience for many years. They have also created a program, called the Penn Resilience Program (PRP), which teaches resiliency skills to adults and to children between the ages of 8 and 12. As a result of the success of this program, which has been demonstrated by research, it is known and used around the world (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

The Reaching IN . . . Reaching OUT project has modified the PRP program to make it more suitable for younger children. The RIRO program targets significant adults in children’s lives, such as childcare providers, teachers, and parents. The aim is to make these adults more aware of their own responses to stress and adversity. In addition, the program gives adults opportunities to increase the accuracy and flexibility of their thinking so that they will be able to demonstrate a resilient response to the children in their care.

**What can I do to be more resilient?**

There are many things we can do to increase our resilience. In addition to taking good care of ourselves physically by getting enough sleep, eating nutritious food, and exercising regularly, we can learn how to increase the accuracy and flexibility of our thinking.

The RIRO College Curriculum modules provide an introduction to developing resilient thinking in young adults. These modules will give you opportunities to:

- increase your awareness of the relationship between your thoughts and your emotions.
- gain insight into your beliefs when things go wrong.
- look for alternative beliefs when you are experiencing debilitating emotions.

These are the first steps in increasing the accuracy and flexibility of your thinking and becoming more resilient to life’s inevitable stresses and adversity.
Suggested activities

Activity 1-1: Resilience word web
In class, have students brainstorm words they have come to associate with resilience. Create a word web on the board or chart paper with resilience at the centre (see PowerPoint slide no. 3 at the end of this module).

Activity 1-2: Resilient role models
Ask students to think about some people they admire for their resilience and to list the characteristics, skills, and abilities these people display.

Activity 1-3: Stories of resilience
Many famous people have overcome enormous obstacles in their lives. Each student could collect information about such a person and tell the class these personal stories of perseverance and strength.

One example could be Rick Hansen. The CBC archives website has video clips that tell the story of his courage and his determination to overcome adversity: http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-74-698/people/rick_hansen/

References
The Importance of Resilience

Resilience is the ability to:
- Persevere or adapt when things go awry
- Overcome obstacles
- Bounce back from major setbacks
- Reach out and broaden your world


Influences on Resilience

Biological
- Autonomic, endocrine, immune systems

Environmental
- Number of stressful events, nature of events, availability of social support, cultural norms

Psychological
- Thought to be a very powerful influence on our response to stress

Beliefs

Beliefs are central to resilience...
- Hardiness
- Self-efficacy
- Optimism


3 C’s of Hardiness

Commitment
- Resilient people believe what they do is important

Control
- Resilient people believe they can influence outcomes

Challenge
- Resilient people consider a demand to be a challenge rather than a threat

Resilient Thinking vs. “Thinking Ruts”

Resilient Thinking
- Creative problem solving
- Move on despite obstacles
- Flexible & accurate
- Able to see others’ points of view
- Can be learned anytime

Thinking Ruts
- Developed over a long period of time
- Unproductive habits
- Often illogical & irrational


Why is Resilience Important?

- Resilience affects:
  - Success in school & work
  - Health & longevity
  - Risk for depression
  - Quality of relationships

- Early resilience can lead to more effective coping strategies later in life.
## Why is Resilience Important for Adults Working with Children?

- Enhances adult coping and well-being
- Children learn through adult models
- Adults can provide support and strategies to build resilience

## RIRO – A Unique Approach

- Focuses on adults in children’s lives
  - Childcare providers
  - Parents
  - Teachers
  - ECE students
- Aims to increase adults’ awareness of their own stress responses
- Helps adults to develop accurate & flexible thinking skills

## What Can I Do to Be More Resilient?

- Learn relaxation techniques
- Increase awareness of relationship between thinking & feeling
- Gain insight into your beliefs when things go wrong
- Look for alternative beliefs when experiencing debilitating emotions

## Where Should I Start?

- Relaxation techniques
  - Based on truth that you can’t be stressed & relaxed at the same time
- Controlled breathing
- Yoga, meditation, positive imagery
Module 2: Cognition and Emotion: The ABC Model

In 1985, Chandrasekhar Sankurathri, an immigrant from India who had come to Canada as a student, was leading a rich and fulfilling life. He had a good job in Ottawa as a biologist with Health Canada and had a beautiful wife and two young children. All that ended on June 23 of that year, when his wife and children, who had just left for a vacation in India, were killed on the Air India flight that was blown up by a terrorist’s bomb off the coast of Ireland. His daughter was three and his son was six when they died; the bodies of his family were never found.

It is difficult to imagine such a terrible loss. It is perhaps more difficult to imagine how a person could carry on under such circumstances, and indeed, Chandrasekhar Sankurathri struggled for three years, going to work every day and returning home to impossible loneliness. He wondered why he was earning a living; he questioned the purpose of his life.

Finally, in his search for meaning and purpose, he decided he could do more good in his homeland than in Canada. So he returned to India, to an impoverished rural region of his wife’s home province of Andhra Pradesh, and there he founded a school and a hospital. The school, which he named after his daughter, Sarada, provides free education, including busing, meals, uniforms, books, and medical care, to children who would normally never have the opportunity to go to school. It gives these children and their families hope for a brighter future. Dr. Chandra, as he is known locally, himself teaches at this school. He says, “The way I do now here, every time I see children, I always remember my children. It gives me joy to see children.”

After school he uses the bus to pick up people throughout the countryside who are in need of cataract surgery and take them to his hospital, named after his son, Srikiran. India is home to one-quarter of the world’s blind people, and many of them do not realize that cataracts are treatable. Dr. Chandra and his skilled team are able to restore their sight in minutes. His hospital performs 150 cataract surgeries a day, and by 2005 it had restored sight to over 95,000 people. He has taken them out of the darkness and given them back their independence, their sense of purpose and usefulness, and the ability to earn a living.
Dr. Chandra acknowledges that not a day goes by when he doesn’t think of his wife and children, but he says, “Forget and forgive, and you get on with your life. . . . Twenty years has gone by. If I didn’t do this, I’d be sitting there waiting for something to happen for those criminals.” That kind of obsession would not have allowed him to accomplish anything worthwhile in his own life. Chandra Sankurathri’s remarkable resilience seems very much related to his thinking – about his loss, his life, himself, and the world around him. How has he overcome the debilitating emotions caused by his tremendous loss? How does one move on with life when faced with such overwhelming adversity?

