RIRO Resiliency Guidebook

Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT

... helping adults and children Reach IN to think more flexibly and accurately and Reach OUT to others and opportunities.
Reaching IN … Reaching OUT
Resiliency Guidebook

“Bounce back” skills for adults & young children

written by
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The information in this Resiliency Guidebook is brought to you by Reaching IN… Reaching OUT (RIRO). We have been promoting resilience in adults and young children since 2002 through evidence-based skills training programs and resiliency-building resources.

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About the Guidebook

This Guidebook was created to increase awareness in child-serving professionals and parents of the importance of promoting resilience in children through caring relationships and adult modelling of resilient thinking and coping strategies.

The Guidebook is divided into three sections:

- Section 1: Resiliency Guides
- Section 2: Helping Children Build Their Resilience
- Section 3: About Reaching IN…Reaching OUT

Each guide in Sections 1 and 2 is followed by a brief summary to aid those who may not have time to read the full Guidebook. These summaries can also be used in other ways, for example, posted on bulletin boards, used as handouts, etc.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from life’s difficulties and do well despite adversity. Forty years of research indicates that resilience has a significant impact on our physical and mental health, our relationships with others and our ability to be successful. Guide 1 gives a brief overview of the theory and research in this field.

Researchers tell us that several critical abilities are associated with resilience. These include: emotional regulation, impulse control, causal analysis, empathy, realistic optimism, self-efficacy, and reaching out. Guide 2 presents detailed information and strategies to help both adults and children develop these resiliency abilities.

Research suggests that the way we think about challenges and adversity influences how we handle setbacks. Thinking skills that help us respond with resilience to daily stresses and serious difficulties can be learned. Guides 3 to 7 present information about some resiliency thinking skills.

Resiliency skills and strategies can be absorbed by children from an early age. Children as young as two years can mimic the thinking styles and coping behaviour of the adults around them. Development of these skills can help children bounce back from life’s inevitable pressures and prevent them from developing life views that may lead to depression and aggression. Strategies and approaches to help children foster a resilient outlook and approach to life are suggested in Section 2.

Section 3 introduces the reader to RIRO’s history and six phases of development, evaluation and research. In addition, the reader will find highlights from our program evaluation as well as links to free resilience-building resources on our websites for service providers and parents.
About the Authors

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Darlene Kordich Hall, Ph.D. For more than 40 years, Darlene has been a researcher, educator and clinician focused on mental health promotion in children and families. From 2002-2012, she was the coordinator of Reaching IN…Reaching OUT (RIRO) and a co-developer the RIRO Resiliency Skills Training Program as well as many resiliency resources for service providers and parents. She is currently responsible for the ongoing evaluation of the RIRO and Bounce Back & Thrive! resiliency skills training programs as well as knowledge mobilization activities. Before coming to Reaching IN…Reaching OUT, she developed and evaluated several early intervention programs including an evidence-based treatment program for young children at risk for maltreatment. She was a faculty member in the School of Nursing at York University as well as several universities in the United States. She is published and is a recognized trainer in the areas of child maltreatment, trauma and resilience. Darlene is the parent of two daughters who are a source of inspiration in her work on resilience.
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SECTION 1

Resiliency Guides
Guide 1

Resilience—a brief overview

Despite our best efforts, we sometimes cannot prevent adversity and stress. We can, however, develop our capacity for resilience in the face of serious difficulties and daily stresses by nurturing positive relationships, reaching out to give or get support and changing how we think about adversity and opportunity.\(^1, 2, 3, 4\)

**What is resilience?**

The definition of resilience varies in different cultures and contexts,\(^5, 6, 7, 8\) but it generally refers to one’s ability to “cope well with adversity” and “persevere and adapt when things go awry.”\(^3, 11, 17\)

Resilience is not a trait or set of characteristics that some have and others don’t. Resilience is something that happens. It is a dynamic process—the interplay between the individual, family, community and society.\(^8\)

Resilience helps people deal with stress and adversity, overcome childhood disadvantage, and reach out to new opportunities.\(^9, 10, 11\) In addition, more than forty years of research shows that resilience is associated with better health, longer life, more success in school and work, happier relationships and less likelihood of depression.\(^3, 12\)

**What role does our thinking play in promoting resilience?**

Stress, adversity, and challenge are inevitable parts of daily life—and sometimes out of our control. However, the way we think about stress is very much in our control and makes a substantial difference in how we handle serious challenges and daily bumps in the road.

Some people feel helpless in the face of stress and adversity, so they easily give up attempts to change the situation or take opportunities that may improve it. Other people hold more resilient views. They believe many problems can be solved if they look for options and keep trying.\(^3, 9, 13\)

Studies show that people who manage stress and adversity best have 3 Cs in common:\(^14, 15\)

- **Control:** a belief in their ability to take charge of the controllable aspects of their situation and influence a positive outcome
- **Challenge:** a view of mistakes as opportunities for new learning, and change as potential for growth
- **Commitment:** an active engagement in work and other pursuits that provides a basis of meaning for their lives

A resilient view is characterized by accurate and flexible thinking, and consists of creative problem solving, the capacity to see other points of view and to challenge one’s own views, and the ability to move on with daily life despite obstacles. Most importantly, research suggests that resilient thinking patterns, based on accuracy and flexibility, can be learned.\(^3, 4, 5\)

Resilient thinking can be learned.

**How can children’s resilience be promoted?**

The most important factor in promoting children’s capacity for resilience is a stable relationship with a caring, responsive adult who provides protection, positive experiences, guidance and opportunities to build self-regulation skills.\(^1, 16, 17, 32\)

Children also benefit from community supports that are accessible, culturally relevant and meaningful for their family.\(^8\)

These supports include faith and cultural groups, drop-in centres, sports and volunteer programs, help for those with special needs, etc.\(^2, 8\)

Another key factor is the importance of thinking processes in the development of resilience and the handling of stress and adversity. Resilience skills that help develop accurate and flexible thinking can be absorbed by children from an early age and can optimize the development of resilience.\(^5, 18, 19\)
What role does adult modelling play in children’s ability to develop resilient thinking patterns?