Source: Based on CBC (2005).

What is the relationship between cognition and emotion?

We know from our everyday experiences that what we think and how we feel are very much related. When you are feeling happy and a friend doesn’t return a phone call, you just think she’s too busy or has forgotten. Because of the way you interpret her behaviour, you simply give her another call. But when you are anxious and depressed, you may see her failure to return that call as a comment about your worth to her. Your interpretation of her behaviour makes you feel increasingly bad about yourself and your friendship, and so it is much less likely that you will give her another call.

Cognition and emotion are intricately bound together (Bell & Wolfe, 2004). The centres in the brain responsible for each are in constant communication with each other. That our emotions and moods affect our thinking is readily apparent in our everyday experience. Although it is less obvious how our thoughts affect our emotions and moods, we do know that cognition and emotion have a reciprocal relationship; that is, the influence runs both ways. This observation is supported by considerable research (Forgas, 2001; Lazarus, 1991). But how exactly do thoughts influence our experience of emotions?

Are thoughts always involved in emotions?

Over the past 25 years there has been a great deal of debate about what role cognition plays in our experience of emotions. The leading researchers in this debate have been Robert Zajonc and Richard Lazarus. Zajonc’s (1980) position has been that emotions can be experienced without any conscious thought: “Preferences need no inferences.” His research reveals that people often form preferences for faces or objects but later can’t remember having seen them before. This observation is taken as evidence that the faces or objects could not have been consciously appraised; otherwise the person would remember
having seen them before (Zajonc, 1980). Critics argue, however, that this could be a failure of memory rather than an absence of cognitive processing.

In contrast, Richard Lazarus’s research supports the idea that emotional reactions to stimuli are critically dependent on cognitive appraisal. He divides cognitive appraisal into three levels. Primary appraisal occurs when a person assesses whether a stimulus is positive, stressful, or unimportant. Secondary appraisal occurs when a person decides whether he or she can cope with the situation; and finally, re-appraisal occurs when the person monitors the results of their primary and secondary appraisals and modifies them if necessary (Lazarus, 1984).

Lazarus and his colleagues have conducted a number of studies which have demonstrated the influence of cognitive appraisals on emotions. In some of the studies, the subjects were shown upsetting films (e.g., a violent workplace accident) but with several different soundtracks. For example, one soundtrack assured the subjects that the film was only a simulation; in another, the narrator suggested the film be viewed from an intellectual perspective; in a third, the narrator described the events but offered no reassurances or instructions on how to watch the film. The different soundtracks produced significantly different emotional reactions in the subjects (Lazarus, 1984).

Lazarus (1991) has agreed with Zajonc that not all cognitive evaluations or appraisals are deliberate or even conscious. He argues that for rough, automatic evaluations of “good” or “bad,” it is possible to experience emotions without any awareness of having thought about the subject (Lazarus, 1991; Uleman & Bargh, 1989). Therefore primary appraisals may not always include the conscious, deliberate thinking that we normally associate with cognitive processes. Secondary appraisal and re-appraisal, however, do involve conscious thought processes.

The consensus seems to be that cognition is very much a part of our emotions; that is, how we interpret the events in our lives influences how we feel and what we do. Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté (2002) argue that if our emotions were not influenced by our cognitive interpretations of events, then we would all react the same way to the same emotionally arousing events. For example, getting a grade of B on a research paper would cause all students to feel satisfied that they had done an above-average job. But this is not everyone’s experience. Each person’s reaction to the “event” of receiving a B depends on what they think. What were their expectations? How do they interpret that grade? What does it mean for them?

How are cognition and emotions related to resilience?

For the most part we respond to the events in our lives in reasonable and productive ways that allow us to carry on with our lives. We usually deal with our emotions in ways that enhance our health and well-being, but there are times when we experience debilitating
emotions that don’t help us to solve our problems and don’t motivate us to engage in constructive actions. Many of us brood continuously about the significance of adverse events, and we feel the corresponding emotions over and over again but to no advantage. We lie awake at night thinking about the events, and we become irritable. Rather than being helpful, our emotions have become debilitative. They add to our distress from the original event and prevent us from carrying on with our lives, solving problems, and bouncing back.

Each of us is particularly sensitive to certain kinds of adversity or events, which are more likely than others to illicit these debilitating emotions. These long-lasting, usually intense emotions spring from our way of thinking. If we were to describe these beliefs to other people (or even to ourselves), they would probably appear highly inaccurate and illogical.

Let’s go back to the example of a student who gets a B on a research paper. Although most students would be satisfied, there might be a student who would be very disappointed. What thoughts could lead to such profound disappointment? Maybe something like this:

“I worked hard on this paper, but obviously I have failed. Less than perfect is just not good enough. How could I be so stupid? I don’t really want to continue in this program. I just don’t have what it takes. I’m no good and this is too hard.”

Those beliefs about getting a B on a paper may sound illogical and overblown to most people, but there have likely been times when you have had equally illogical or catastrophic beliefs that have interfered with your ability to cope effectively. It is these beliefs, not the adverse events themselves, that cause the emotions.

**What is the ABC model?**

Many of us believe that unpleasant events themselves cause us to act in certain ways and feel particular emotions. That is, we believe that adversity (A) leads to consequences (C). Albert Ellis (1962), who had a different theory, created the ABC model to help explain our reactions to adversity. He argued that our feelings are not caused by events but by our interpretation of events. He developed a cognitive approach, called Rational Emotive Therapy, that has been very successful in helping people dispute the often irrational beliefs that lead them to feel depressed. Ellis labels the adverse event as “A” (adverse event); our thoughts about the adversity are labelled “B” (beliefs); and our feelings and behaviour are labelled “C” (consequences). This ABC model helps us to gain insight into our thinking. The ABC model for the example above looks like this:

**A** (Adversity) – A grade of B on a research paper.

**B** (Belief) – I must do well or I am worthless. “I have failed. I did not get a perfect mark and I don’t want to continue working for grades like this. I’m no good and this is too hard.”

**C** (Consequences) – Feelings of sadness and despair – giving up.
Ellis would argue that we create stress for ourselves by consciously or unconsciously holding these irrational beliefs about ourselves, other people, and the world.

**How can the ABC model be used?**

Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté (2002) argue that the first step in becoming more resilient is to gain self-awareness, specifically, to listen to our interpretations of adverse events. What do we say to ourselves when we are upset? What is our interior monologue when things go wrong? It is particularly important to ask ourselves those questions when we are under stress and not coping well, that is, when we are feeling debilitating, non-productive emotions such as the ones described above. These emotions are intense and long-lasting, and they don’t help us to solve the problem or take constructive action for the future. Reivich and Shatté (2002) suggest that each of us has our own unique reactions to particular situations that “push our buttons.” We can use the ABC model to gain insight into the thoughts we have, and we can evaluate whether or not they are accurate. The first step, however, is just to become aware of our interior monologue. In other words, we need to understand what thoughts, explanations, and interpretations we have when things go wrong.

**How do I identify my beliefs?**

Reivich and Shatté (2002) suggest we observe our thoughts during adverse events, particularly those that seem to distress us much more than seems reasonable. They describe a “beeper” exercise that involves setting a timer or programmable watch to beep throughout the day and then recording our thoughts each time the beeper sounds. A less intrusive method would be to keep a diary or journal that includes your thoughts and beliefs during times of stress and adversity. It is important to use whatever method helps you to become more aware of the beliefs you have that connect the adverse events in your life with your emotional reactions and your behaviour.

For many people, it is easy to identify the adverse event (A) and their feelings and behaviour (C). But is much more difficult to figure out what beliefs (the B part) led them to feel and react that way. Reivich and Shatté (2002) describe a series of beliefs that are connected to specific feelings and kinds of behaviour. The chart below outlines the links between specific beliefs and emotions that are predictable and universal. The authors have charted only the “negative” emotions, since they are commonly the ones we experience in times of adversity.
Recognizing your beliefs will help you to understand better why certain adverse events cause you to feel strong, long-lasting, and debilitating emotions. Your beliefs will give you insight into what kinds of adversity “push your buttons”; and once you have identified these beliefs, you can examine them for accuracy. It is important to pay particular attention to beliefs that seem irrational or inaccurate. Is there another way to view the situation? Are there other beliefs that would more accurately explain what has happened and what you need to do about it?

**What do I do when my beliefs are not accurate?**

Once you have identified your beliefs, you can begin to challenge them. More information about challenging beliefs can be found in the next module, but to begin it is helpful to think about plausible, alternative beliefs. For example, imagine you find out that several classmates have organized a pub night but have not invited you. You find yourself feeling quite angry, and you have been thinking about how rude and inconsiderate it was for them to leave you out. You find yourself avoiding these classmates and being aloof when you are with them. The ABC’s of this adverse event might look like this:

A = Not being invited to the pub night.

B = These classmates have treated me badly; they have excluded me. “How rude to leave me out. I thought I these people were my friends, but they are mean.”

C = Feeling angry and acting in a hostile and aloof manner with these classmates.

Imagine that after examining your beliefs in this situation, you realize that they may not be entirely accurate, or at least you suspect that there might be other beliefs that would explain your classmates’ behaviour. After all, they are still friendly and they’re happy to see you. They are not acting as though they dislike you, and they have done nothing else that you would interpret as mean. Perhaps they forgot to invite you or thought you had to work that
evening. You can probably generate many other possible explanations for their behaviour that would lead you to have very different feelings and engage in significantly different behaviour. Here is an example:

A = Not being invited to the pub night.

B = “These people usually include me in their plans. They are friendly and otherwise seem to enjoy my company. There must be some reason I am not invited. I wonder what it is.”

C = Feeling puzzled, and confused and asking them about their plans and whether I could join them.

Since it can be difficult to search for plausible, alternative beliefs, there are times when talking to someone else is helpful. Another helpful method for generating alternative beliefs is to put yourself in the other person’s position. In this case it would be to view not being invited to the pub night from your classmates’ perspective.

Increasing our self-awareness by articulating our beliefs and observing their connection to our emotions and behaviour is a vital first step in increasing the accuracy and flexibility our thinking. Doing our ABC’s is the first step in increasing our resilience.

**Suggested DVD segment**

The following DVD segment features early childhood educators discussing their experiences using the skills and concepts covered in this module. It can be downloaded from [http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources.htm](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources.htm).

“The ABC model” (4 minutes)

The ABC model helps us understand our own and other people’s reactions to adversity and stressful circumstances.

**Suggested activities**

*Activity 2-1: Tuning in to your beliefs*

This activity can be done in class or as homework. Have students pay attention to the stream of thoughts flowing through their minds by signalling them to “tune in” at regular intervals. Reivich and Shatté (2002) suggest setting a timer to “beep” at various times. This can be done in class or outside of class with a programmable watch or timer. When the alarm sounds, students are instructed to listen to what they are saying to themselves and write it down.
Another way to do this activity is to have students record their thoughts only when they are under stress or when things go wrong. By keeping a journal of their beliefs during adverse events, they will become more aware of their beliefs and can then examine how those beliefs influence their behaviour and their emotions.

**Activity 2-2: Generating alternative beliefs**

This activity can be done in class or assigned as homework. Ask students to recall a time when they experienced debilitating emotions that seemed to be more intense or long-lasting than the situation warranted. Ask them to use the ABC model to describe the adversity and then to try to generate plausible alternative beliefs that would produce significantly different emotions and behaviour.

Students might need some help to describe the adversity clearly and objectively. A common mistake here is to incorporate beliefs and opinions into the description of the event. Remind them that it is important to separate their beliefs about the event from the facts of the event.

Another common problem that students have is actually identifying their beliefs. It is sometimes easier to begin by describing the adversity and the consequences and then to go back and piece together the beliefs that connect A to C.

Students can use Handout 2:1 to record their adverse event and then write an alternative set of beliefs.

**Activity 2-3: The benefits and difficulties of using the ABC model**

In this activity the students analyze both the difficulties and the benefits of using the ABC model and developing alternative beliefs. They can do this alone or in small groups.