Warm, caring adults at home and in the community, who model resilient thinking and coping in their daily interactions, nurture children’s lifelong capacity for resilience.

In fact, researchers point to just how crucial our modelling is. By eight years of age, most children have developed a thinking style, or habitual way of reacting to stress. Even children two and three years old mimic the thinking styles and coping behaviour of caregivers around them.5

Just as children develop language in a “language-rich” environment, so they will develop resiliency skills in a “resilience-rich” environment.

Introducing age-appropriate resilience-building strategies to children as early as possible can promote emerging coping skills to ease anxiety, overcome life’s inevitable difficulties and help inoculate them against depression.5

Research has provided us with the direction and tools We can put both children and ourselves on the pathway to a brighter future.

What do teachers say?

I think the role modelling that teachers do when they are teaching the resiliency skills is absolutely essential to the children. It is a far more important part of their learning than we realize. The role modelling we do on a daily basis — we really have to look at that. — CG (resource teacher)

[After the skills training] I’m more aware of how I talk, how I engage in conversation and play with the kids because I know they’re watching me and whatever I do. They are like sponges. They want to do the same thing. They’ll use the same tone, the same inflections, and I’ve noticed if I come in and I’m having a bad day and the group is really down — I’ll wonder why is everyone so angry today? Then I’ll think about it and I’ll figure maybe they’re seeing some of it from me. And I find when they see it from me, they initially will take over that feeling, even if they were happy and calm before. So, I am very aware of my body language, my emotional regulation, because they pick everything up. What I do is reflected right back from them. — EL (preschool)
Summary of Guide 1

Resilience—a brief overview

What is resilience?
The definition of resilience varies in different cultures and contexts, but is generally defined as the ability to “cope well with adversity” and “persevere and adapt when things go awry.”

Resilience is not a trait. It is the dynamic interplay between the individual, family, community and society.

Resilience is associated with
- better health and longer life
- more success in school and work
- happier relationships
- less depression

People who respond with resilience are able to
- deal with stress and adversity
- overcome childhood disadvantage
- reach out to new opportunities

What role does our thinking play in promoting resilience?
- The way we think about daily stress and serious challenges directly affects our resilience.
- A resilient perspective is based on accurate and flexible thinking.
- We can build our resilience by changing how we think about challenges and opportunities.

People who manage stress best have three Cs in common:
- Control: a belief in their ability to take charge and influence outcomes
- Challenge: a view of mistakes as opportunities for growth
- Commitment: an active engagement in activities that give meaning to life

What role does adult modelling play in children’s ability to develop resilient thinking patterns?
- Even two-year-olds can mimic the thinking styles and coping behaviour of caregivers around them.
- Adults who model resilience in the face of daily stresses and serious challenges create a “resilience-rich” environment in which children can develop resilient thinking and coping strategies.

A stable relationship with a caring, responsive adult is crucial for children to develop their capacity for resilience.
Guide 2
Critical abilities associated with resilience

What are some critical abilities associated with resilience? How can adults and children develop them?

According to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, thinking processes directly affect several critical abilities linked with resilience. Developing and maintaining these resiliency abilities is an ongoing process that helps adults and young children bounce back from daily stress and tough times.

Ability 1. Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is being in charge of our emotions enough to stay calm under pressure. When we get upset or angry, our emotions can be overwhelming and can adversely affect our whole day. When we’re in charge of our emotions, we’re able to calm down and clear our heads enough so that we don’t stay overwhelmed.

Being in charge of our emotions doesn’t mean that we cut off our emotions or keep them inside. Expressing emotions is healthy and constructive. Being in charge of our emotions is a key part of self-regulation. It is necessary to calm down enough so that we can express our emotions in ways that will help, rather than hurt, a situation.

We can see the beginning stages of self-regulation in babies when they suck their fingers or hold onto their blankets to soothe themselves. Young children need our support to calm down. We can do this by letting them know that all feelings are acceptable, but not all behaviours are. We need to set firm and loving limits on their behaviour. For example, we can say, “It’s okay to be mad. It’s not okay to hurt yourself or somebody else.” Then we can give them other choices to help them express their emotions safely and to calm down. For example, they can draw their “mad” feelings on paper.

One simple and effective way be in charge of our emotions is the old tried and true method of taking three deep breaths. When we slowly inhale to the count of three and exhale to the count to three a few times in a row, we experience an amazing calming effect. Young children can learn to do “belly breaths” to calm down. Ask them to feel their bellies swell with air as they slowly inhale, and then, feel their bellies deflate as they slowly exhale. Tell them it’s just like blowing up and releasing the air from a balloon.

Dr. Andrew Shatté, resiliency researcher and co-author of The Resilience Factor, says that emotional regulation is the most important ability associated with resilience. Being in charge of our emotions affects the way we interact with others, the way we solve problems—even the way we look at the world.

Ability 2. Impulse Control

Impulse control is the ability to stop and choose whether to act on the desire to do something. For example, when we see an item we want even though we cannot afford it, impulse control enables us to stop and decide that going into debt in order to have that item may cause unnecessary financial stress.

Controlling our impulses helps enhance executive functioning skills such as planning for the future, finishing what we set out to do, focusing our attention and delaying gratification.

We can help young children develop impulse control by modelling it ourselves and giving them opportunities to practice waiting.

This can be done by putting routines in place; playing waiting games that require focused attention, such as Red light/Green light and Freeze; and using rhymes that promote waiting.
Then we can acknowledge their effort. For example, we can say, “You did it! It was really hard to wait, but you did it!”

Impulse control and emotional regulation are important self-regulation skills that lay the groundwork for developing the other resiliency abilities.