Some common difficulties identified include the following:

- They may not be able to separate their beliefs from their emotional reactions.
- It can be hard to take another perspective when they are angry.
- It is time-consuming to try to identify their beliefs.
It is hard to give up one’s beliefs and entertain the possibility that there is another way to view the situation. Some common benefits include the following:

- It provides insight into one’s reactions.
- It helps promote problem solving.
- It helps to reduce distress by enabling the person to consider other possible beliefs.
- It helps to preserve relationships by developing empathy.
Handout 2-1: Generating alternative beliefs

Note: This handout activity has been adapted from content in Reivich & Shatté, *The resilience factor*, 2002, New York: Broadway Books.

**Part A**

Pick a situation in which you had strong negative emotions. Describe the adversity, your beliefs, and the consequences. This part of the assignment is a description of the actual occurrence together with your thoughts and feelings. Record this information on the attached worksheet.

**Tip** – when you are doing the assignment, it might be easiest to record the **Adversity** first and then the **Consequence** and finally try to describe the **Beliefs** you have that connect **A** to **C**.

**Descriptions of adversity, beliefs, and consequences**

**Adversity** – Be objective about the situation. Record your *description* of what happened, not your evaluation of it. Try to stick to the facts: “Who? What? Where? When?”

- *e.g., On Tuesday night at Tim Hortons, Joe and I had an argument about Suzanne’s new car.*

**Beliefs** – Record your interpretation of the adversity. This is what you *think* about it, not how you feel. Beliefs are the things we say to ourselves when something happens.

- *e.g., “He can be such a jerk. He wouldn’t listen to a word I said. He was just trying to show me he knows more about cars than I do.”*

**Consequences** – Record how you felt (the emotion) and what you did (your behaviour) as a response.

- *e.g., I was so angry, I got up and walked out of the coffee shop. I just couldn’t talk to him any more.*
**Part B**

For this section of the assignment you will use the same adverse event described in Part A. You need to think about different ways to interpret the same adversity. There are usually many ways to look at a situation. Choose a plausible belief that would lead to a different set of emotions and actions. Record your alternative beliefs and the possible consequences on the attached worksheet.

**Adversity – same as Part A**

*e.g., On Tuesday night at Tim Hortons, Joe and I had a fight about Suzanne’s new car.*

**Alternative beliefs** – Record a significantly different but plausible interpretation of the adversity. This is what you might have *thought* if you had taken another perspective. Again, this is *not* how you might have *felt*: beliefs are the things we say to ourselves when something happens.

*e.g., “He really seems to want to impress me with his knowledge of cars. He seems to be feeling a little insecure tonight. I wonder if he had another big argument at work.”*

**Possible consequences** – If you held this belief (instead of your original belief), what emotions would you have and what might you do (behaviour)?

*e.g., I might feel concerned that something else was wrong. I might compliment him on his knowledge of cars to defuse the argument and then ask him about his day.*
Developing alternative beliefs worksheet

Name: ____________________________________________

For this activity, we would like you to focus on one event or occasion. It can be at school, at work or in some other place.

Part A: Using the ABC model to describe an adverse event

Using the ABC model, describe a real event.

A (adversity: the event)
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________

B (beliefs: an interpretation of the event)
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________

C (consequences: the emotions and behaviour)
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________
**Part B: Developing alternative beliefs – taking a different perspective**

Using the same event as in Part A, describe a significantly different but plausible set of beliefs you *could* have had. Choose beliefs that would lead to different emotions and behaviour than the ones you actually experienced and described in Part A.

**Challenge B (a different interpretation of the adversity)**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**New C (new consequences: emotions and behaviour that would follow from the alternative beliefs)**

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
References


Cognition & Emotion

- How we think & feel are related
- Centers in the brain responsible for cognition & emotion are in constant communication
- Relationship is two-directional

Are Thoughts Always Involved in Emotions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zajonc</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>Lazarus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| People experience emotion without conscious thought | Emotional reactions critically dependent on cognitive appraisal | 3 levels of appraisal

Consensus
Most of the time cognition is part of our emotions.

How are Cognitions & Emotions Related to Resilience?

- Our appraisal of a situation & our resulting beliefs determine how we feel
- Irrational or illogic beliefs can create debilitating emotions
- These emotions can prevent us from coping effectively

What are Debilitating Emotions?

Debilitating emotions:
- are usually intense
- are often long lasting
- don’t help us move forward or solve problems
- are often illogical or irrational

What is the ABC Model?

The ABC Model:
- is a way of looking at the relationship between thoughts & emotions
- was developed by Dr. Albert Ellis
- provides a method to help identify irrational beliefs & challenge them

ABC Model

A = Adversity
- e.g., a grade of B on a research paper

B = Belief
- e.g., I must do well, or I am worthless

C = Consequences
- e.g., feelings of sadness, or giving up
How to Use the ABC Model

The ABC model can be used to gain insight into our thoughts:

- Adversity & consequences are often easy to identify
- Beliefs often the most difficult to identify
- Certain beliefs consistently provoke certain emotions – B-C connections

B-C Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violation of your rights</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future threat</td>
<td>Anxiety, fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of another’s rights</td>
<td>Guilt, shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of status</td>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Can Be Done When Beliefs are Not Accurate?

- Challenge the beliefs
- Think of plausible, alternative beliefs
- Take the perspective of the other person

Module 3: Explanatory Style and Putting It in Perspective

Rosemary Brown was an intelligent and outspoken Canadian. She had a rare kind of positive spirit. The first black woman to be elected to a Canadian legislature, she served as a member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia for 14 years. She was also the first woman to run for the leadership of a Canadian political party, coming second to Ed Broadbent at the 1975 leadership convention of the federal New Democratic Party. She was the Ruth Wyn Woodward professor in Women’s Studies at Simon Fraser University, and throughout her life she worked in a variety of organizations and associations to put an end to sexism and racism. She was the Vancouver Ombudswoman, Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, and a founding member of the Vancouver Status of Women Council and the Vancouver Crisis Centre. She was appointed chief executive officer of MATCH, an international non-governmental organization that promotes women’s issues on a global basis – for she believed that no matter how much progress Canadian women made towards equality, if women in other countries had not achieved as much, then all our progress was threatened.

Born in Jamaica in 1930, Rosemary Brown came to Canada in 1950 to attend McGill University. Her life in Canada included many encounters with both open and thinly disguised racism and sexism, but her optimism prevailed. In 1973, in a famous speech, “Black Women and the Women’s Liberation,” Rosemary said, “I am Black and I am a woman – and to be Black and female in a society which is both racist and sexist is to be in the unique position of having nowhere to go but up!” (Brown, 1989, p. 86). Rather than be consumed by anger and outrage about incidents of racism and sexism, she set about making Canada and the world into better places. She believed that although politics was tough and unpleasant, women should get involved in order to bring about change. She approached the hurtful narrow-mindedness of oppression as a challenge, rather than a threat, and was described by Judy Rebick (2003) as “a role model of grace and dignity under fire.”

Rosemary Brown attributed her resilience to the warm, safe, and secure relationships she experienced in her childhood. Despite the fact that her father died when she was very young, she remembered growing up in Jamaica during the 1930s and 1940s as an idyllic time full of love, freedom, encouragement, intellectual stimulation, and high expectations. Rosemary’s mother, aunts, and particularly her grandmother were models of strength, cooperation, self-sufficiency, and political involvement. They expected much of her and offered their unflagging support and encouragement. She in turn was able to “reach in” for strength, optimism, and perseverance and “reach out” to others for their support and participation in her commitment to make the world a better place.

Source: Based on Brown (1989); Rebick (2003).
Learning outcomes
Upon successful completion of Module 3, students will be able to:

- synthesize their knowledge of optimism, self-efficacy, hardiness, explanatory style, and resilience.
- appraise their own explanatory style.
- think more accurately and flexibly about unpleasant events in their lives.

What beliefs are involved in resilient thinking?
Our beliefs about the future (optimism versus pessimism), ourselves (self-efficacy versus helplessness), and our perceptions of control, commitment, and challenge (hardiness) are all related to the resilience with which we adapt to stress and adversity.

How is optimism related to resilience?
Our beliefs about the way things will turn out have a significant influence on the ways in which we respond to stress and adversity. Optimistic people expect that in the end things will turn out well, despite the difficulties they may face in the present. Pessimists, on the other hand, tend to view the future as uncertain at best and, at worst, filled with continued difficulties and insurmountable struggles. Optimists view themselves as less helpless in the face of stress than pessimists do, they adjust better to negative events, and they have a lower risk of anxiety and depression (Chang, 1998). Optimism also appears to affect our physical well-being. A study of women being treated for breast cancer revealed that optimists lived longer during the five years of the study, even when the physical severity of the disease was the same at the outset of the study (Levy et al., 1989).

How is self-efficacy related to resilience?
Our views about the future are very much related to our views about ourselves and our ability to cope with the demands of a stressful situation. The conviction that we have the resources to deal with an adverse event predicts a better adjustment than the belief that we are incapable (Bandura, 1997). These beliefs about our ability to cope with stress and solve our problems are referred to as self-efficacy and are always specific to the particular situation. We develop these beliefs through successful experiences in similar situations, by watching others cope successfully, and by being encouraged by others who believe we can be successful (Bandura, 1997).
How is hardiness related to resilience?

Optimism and self-efficacy are obviously linked to the three C’s of hardiness introduced in Module 1. Recall that Suzanne Kobasa’s (1985) research revealed that resilient, or “hardy,” individuals believe that they can influence the outcomes of events (control), they believe that what they do is important (commitment), and they assess stressful events as challenges to master (challenge) rather than as threats to their well-being. The most powerful belief in buffering the negative effects of stress is the belief that we are in control (Funk, 1992). Clearly our beliefs about our ability to cope (self-efficacy) and our view of the future (optimism or pessimism) are involved in our assessments of how much we can influence a given situation.

Research into hardiness, self-efficacy, and optimism all suggest that certain beliefs help us to cope better and to live longer, healthier, and happier lives. The beliefs behind our explanations of the events in our lives often need more careful scrutiny if we are to make our thinking more accurate and flexible.

Why are our explanations of negative events so important to resilience?

Martin Seligman and his colleagues (1995) called the habitual way in which people explain the causes of bad events “explanatory style.” Negative explanatory style has been related to lower grades in college (Peterson & Barrett, 1987), lower immune system functioning (Kamen, Rodin, & Seligman, 1987), and more visits to doctors (Peterson, 1988), and it is predictive of poor health in middle and late adulthood (Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant, 1988). In addition it has been very clearly linked with depression (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Sweeny, Anderson, & Bailey, 1986). The way we explain negative events in our lives appears to be quite stable throughout our lives, and it is a strong predictor of well-being. Curiously, however, the way we explain positive events in our lives does not appear to be as consistent or as predictive of overall health and well-being (Burns & Seligman, 1989). If our explanations are not accurate, self-awareness and the use of the ABC model described in Module 2 can help to change the way we explain negative events.

What are the dimensions of explanatory style?

Explanatory style has three main dimensions. When explaining bad events in their lives, people ask themselves three questions (Seligman et al., 1995): Who is to blame? How long will it last? How much of my life will be undermined? Seligman has labelled these dimensions personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness. These are not the only questions we ask when things go wrong, but they appear to be very important in determining our feelings and actions. People with a negative or pessimistic explanatory style believe that bad events in their lives are caused by some personal characteristic (such
as stupidity). They see the negative consequences as touching everything in their lives and lasting a long time.

This kind of thinking can lead to feelings of helplessness and despair even though this analysis would rarely be accurate. Suppose, for example, you invited a few new friends over for dinner and the meal you prepared did not taste very good. Many people might not find this at all upsetting; others might find it embarrassing; and someone with a negative explanatory style might engage in self-talk that sounded something like this: “I am such an idiot (permanence)! Why did I even try to cook that meal? It was a disaster. They must think I’m incompetent. Nothing I do ever seems to turn out right (pervasive). I just can’t make friends and keep them (permanent). I give up!”

A more helpful way to solve problems is to use accurate and flexible thinking about the causes of negative events. Accurate explanations take into account the fact that a negative event usually has many causes, and that the situation doesn’t usually last forever or involve all aspects of our lives.