**Ability 3. Causal Analysis**

Causal analysis is the ability to analyze and accurately decide what caused the problem we are facing. The word **accurate** is very important. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have shown that what we think about stressful events or problems affects how we feel about these events and what we do about them.

Most people have developed thinking habits that become set patterns known as “thinking styles” or “explanatory styles.” Some thinking habits get in the way of people’s ability to look at problems accurately, find solutions and bounce back.

If we use our thinking styles to analyze a problem, we may not be accurate about what caused the problem. Resilient thinking allows us to be flexible—to step back and assess the problem specifically and to decide what is accurate in a particular situation. For example, “It’s all my fault” is revised to “I’m only one member of the team.” “This is never going to end” becomes “Once exams are over, I’ll be able to hang out with my friends.” “I can’t do anything right” is replaced with “I’ll get better at this once I have more experience.” (We’ll talk more about thinking habits or styles in Guide 4; see page 12.)

Assessing situations accurately and flexibly can help us determine how long the adversity will last and how much of our lives it will affect. Realizing that a challenging situation is temporary and affects only a specific part of our lives helps us feel less overwhelmed. When a challenging situation is actually permanent and affects many aspects of our lives, accurate and flexible thinking can help us put solutions into place to ease the stress.

We can help children develop the ability to analyze problems by first helping them identify the problem and then discussing together what they can do about it. For example, we can say, “There is a problem here because you both want to play with the same toy. What do you think you could do?” or “What do you think we could do to solve the problem?”

To help children think more accurately and flexibly about whether a situation is permanent or temporary, we can challenge their initial assessment of the situation. For example:

- “I never get to be first in line” or “She always gets to play with Alicia” can be challenged by first acknowledging the child’s feeling and then offering a gentle reminder like, “Remember, yesterday you and Alicia played together in the kitchen centre?” or “We all get a chance to be first in line. Your turn will come too.”

- “I will never be able to do …” can be challenged by reminding the child of past achievements: “You seemed frustrated right now. Remember, you thought you would never be able to put on your jacket without my help? Now you can do it all by yourself!”

Assessing situations accurately and flexibly can help us determine how long the adversity will last and how much of our lives it will affect. Realizing that a challenging situation is temporary and affects only a specific part of our lives helps us feel less overwhelmed. When a challenging situation is actually permanent and affects many aspects of our lives, accurate and flexible thinking can help us put solutions into place to ease the stress.
Ability 4. Realistic Optimism
Realistic optimism is the ability to maintain hope for a bright future. This kind of optimism is not about seeing only the positive things in life and dismissing negative events. It’s about seeing things as they are and believing that we can make the best out of a situation: “Realistic optimism is the ability to maintain a positive outlook without denying reality, actively appreciating the positive aspects of a situation without ignoring the negative aspects.” It is the ability to work toward positive outcomes with the knowledge that they don’t happen automatically, but are achieved through communication, effort, problem solving, and planning. We do this by generating alternatives to encountered obstacles. We can ask ourselves, “What else can happen now?” or “How else could I think about this?” Here’s an example:

When a plan to take the children to the park for a picnic seemed threatened by an overnight rainfall and continuing grey skies, Martha considered the big picture. The children were looking forward to the outing, and overcast skies and cooler temperatures could mean fewer crowds from nearby childcare centres. The wet grass wouldn’t be a problem if the kids wore their rainboots and coats. And if it started to rain, they could picnic on the benches under the shelter, and finish their outing by going to a nearby library.

Martha was able to view the situation with realistic optimism. She didn’t deny the negative aspects of the weather, but she also found some positive features—less heat and fewer crowds. She put a plan into place and believed she could cope with whatever the weather might bring. And by talking about the plan with the children before the outing, Martha modelled how accurate and flexible thinking can help people look for the controllable aspects in everyday situations.

Ability 5. Empathy
Empathy is often described as understanding what it is like to walk in another person’s shoes. It’s the ability to understand the feelings and needs of another person.

Children learn to understand and support others’ feelings by being understood and supported by those around them. Young children benefit when an adult helps them recognize their own feelings: “You look happy about doing that all by yourself.” Later on, adults can help children recognize others’ feelings: “Jenny’s face looks sad. I wonder if she misses playing with her friend today.” Research tells us that being understood and understanding others are important to building the capacity for resilience.

Ability 6. Self-efficacy
Self-efficacy is the feeling of being effective in the world—that we can make a difference and have an impact. It is the belief that we have the competence to tackle problems and bounce back when things get tough. This attitude influences our ability to persevere and maintain a realistically optimistic view of the future.

Self-efficacy is rooted in actual experience. We can help children experience competence by giving them choices that allow them to influence decisions that affect them, for example: “It’s cold outside. Do you want to wear your hat or pull up your hood?” Offering choice helps children feel that they have some control over what they do. Giving them opportunities to succeed, but still feel challenged, increases confidence.
Ability 7. Reaching Out

Reaching out is the ability to take on new opportunities that life presents. Resiliency research suggests that people who see mistakes as learning opportunities find it easier to take risks and try new things.

We can help children want to try new things by pointing out, “No one is perfect” and “Everyone makes mistakes. It is part of how we learn.” Adults can also model making mistakes and fixing them: “Remember when I forgot to read the story yesterday? Today, I’m going to read two stories.”

We can also remind children of what they have already accomplished, so that they see that they are indeed growing and learning every day: “When you were a baby, you couldn’t walk. And look at you now! You run so fast, I can hardly keep up with you.”

Another important part of reaching out is being accurate and realistic about how much we can cope with and being willing to ask for help when we need it. We can find support from friends, co-workers, community organizations, and professionals. We can help children reach out for support by modelling that it is okay to ask for help. We all need support from others sometimes.²

RESILIENCY ABILITIES:
Reflections to Myself
- Which ability(ies) is a strength for me?
- Which ability(ies) is challenging for me?
- What can I do to develop an ability(ies) that is challenging for me?