**Why do people feel compelled to explain negative events in their lives?**

Human beings appear to be highly motivated to understand the causes of the events in their lives. Perhaps it is our desire to understand the world around us that makes us want to explain why things happen, even when we have very little information on which to base our explanations. The analyzing of a problem to decide what has caused it is called causal analysis. But the analysis must be accurate. Accurate analysis of the causes of problems can free us from repeating our mistakes. Clearly there are many cognitive skills involved in determining the causes of events; they include attentiveness, memory, impulse inhibition, creating internal symbols and representations, perspective taking, and making inferences and logical connections.

One of the things that human beings have a strong desire to explain is the behaviour of themselves and others. The judgments we make about the causes of our own and other people’s behaviour are known as attributions. When we make these analyses, we are susceptible to a number of common errors in judgment that can make our conclusions about social situations quite inaccurate. One common error when we analyze the cause of other people’s failures is to underestimate the influence of situational and environmental factors and to overestimate the influence of personal factors. For example, when a classmate forgets to bring you the notes he promised to lend you, you say it’s because he is absent-minded (personal), but when you forget, it is because you had a hectic morning (situational).
Why do we develop reflexive habits of thinking?

We constantly draw conclusions about the causes of people’s behaviour in order to decide on a course of action. For example, while you are driving to school, another driver cuts in front of you. Should you honk? Make a rude gesture? Ignore it? It all depends on what you attribute his behaviour to. Is he inconsiderate, or did he make a mistake? You arrive at school and find the technician has not opened the computer lab. It was scheduled to open 10 minutes ago. What is your response? Well again, it depends on what you judge to be the reason. Similarly, your response when the technician arrives will also depend on how you assess the cause of her lateness. And as your day unfolds you continue making judgments about why people, including yourself, behave the way they do. Since there are so many of these assessments, we cannot always ensure that they are careful and considered. Instead, we develop efficiencies, or shortcuts.

Most people have developed some thinking habits that become patterns known as “thinking styles,” some of which get in the way of their ability to look at problems accurately and to find solutions.

Why do some people develop a negative explanatory style?

Several investigations into the development of depression and anxiety in children and young adults suggest that parenting styles, attachment relationships, and predictability of early childhood environments interact with our biology and that they are related to the development of cognitions about the causes of negative life events (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998; Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1997). Parents who are overly protective and who unnecessarily prevent their children from exploring may also restrict their children’s opportunities to solve problems. Children who have anxious or disorganized attachment relationships may learn that other people are not to be trusted and that social support for solving life’s problems is unreliable at best. Children who do not see the connection between their efforts and positive outcomes may not believe they can solve their own problems. There are probably many factors that contribute to the development of negative explanatory style. Martin Seligman and his colleagues (1997) argue that the most powerful factor is the modelling of significant adults in children’s lives. Children learn the specific content of explanations as well as the general style of those explanations by listening to their parents, teachers, and other significant adults in their lives. Seligman et al. also argue that negative explanatory style can be unlearned at any point in development.

How can we increase the accuracy of our explanations of negative events?

More accurate and flexible thinking about the causes of events can be learned. The ABC model described in Module 2 is the first step in identifying our beliefs and then challenging
their accuracy. To help us challenge our why beliefs about the causes of adversity, Seligman and his colleagues (1995) suggest we ask ourselves three questions related to negative explanatory style:

- Who is to blame?
- How long will the situation last?
- How much of my life will be affected?

If we keep track of our answers to these three questions (by writing them down in a journal or just by reflecting on things that have gone wrong in the recent past), we may find patterns. Perhaps we have a tendency to overlook the multiple causes that contribute to the creation of most adverse events, instead focusing solely on our own contribution. Many of us have “catastrophic tendencies” – we believe that negative events are much more pervasive and permanent than objective evidence would suggest. Maybe you heard the voice in your head say something like, “It’s entirely my fault. I’ve ruined everything and I will never be able to fix this.” If you have, then you have probably experienced the anxiety and despair that comes with catastrophic thinking. In order to overcome this knee-jerk type of thinking, which creates a high level of anxiety and feelings of being threatened, we can put negative events into perspective; this will bring our anxiety down to a level that is more in proportion with the real degree of threat. “Putting it in perspective is a parallel process to challenging beliefs, but is designed to change our beliefs about the future” (Reivich & Shatté, 2002, p. 170).

**How do I put it in perspective?**

The skill of “decatastrophizing” or “putting it in perspective” enables you to examine your beliefs about the future and to generate alternative beliefs in much the same way that the ABC model showed you how to recognize and challenge your beliefs about the causes of negative events and their emotional connections. Revich & Shatté (2002) suggest first describing the best possible outcome of the negative event, the worst possible outcome, and the most likely outcome. Next they propose judging the likelihood that each will happen. This is followed up with generating possible solutions to deal with the most likely outcome. In order to do this kind of thinking, Seligman and his colleagues (1995, pp. 219–220) formulated six questions we can ask ourselves:

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. What is one thing I can do to help stop the worst thing from happening?
3. What is the best thing that can happen?
4. What is one thing I can do to make the best thing happen?
5. What is the most likely thing that will happen?

6. What can I do to handle the most likely thing if it happens?

Returning to our example of the dinner disaster, the answers might be something like this:

1. The worst thing that could happen is they won’t want to associate with me ever again and I will never make any more friends.

2. To stop this from happening I could tell them that I had never cooked those things before and will never cook for new friends again.

3. The best thing that could happen is that they didn’t really notice or remember that the food didn’t taste good and we will just carry on being friends.

4. To make this happen I could talk to them about other things that we enjoyed that evening.

5. It is most likely that they didn’t like the food but had a pretty good time that evening despite the meal. They might make fun of my cooking.

6. If this happens I could laugh along with them and promise to order in food next time we get together or make something easier.

By asking ourselves these questions we can increase the accuracy of our beliefs about the future and help ourselves to regulate our emotions, particularly anxiety and despair. Gaining awareness of our patterns of thinking and making an effort to challenge our beliefs about the causes and future threats of negative events in our lives are proven ways to begin to increase our resilience.

**Suggested DVD segments**

The following DVD clips can be downloaded from [http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources.htm](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources.htm). Each clip features early childhood educators discussing their experiences using the skills and concepts covered in this module.

“Explanatory style” (4 minutes) – “Thinking habits” can help or hinder the resilience of our response to stressful circumstances.

“Challenging beliefs” (2 minutes 21 seconds) – We can challenge our non-resilient thinking habits.

“Generating alternatives” (2 minutes 21 seconds) – Flexible thinking helps us find more than one way to think about and handle stressful circumstances.
“Putting it into perspective” (3 minutes 21 seconds) – Gaining perspective helps us challenge catastrophic thinking.

Suggested activities

Activity 3-1: How optimistic are you?

For this activity, students can examine their levels of optimism by answering the quiz in Learned Optimism by Martin Seligman (1991, 33–39).

Or they can often find this quiz on line. A site that currently has the quiz and will tally the scores is http://www.spiritualityhealth.com/cgi/optimism.cgi.

Once the students have completed a personal assessment, they can engage in small-group discussions of some elements of the test. These include personalization, pervasiveness, permanence (in both negative and positive situations), and hopefulness, as well as the meaning of the overall score.

In addition, students can discuss when to use optimism and when not to. Seligman et al. (1991, pp. 208–209) suggest using the following guidelines to assess the appropriateness of optimism:

- If you are in an achievement situation (getting a promotion, selling a product, writing a difficult report, winning a game), use optimism.
- If you are concerned about how you will feel (fighting off depression, keeping up your morale), use optimism.
- If your physical health is the issue, use optimism.
- If you want to lead or to inspire others, use optimism.
- If your goal is to plan for a risky and uncertain future, do not use optimism.
- If your goal is to counsel others whose future is dim, do not use optimism initially.
- If you want to appear sympathetic to the troubles of others, do not begin with optimism, although using it later, once confidence and empathy are established, may help.

Activity 3-2: Self-efficacy is a result of mastery

Martin Seligman (1995) and his colleagues have argued that self-esteem has two components: “doing well” and “feeling good.” Doing well creates confidence in our ability to think and cope with the basic challenges of life. Feeling good requires us to feel worthy and to be
confident of our right to be happy. Seligman argues that there is no way of teaching people to feel good without their first doing well. In other words, feeling good is a side effect of mastering challenges, overcoming frustrations, and solving problems – that is, of doing well.

Students can be asked to recall instances of doing well – solving problems and overcoming obstacles – that have given them confidence and a sense of self-efficacy.

Possible discussion questions:

1. Do experiences of mastery or doing well at different times or in different areas of life have the same impact?
2. Are experiences of mastery in one area of life generalized to other areas?

**Activity 3-3: The importance of control**

Funk (1992) found that of the three components of hardiness, control was the most likely to predict healthy adaptation to stressful events. Stephen Dollinger (1990) developed the following exercise, which will help to illustrate to students how strong our need to influence the outcomes of situations really is.

Recruit 20 student volunteers and explain that you want them to play a short card game. Tell them to bring a pen and paper to the front of the class.

Get them to line up in a row, hold up a dollar, and explain that the person with the highest card will get the money as a prize. You will need to establish the value of aces and each suit beforehand.

Tell them that when they receive their card they must not look at it. The rest of the class can watch to make sure no one peeks.

Then, with a deck of cards in hand, give the first person in the line a card and let the next person choose a card. Give the third person in the line a card and let the fourth person in the line choose a card, and so on. By the time you get to the end of the line 10 people (half the group) will have been given a card (*no choice*) and 10 people will have chosen a card (*choice*).

Next ask all 20 card holders to write down what level of confidence they have that they hold the highest card – from 0% to 100% confidence.

After the students have made their ratings have them turn over their cards; award the dollar to the person with the highest card.

Write the 10 confidence ratings for each group (*choice* and *no choice*) on the board and calculate the mean for each group.
Dollinger (1998) reported that the *choice* condition reported markedly higher confidence ratings (M = 55%) regarding their possession of the winning card than the *no choice* condition (M = 45%).

Compare your class’s results to Dollinger’s results, and discuss why it is important for us to believe that we have control over situations. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this belief?

*Activity 3-4: Explanatory style*

This activity can be part of a journal activity or it can be done in class with each student paired with a partner.

Ask the students to think of an unpleasant event that has occurred recently in their lives and answer Seligman’s (1997) three questions about explanatory style:

1. Personalization: Who is to blame?
2. Permanence: How long will this last?
3. Pervasiveness: How much of my life does this affect?

They can then show their answers to their partners, who can assess the degree to which they have described a negative explanatory style and what information needs to be considered to make their explanation more accurate.

*Activity 3-5: Putting it in perspective*

Ask the students to think of an unpleasant event that has occurred recently in their lives. Tell them to answer the following six questions (Seligman et al., 1997, 219–220) to help put the event into perspective and gain a more accurate view of the situation. (Working with a partner for this activity may help students to take a more objective perspective.)

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. What is one thing I can do to help stop the worst thing from happening?
3. What is the best thing that can happen?
4. What is one thing I can do to make the best thing happen?
5. What is the most likely thing that will happen?
6. What can I do to handle the most likely thing if it happens?
The last step in this activity is to use problem-solving strategies to generate a course of action for dealing with the most likely outcome of a difficult situation. Seligman and his colleagues (1995, p. 260) suggest the following technique:

1. Slow down – stop and think.
2. Take the other person’s point of view.
3. Choose a goal and make a list of possible paths for reaching it.
4. Identify the pluses and minuses of each path.
5. Evaluate the solution – if it didn’t work try another.

Students can use these problem-solving steps to answer question 6 above.

References


www.rabble.ca/in_their_own_words.shtml?x=21199.