Reflections About the Children
Think about one child you work with:
- Which ability(ies) is his/her emerging strength?
- Which ability(ies) is challenging for this child?
- What can I do to help this child develop a challenging area(s)?

Please visit www.reachinginreachingout.com, RIRO’s website, for a brief video on strategies to develop emotional regulation: Calming and Focusing (Skills Video 7).

For a link to children’s storybooks that promote the resiliency abilities, go to:
What are some critical abilities associated with resilience?

According to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, thinking processes directly affect several critical abilities associated with resilience, including:

- **Emotional regulation:** the ability to keep calm under pressure and express emotions in a way that helps the situation
- **Impulse control:** the ability to stop and choose whether to act on the desire to take action; the ability to delay gratification and follow through on goals and plans
- **Causal analysis:** the ability to analyze problems and accurately decide what the causes are
- **Empathy:** the ability to understand the feelings and needs of another person
- **Realistic optimism:** the ability to keep a positive outlook without denying reality
- **Self-efficacy:** the belief that one has the ability to solve problems, handle stress and persevere
- **Reaching out:** the ability to take new opportunities and reach out to others

Resilience is not something we either have or don’t have. Developing and maintaining resiliency abilities is an *ongoing process.*

What can adults do to help children develop these key resiliency abilities?

- Teach children strategies to calm themselves down, control impulses, and delay gratification.
- Help children plan for positive outcomes by analyzing the cause of the current problem.
- Guide children as they try to identify their own and others’ feelings, understand cause and effect, and reach out to ask for support from others when they need it.
- Promote development of children’s self-worth and encourage them to express an interest in life, take opportunities that are presented, and actively engage with others.
Guide 3
Understanding our response to stress and adversity

Caught in a traffic jam, one person will honk the horn in anger, another will turn on some quiet music and wait, while still another will be flooded with anxiety about being late. Why do people have different reactions to circumstances that happen?

Many of us believe that negative events cause us to act in certain ways. However, in Guide 1, we introduced a different reason for our reactions to stressful circumstances. Research tells us that our reactions are based on how we think about the situation or event.

When something happens, we have automatic thoughts about why it happened. These thoughts cause our reaction—how we feel and what we do.

The CAR model

We use the acronym CAR to help make sense of why we react the way we do to circumstances in our lives. Here’s how the CAR model works:

- **C** is the circumstance—the situation or event.
- **A** is our automatic thought—our interpretation about why the situation happened.
- **R** is our reaction—the feelings and actions that our automatic thoughts set into motion.

Adapted from the ABC Model by Albert Ellis

Here’s an example:

*Mary-Jo has been consciously living a healthy lifestyle for more than two months. She finds out that she wasn’t invited to a party at school, but her friend Janice was invited. Mary-Jo thinks to herself, Janice always gets invited to things; I never do. I am such a loser—nobody likes me. She feels very sad, doesn’t go out jogging, and eats a carton of ice cream instead.*

So how does CAR work in this scenario?

**Circumstance** = didn’t get invited to the party to which her friend was invited

**Automatic thought** = “I am such a loser—nobody likes me.”

**Reaction** = feels sad, even depressed. Has no motivation to go jogging and eats a carton of ice cream despite her focus on healthier living.

Here is another reaction:

Another person, Anna, reacts differently to the same situation:

*That’s disappointing, but I actually don’t know Nancy very well. Janice knows her far better. That’s probably why I wasn’t invited. Maybe next time I’ll be invited. Anna goes for a run, then invites a girlfriend over to watch a new comedy series they both enjoy.*

The circumstance (C) remains the same, but Anna’s automatic thoughts (A) are different. She believes the reason she didn’t get invited to the party is because, "I don’t know Nancy very well. Maybe next time I’ll be invited." Anna lets go of her initial disappointment and goes on with her day in a positive way (R).
Using the CAR model can help us develop key resiliency abilities discussed in Guide 2, such as emotional regulation, impulse control, causal analysis, and empathy.

**HOW TO USE THE CAR MODEL**

Vividly recall a recent stressful event. Follow the CAR sequence as shown below. Alternatively, after recording the C, fill in the R, then the A. Choose the method that works best for you.

- **C**: Describe the event objectively. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When?
- **A**: Record your Automatic thoughts about caused the event. Why do you think it happened?
- **R**: Record your feelings and actions.

**Thought-Feeling Connections**

Our automatic thoughts are formed from a wide array of our past experiences and what is happening in our lives right now. That’s why we have such a personal response to situations that happen. Our thinking is very subjective!

However, research shows that there are common thought-feeling connections that people predictably and universally experience. The chart below shows several thought-feeling connections that are commonly experienced during stressful circumstances.

The chart shows that if we believe that our rights have been violated—for example, if we think that we’ve been treated unjustly or disrespectfully—this will lead to feelings of anger. Thoughts about loss will cause sadness, perhaps even depression. When we think something negative is going to happen (future threat) we feel anxious and fearful.

**How can we use the Thought-Feeling Connections to understand our reactions?**

Sometimes it’s hard to identify what we are thinking; we often have an easier time labelling our feelings. The Thought-Feeling Connections can be used in reverse to help us identify our automatic thoughts. For example, feelings of guilt are often aroused when we believe that we have violated another person’s rights. We feel embarrassed when we believe that we have lost standing in another’s eyes. Thought-Feeling Connections help us increase our self-awareness—an important first step to responding to adversity with resilience.

Refer to Section 2, “Helping Children Build Their Resilience” for information about using the Thought-Feeling Connections with children.

**What do teachers say about using the CAR model and Thought-Feeling Connections?**

Using the CAR model helped me identify my automatic thoughts when I’m upset, mad, etc. It helped me look at things more positively. It led to looking for alternatives to solve the problem and helped me be calmer in a situation that is hard to handle. —YZ (kindergarten)

The CAR model allows me to be reflective about my responses. —TH (supervisor)

Using the process of thinking through what the problem is, step by step, helps me know more exactly what my automatic thoughts are. It simplifies things. —KH (kindergarten-preschool)
Summary of Guide 3

Understanding our response to stress and adversity

Why do people have different reactions to adversity and stress?

- Our thoughts about adversity cause our reactions—how we feel and what we do in stressful situations.

- A simple model called CAR can help us understand the connection between the circumstance (C), our automatic thoughts (A), and our emotions and actions (R).

Circumstance → Automatic thoughts → Reaction

- Sometimes our automatic thoughts about a situation are not accurate, and our reactions undermine our ability to respond with resilience.

- We can use the CAR model to identify our automatic thoughts and, if necessary, challenge whether they are true.

- Using Thought-Feeling Connections can help us identify our thinking. If we know what our emotional reactions are, we can identify our automatic thoughts, e.g., sadness = loss; anxiety = future threat; anger = violation of our rights.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>violation of our rights</td>
<td>anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>actual loss or loss of self-worth</td>
<td>sadness, depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future threat</td>
<td>anxiety, fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violation of another’s rights</td>
<td>guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of standing with others</td>
<td>embarrassment</td>
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Guide 4

Thinking style—thinking habits that affect our resilience

Our research has demonstrated that the number-one roadblock to resilience is not genetics, not childhood experiences, not a lack of opportunity or wealth. The principal obstacle to tapping into our inner strength lies with our thinking style.3

What is “thinking style”? Researchers have found that the explanation people give for their successes and failures influences whether they persevere or give up when faced with adversity.30

Dr. Martin Seligman, a social psychologist, and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania have studied the development of resilience for more than thirty years. Most notable is their research into people’s beliefs about personal adversity, challenge, and success. Seligman listened to thousands of people explain why things that happened to them. He concluded that people develop thinking habits, preferred ways of viewing the world. Seligman terms these habits a person’s “explanatory style” or “thinking style.” He suggests that our thinking style can help or hinder our ability to respond to inevitable bumps in the road with resilience.4

How does our thinking style affect our resilience? Our thinking style comes into play as we try to determine why things happen and what impact they will have. Our style can “bias and color our viewpoint, leading us to develop patterns of behavior that can be self-defeating.”3

Our thinking style may be the same at home, at work, and on the social scene, or it may vary according to our roles and relationships in these environments. The important thing about thinking style is that it causes us to react out of habit and jump to conclusions that may not be accurate. This, in turn, prevents us from using the kind of flexible thinking that promotes problem solving and positive change.

Seligman’s research shows that people unconsciously jump to conclusions in order to make sense of why things happen and what the effect will be. These conclusions relate to what Seligman calls the three dimensions of explanatory or thinking style: personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness.3, 4

- **Personalization:**
  - Who /what caused this to happen:
    - Me
    - Not me

- **Permanence:**
  - How long this will last:
    - Always
    - Not always

- **Pervasiveness:**
  - How much of my life this will affect:
    - Everything
    - Not everything

Thinking habits associated with depression

Think back to Guide 3. Remember Mary-Jo’s beliefs about why she wasn’t invited to the party? Let’s look at her automatic thoughts again to help understand the concept of thinking style:

Mary-Jo has been consciously living a healthy lifestyle for more than two months. She finds out that she wasn’t invited to a party at school, but her friend Janice was invited.

Mary-Jo’s explanation for not being invited was:

Janice always gets invited to things; I never do. I am such a loser—nobody likes me. She feels very sad, doesn’t go out jogging, and eats a carton of ice cream instead.

This explanation is typical of “Me/Always/Everything” thinking—a thinking pattern related to “pessimistic” thinking. Researchers say that routine use of automatic thoughts like these can lead to depression and a loss of hope.3

With the “Me” statement “I am such a loser,” Mary-Jo shows that she takes the situation personally and blames herself for not being invited to the party. The statement is also an example of “Always” and “Everything” thinking: If Mary-Jo is innately a loser,
many aspects of her life will be affected, and there is little hope for change.

People who habitually blame themselves often believe that stressful situations are permanent. This belief affects many areas of their lives, or is pervasive. Understandably, they tend to give up more easily because things seem so overwhelming and hopeless. It is hard to respond with resilience to stressful situations with “Me/Always/Everything” habits of thinking.

**Thinking habits associated with aggression**

“Not me/Always/Everything” thinking can also prevent a resilient response to stressful situations. People with “Not me” thinking have a habit of blaming others and taking little responsibility for situations. If “Not me” thinking is paired with “Always” and “Everything” thinking, people can experience a sense of futility when things go wrong. But instead of leading to depression, this thinking style can make people feel trapped and angry, causing them to lash out at others.

An extreme version of this pattern can be seen in people who act out or engage in delinquent behaviour.¹⁸

We’ll use the same example of the party to illustrate how a “Not me/Always/Everything” thinking style might look. Here’s how another person, Katina, explained why she wasn’t invited to a party to which her friend was invited:

Janice always gets invited to things; I never do. People are such snobs! Katina becomes angry, phones the host of the party, and tells her off. Then, she calls for a pizza, gets into an argument with the person on the phone, and ends up cancelling the order. Katina’s frustration mounts. She skips her regular jog, and goes to bed without eating.

Katina gets angry because she blames the situation on others. Since she is using “Always” and “Everything” thinking, she believes the situation is futile. Her anger spills into other areas of her life—she yells at the pizza delivery operator. And instead of exercising, she skips dinner and goes to bed.

**Thinking habits associated with optimism**

Another thinking habit is important to note here: “Not me/Not always/Not everything” thinking. To see this style in action, let’s take another look at Anna’s explanation for not being invited to the party.

That’s disappointing, but I actually don’t know Nancy very well. Janice knows her far better. That’s probably why I wasn’t invited. Maybe next time I’ll be invited. Anna goes for a run, and invites a girlfriend over to watch a comedy series they both enjoy.