Beliefs Involved in Resilient Thinking

- Optimism vs. Pessimism
- Self-efficacy vs. Helplessness
- Hardiness
  - Control
  - Commitment
  - Challenge

Optimism & Resilience

- Hopeful outlook
- Capable rather than helpless
- Better adjustment to stress & negative events
  - Lower risk of anxiety & depression
  - Better physical health

Self Efficacy & Resilience

- Beliefs about:
  - our ability to cope
  - resources available

- Predict feelings & behaviour

3 C’s of Hardiness

**Commitment**
- Resilient people believe what they do is important

**Control**
- Resilient people believe they can influence outcomes

**Challenge**
- Resilient people consider a demand to be a challenge rather than a threat

Explanations of Negative Events

Negative explanatory style is related to:

- Lower grades
- Lower immune system functioning
- More visits to doctors
- Poor health in middle & late adulthood
- Depression

Dimensions of Explanatory Style

- Personalization
  - Who is to blame?

- Permanence
  - How long will it last?

- Pervasiveness
  - How much of my life will be affected?
Elements of a Negative Explanatory Style

- Belief that blame rests squarely on some personal characteristic of oneself
- Belief that problems are long-lasting
- Belief that problems affect all aspects of one's life

Accurate & Flexible Explanations

- Take into account possibility of multiple causes
- Assess problems as temporary
- Understand that problems affect only some areas of one's life

Why Do We Develop Inaccurate Thinking Habits?

- Humans seem compelled to explain the world around them
- Often we do not have complete information
- Number of explanations is high
- We develop short cuts in our thinking

Development of a Negative Explanatory Style

- Biological influences
- Parenting style – modeling
- Attachment relationships
- Predictability of early childhood environments

Increasing the Accuracy of Our Explanations

Ask three questions:

1. Who is to blame?
   - Consider multiple causes
2. How long will it last?
   - Be realistic, consider your capacity to adjust
3. How much of my life will be affected?
   - Think about areas of your life that will be affected the least

Seligman’s Six Questions:

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. What is one thing I can do to help stop the worst thing from happening?
3. What is the best thing that can happen?
4. What is one thing I can do to make the best thing happen?
5. What is the most likely thing that will happen?
6. What can I do to handle the most likely thing if it happens?

Putting it In Perspective

Project Overview

What is the Reaching IN . . . Reaching OUT project?

The Reaching IN . . . Reaching OUT project (RIRO) uses new knowledge about resiliency promotion to adapt and evaluate the Penn Resilience Program (PRP) school-age model for use with children six years old and younger. The PRP is based on many years of systematic research on depression prevention by Martin Seligman and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania. This program helps children learn to reach in to think more flexibly and accurately and to reach out to take on new opportunities.

Reaching IN . . . Reaching OUT consists of three stages. The first stage focused on enhancing the quality of children’s experiences in childcare centres through initial specialized training of early childhood educators by PRP staff, followed by active involvement of early childhood teachers in a collaborative development of:

- strategies and innovative resource materials that can be distributed and used in a wide variety of childcare and early childhood settings; and
- a self-contained course of study that could be offered by community colleges and universities as part of diploma, degree, or continuing education courses.

The PRP training helps early childhood educators (ECEs) and other child-serving professionals to become more aware of their own beliefs about adversity and opportunity. ECEs in RIRO pilot centres practise techniques that have been demonstrated to increase flexibility and accuracy in thinking, thus helping them to develop more efficacy in analyzing and solving problems, and to maintain a realistic optimism when faced with obstacles or adversity. The training covers the ABC model (Ellis), common thinking errors, explanatory styles, and self-disputing techniques. It is designed to increase the understanding of, skill in, and use of these concepts by ECEs and other professionals in their day-to-day work with children. It also helps ECEs to develop specific tools, learning activities, and strategies.

In order to implement this approach consistently, support the use of these techniques by childcare staff, and evaluate the model in the pilot centres, the training used reflective journailling and weekly discussion to extend and promote integration of the initial training during the first year. The PRP staff and members of the Child and Family Partnership are consulting continually with project staff, researchers, and ECEs to adapt the PRP school-age program to the developmental needs of children six and younger in childcare programs. The first stage of the project (model testing) was completed in March 2004 through funding from Social Development Canada (SDC).
The second stage of the project involves the development of a training program, based on the findings of Stage 1, in resilience skills for professionals working with young children. The program is slated for completion in March 2006 and, again, is funded by SDC. RIRO is seeking funding for its third stage (implementation and dissemination). Please visit our Project Update at http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/update.htm for current project activities.

What research has been conducted so far?

Research and evaluation are woven throughout all stages of the project. The research results reported in this section are from the pilot study in the first stage.

The Pilot Study (RIRO – Stage 1)

The Reaching IN . . . Reaching OUT pilot study systematically explored whether the Penn Resilience Program (PRP) school-age model could be adapted for use with young children in childcare.

Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) from four diverse childcare centres in Ontario were trained in the adult resiliency skills of the PRP model. The project research team visited the centres regularly to help educators integrate the skills training and to adapt and introduce the skills to preschool and kindergarten children.

Over the course of one year, these ECEs modelled the resiliency skills in their daily interactions with children. They introduced selected skills to children of various ages through developmentally adapted activities and then evaluated the outcome. Members of the RIRO research team consulted with ECEs on site and observed them working with the children in the centres. Throughout the project the research team interviewed ECEs to gather qualitative information about their use of the skills. At the end of the year, the team conducted two formal written surveys measuring the effect of the resilience skills training on the ECEs and the children.

What are the research results thus far?

Teachers have reported that the training in resilience skills had a positive impact on their understanding of themselves and other people in their lives (children, families, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances). They found the training useful and have applied the skills in their daily lives. They observed positive changes in their own behaviour and that of the children they care for, changes that they attributed to the skills training they received. For more detailed research findings please visit the RIRO website at http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/researchresults.htm.
What is the purpose of the RIRO ECE College Program Curriculum?

The RIRO College Program Curriculum modules were developed to make ECE students more aware of the concept of resilience and the thinking skills that are central to positive adaptation and coping. The three draft modules provide an introduction to the resilience literature. Because there is considerable variation in the courses offered by Canada’s ECE diploma programs, these draft modules were designed to be used flexibly in conjunction with other RIRO resources materials to suit the diverse needs of ECE faculty across Canada. Your comments are welcome. Contact information can be found at http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/contact.htm.

Where can I find additional resource materials about resilience and the RIRO project?

There is a variety of audiovisual and print materials as well as suggestions about related literature and children’s books. These materials are free if obtained through the RIRO website: http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/index.htm.