Anna believes that Nancy didn’t invite her to the party because they don’t know each other that well yet, a “Not me” explanation. She sees the situation as temporary. This “Not always,” view causes her to think that she might be included in a future social event when she and Nancy know each other better. Anna continues with her healthy lifestyle activities and her relationships with other people. These indicate that not being invited to the party is specific and doesn’t affect “everything” in her life.
The key to resilient thinking habits—accurate and flexible thinking

While a “Not me/Not always/Not everything” style may be the most “optimistic” explanatory style, it may not be an accurate or realistic view of a situation. People who use this style out of habit run the risk of losing out on genuine relationships, since their optimistic outlook might ignore difficult issues that exist between themselves and others. In addition, they may be doing themselves a disservice during times of serious adversity, such as when they are experience a health problem, and their habit of seeing situations positively prevents them from seeking help.

The goal is to maintain a sense of realistic optimism by thinking as accurately and flexibly as possible about each situation we face. In the next guide, we discuss several common thinking traps that contribute to our thinking style and restrict our resilience.

What do teachers say about increasing awareness of their explanatory styles?

I used to habitually have a “Me” response to situations at work, and put in long hours taking responsibility for things that I didn’t need to. After the training, I find myself delegating more, and this has encouraged more of a team effort amongst the staff. —LD (supervisor)

Before understanding explanatory style, if something went wrong first thing in the morning, I would immediately think to myself, “Oh no! This is going to be a hard day.” Now I don’t use such permanent thinking. I just take the day as it comes and see what happens. —BM (preschool)

WHAT’S YOUR THINKING STYLE?

Reflect on these questions:

- In times of stress, do I often blame myself when things go wrong? (“Me” thinking)
- Do I often blame someone else or the circumstances? (“Not me” thinking)
- Do I often feel as if stressful situations will be permanent and all encompassing? (“Always/Everything” thinking)
- Do I typically look for aspects of stressful situations that are temporary and specific? (“Not always/Not everything” thinking)

Refer to Section 2, Helping Children Build Their Resilience, for suggestions and activities concerning children’s emerging thinking styles.

Please visit www.reachinginreachingout.com, RIRO’s website, to view a brief video on explanatory style (Skills Video 3).
Summary of Guide 4

Thinking Style—thinking habits that affect our resilience

What is thinking style?
Research shows that the explanations people give for their successes and failures influences whether they persevere or give up when faced with stressful situations.

Social psychologist and researcher Dr. Martin Seligman says that people develop thinking habits, preferred ways of viewing themselves and the world. Seligman terms these habits a person’s “explanatory style” or “thinking style.” These habits can help or hinder our ability to respond to adversity with resilience.

How does our thinking style affect our resilience?
Thinking style thinking habits are

- explanations we develop for why things happen and what impact they will have
- not necessarily accurate assessments of the stressful situation

Seligman’s research shows that people try to make meaning of the things that happen to them and unconsciously make assumptions related to three dimensions of thinking style—personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness.

- **Personalization**: Who /what caused this to happen:
  - Me
  - Not me

- **Permanence**: How long this will last:
  - Always
  - Not always

- **Pervasiveness**: How much of my life this will affect:
  - Everything
  - Not everything

Our thinking style is a mix of these three dimensions. Each style is associated with a habitual response to stressful situations. Here are a few examples of thinking styles:

- “Me/Always/Everything” = helplessness, giving up, depression
- “Not me/Always/Everything” = lack of responsibility, anger, acting out, hopelessness
- “Not me/Not always/Not everything” = more optimistic behaviour, but can be inaccurate

To increase our capacity for resilience, we need to challenge our thinking styles on each dimension by thinking accurately and flexibly about each situation we face.

Challenging thinking style → Increased resilience
Guide 5
Thinking Traps

In Guide 4, we discussed how our thinking habits affect our beliefs about why situations occur, and our predictions about what will happen next. In this guide, we’ll deal more specifically with common thinking traps and how they contribute to the development of our thinking style.

What are thinking traps and how do they develop?
Our five senses take in far more information about our daily activities and associations than our brains can process, so we take “mental shortcuts” to simplify the information and make sense of it, especially in times of stress. These shortcuts are automatic and largely unconscious. They trap us into drawing conclusions prematurely, hence the name “thinking traps.”

How do thinking traps affect our ability to respond with resilience?
Cognitive science suggests that we have a strong bias when we process information. We tend to use only the information that supports the beliefs we already hold about a situation, and we filter out information that does not support our beliefs. This is called “confirmation bias.” Our confirmation bias can stop us from using accurate and flexible thinking to assess situations, causing us to draw conclusions with less information than we need. As we discussed in Guide 1, accurate and flexible thinking can help us bounce back from stressful situations and adversity.

What are some common thinking traps?
While it’s likely we’ve all been caught by most of the following traps at one time or another, each of us tends to be most vulnerable to two or three traps.

1) **Jumping to conclusions:** We make an assumption about a person or situation, with little or no evidence to back it up. All thinking traps involve jumping to conclusions in one way or another.

2) **Personalizing:** We assume blame for problems or situations for which we are not primarily responsible. This is characteristic of “Me” thinking, referred to in Guide 4. When done habitually, it can lead to a loss of self-worth, and over-experiencing sadness and guilt.

3) **Externalizing:** We erroneously blame others for situations for which they are not primarily responsible. This “Not me” thinking can result in anger and relationship problems, as discussed in Guide 4.

4) **Mind-reading:** We assume that we know what others are thinking without checking with them. Or, we expect others to know what we are thinking without telling them. One example of falling into the mind-reading trap is concluding that people have been talking about us when they fall silent as we enter the room.

Or, we might think that our significant other should know that we’re “too tired to go out tonight” despite the fact we haven’t told him/her.

Mind-reading can be at the core of many difficulties in both our work and personal relationships because it involves making assumptions about who is to blame for situations.

5) **Emotional reasoning:** We make false conclusions about an experience based on how we feel rather than on the facts. For example, we might feel relieved after a long, difficult conversation with a friend. However, our feelings of relief may colour our perception of the actual conversation. Thus, we may end up feeling surprised and dejected when our friend remains dissatisfied with the relationship.
Emotional reasoning can contribute to “Me” and “Not me” thinking. For instance, if we already feel down or sad, we may assume that we are at fault for a situation. If we are tense and angry, it is more likely we would see others at fault.

Emotional reasoning is also related to “shoulding”—the expectations about what we or others should or shouldn’t do. “Shoulding” directed at ourselves can make us feel miserable, lead to procrastination, and take the joy out of life. Directed at others, it can lead to unrealistic expectations, labelling and stereotyping.

6) Overgeneralizing: We make sweeping judgments about someone or something based on only one or two experiences. For example, we might believe that something can’t be done because of a single difficulty or failure in the past. Or, we might view a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Overgeneralizing can lead to a harsh view of ourselves and others, stereotyping, and discrimination. We might judge a whole group of people based on our experiences with a few. Overgeneralizing is consistent with “Always/Everything” thinking, as discussed in Guide 4.

7) Magnifying/minimizing: We overemphasize certain aspects of a situation and shrink the importance of other aspects. Some of us magnify the negative and minimize the positive. We do this by exaggerating the importance of our own or others’ mistakes, or by making “mountains out of molehills.” This “Always/Everything” thinking can cause us to feel overwhelmed, discouraged, or angry.

Others magnify the positive and minimize the negative. We ignore the negative aspects to maintain a positive spin on a situation. This can lead to self-deception, which prevents us from dealing with situations that require attention. We might also overemphasize the positive contributions we make, while minimizing the efforts of others.

8) Catastrophizing: We assume something bad is going to happen, or we exaggerate how bad a situation will be. This involves linking a series of negative thinking traps, such as magnifying/minimizing, overgeneralizing, etc. For example, when we don’t get the promotion we apply for, we begin to imagine the worst case scenario:

I didn't get a promotion because my supervisor doesn't like me. And that means I'll never get promoted. I'll be stuck at the bottom of the pay scale. And that means I'll never get my own apartment. And that means I'll never be independent. And that means...

At the end of this guide, you’ll find a chart summarizing the common thinking traps discussed in this section.

For further information about thinking traps and how to avoid them, see Chapter 5 of The Resilience Factor by Reivich and Shatté.
## Common Thinking Traps & Thinking Style Links

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking Traps</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jumping to Conclusions</td>
<td>Making assumptions with little or no evidence to back them up (All thinking traps involve making assumptions.)</td>
<td>Melinda comes home, the house is quiet, and the living room is a mess even though her significant other was home all day. She thinks, “Well, looks like he’s gone out and left the mess for me.” He calls downstairs, “Melinda, I’m in bed with the flu.”</td>
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<td>Personalizing (&quot;Me&quot; thinking)</td>
<td>Blaming oneself for problems for which one is not primarily responsible</td>
<td>“The kids are so hyper today. It’s my fault. I’m just not cut out for this kind of work.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Externalizing (&quot;Not me&quot; thinking)</td>
<td>Blaming others for things for which they are not primarily responsible</td>
<td>“If she had pulled her weight, our team would have come out on top.”</td>
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<td>Mind Reading (Contributes to “Me”/ “Not me” and “Always/ Everything” thinking)</td>
<td>Assuming we know what another person(s) is thinking and expecting another person to know what we are thinking</td>
<td>“He thinks I’m a poor choice for this position and that’s why he’s avoiding me.”</td>
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<td>Emotional Reasoning/Shoulding (Contributes to “Me”/“Not me” and “Always/Everything” thinking)</td>
<td>Making an assumption about an experience based on feelings rather than facts. Linked to thoughts of “I should” or “they should.”</td>
<td>Jan looks around at her untidy house and feels overwhelmed by the prospect of cleaning it: “I should be able to keep things orderly, but it’s hopeless. Why even try?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overgeneralizing (Contributes to “Me”/ “Not me” and “Always/Everything” thinking)</td>
<td>Making an assumption about someone (or a situation) based on only one or two experiences and assuming the cause of a problem is due to a character flaw instead of a person’s behaviour</td>
<td>“People like her can’t be trusted.”</td>
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<td>Magnifying/Minimizing (Contributes to “Always/Everything” and “Me”/ “Not me” thinking)</td>
<td>Magnifying the negative aspects of a situation and minimizing the positive Magnifying the positive aspects and ignoring the negative</td>
<td>James was laughing and playing during outside play, but told his mom, “My day was terrible. Ben only wanted to play with Zach.” Jenna’s best friend leaves a message saying she’s really upset with her and wants to talk. Jenna thinks, “We are such good friends; it can’t be anything serious. She’s probably just tired.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catastrophizing (Contributes to “Always/Everything” thinking)</td>
<td>Exaggerating the likelihood that something bad will happen, or exaggerating how bad it will be</td>
<td>“Oh, no. I misplaced the report. Now it will be late. And my boss will be mad. And I’ll be fired. And I won’t be able to pay my bills. And then ….”</td>
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How can we help children deal with their thinking traps?

Like adults, children can get trapped by their emerging beliefs about why things happen and what will happen next. A child might jump to a conclusion and say, “He’s not going to let me play with the truck.” After one thing goes wrong, a child may magnify the negative experience by saying, “My whole day is ruined!” A child might use emotional reasoning: “I’m mad at you. You aren’t invited to my birthday party.” Children are also not immune from catastrophic thinking: “Alba won’t play with me. She hates me. Everybody hates me. I’m never going to have any friends.”

When we use accurate and flexible thinking to assess our daily stresses and serious challenges, we role model a resilient view which children can imitate and eventually make their own. In addition, after acknowledging children’s feelings, we can gently challenge their assumptions and guide them to see the bigger picture. This guidance can help children develop important critical abilities, such as emotional regulation, impulse control, self-efficacy, and realistic optimism.

Refer to Section 2, Helping Children Build Resilience, for suggestions and activities to help children develop accurate and flexible thinking patterns.

What do teachers say about thinking traps?

I’m more aware now that I may be jumping to conclusions. This has made me think about my biases toward individuals I work with. It’s changed how I relate to them. –DW (centre supervisor)

I realized that I really am prone to make negative assumptions about people’s behaviour. Now I stop myself and try to talk with them, to find out what they were REALLY thinking. –SF (centre supervisor)

Knowing about thinking traps has given me a clearer picture of why people behave in certain ways—myself included. –BM (preschool teacher)

Identifying my traps has helped me with what I say to myself about situations. I’m less negative and look for other explanations for why something happens. –NB (kindergarten teacher)

When the children in my class jump to conclusions about sharing toys or playing with others, I find myself saying, “Did you ask if you could join the game?” or “Did you ask if you could have a turn?” I’ve found they often have made an assumption and, when they ask, the outcome is positive. –EW (preschool teacher)
Summary of Guide 5
Identifying Thinking Traps

What are thinking traps and how are they developed?
- Our five senses take in far more information than our brains can process.
- We unconsciously take “mental shortcuts” to simplify the information and make sense of it. These shortcuts can trap us by leading us to inaccurate conclusions, hence the name “thinking traps.”

How do thinking traps affect our ability to respond with resilience?
- Thinking traps cause us to draw knee-jerk conclusions based on inadequate information and, thus, reduce our accuracy and flexibility.
- Accuracy and flexibility are the cornerstones of resilient thinking.

What are some common thinking traps?
Some common thinking traps that contribute to “Me”/”Not Me” and “Always/Everything” thinking habits are
- Jumping to conclusions: drawing conclusions based on inadequate evidence
- Personalizing/externalizing: blaming ourselves/others for situations for which we/they are not primarily responsible
- Mind-reading: assuming we know what others are thinking, or expecting others to know what we are thinking
- Emotional reasoning: making a conclusion about a situation based on how we feel as opposed to facts and evidence. Emotional reasoning can lead to “shoulding,” i.e., I should or s/he should.
- Overgeneralizing: making conclusions based on only one or two experiences, which leads to “labelling” of oneself or others
- Magnifying/minimizing: overemphasizing the negative (or positive) features of a situation, while reducing the importance of the positive (or negative) features
- Catastrophizing: exaggerating the likelihood that something bad will happen, or exaggerating how bad a situation will be

How can we help children deal with their thinking traps?
- Children can get trapped by their emerging beliefs about why things happen and what will happen next.
- Adults can role model resilient thinking and healthy coping behaviour.
- After acknowledging children’s feelings, adults can gently challenge children’s assumptions and guide them to see situations more accurately.
Guide 6
Challenging our thinking promotes resilience

As discussed in Guides 4 and 5, our beliefs about the causes and impact of events are often based on inaccurate thinking patterns. This example illustrates several assumptions that trap a teacher into a spiral of negative thinking:

I feel so tense— I could explode! I promised to take the kids to the park today, but instead I disappointed them completely when we didn’t have time to go (personalizing/magnifying the negative). I always get behind (overgeneralizing). I feel so bad— I’m such a lousy teacher. I really wonder if I have what it takes to do this job. (overgeneralizing/emotional reasoning).

How can we challenge our thinking to promote our resilience?
We can assess a situation more accurately and flexibly by challenging our initial thoughts about it. Let’s listen to the teacher’s internal dialogue as she calms herself and gathers more accurate and flexible evidence to challenge her thinking:

Okay, stop … take three deep breaths. Now, just because we didn’t have time to go to the park doesn’t mean the children were completely disappointed or that I’m a poor teacher. I did a very good circle this morning. All my planning really paid off; the kids really enjoyed themselves. And, think about it, today we had a fire drill— that took time. I actually stayed pretty calm during the drill even though the kids were getting restless. And Julie needed a lot of extra one-to-one attention when her mom dropped her off. That took some time, but it was worth it because then she had a great time putting puzzles together with Lisa.

I do love working with the kids, but I’m a bit overwhelmed by the extra work caused by the room changes we had to make. The move has caused stress for everyone, and the kids are still reacting. I need to remember that adjusting to change takes time. Maybe I need to build in more time for us all to de-stress. Some calming activities would probably help us all right now.

When this teacher challenges her thinking, she gathers evidence to get a more accurate picture of why the morning felt so overwhelming. She can see that she isn’t a lousy teacher but, in fact, is doing a reasonable job in spite of some real challenges (thereby reducing “Me” thinking). She remembers other reasons why the day went by too quickly. She disputes her first thoughts about being a failure and is able to free herself to see the situation as temporary (reducing “Always” thinking). She doesn’t deny the reality of her situation; she doesn’t just say that tomorrow will be better. She uses the time to reflect and develop a plan to decrease stress (reducing “Always” and “Everything” thinking). This teacher is demonstrating “realistic optimism” in action.

Thinking style dimensions as a guide for challenging our thoughts
We can also challenge our thinking habits and traps by regularly asking ourselves questions related to the three dimensions of thinking style:

Personalization: Who caused the problem?
Ask yourself, “Who or what is actually responsible? It’s important to remember that most stressful situations are not 100% the result of just one person. Instead of habitually blaming yourself or someone else, stop for a moment. Ask yourself, “What is true in this case? What evidence do I have to support my belief?”
Some people find it helpful to think of a pie shape to avoid the blame game. Ask yourself, “How much of the pie is due to my actions? How much of the pie is due to the actions of other people? How much of the pie is due to circumstances outside my control?”

You can also ask yourself, “What aspects of the situation can be controlled? What parts of the situation can I do something about?” This type of questioning encourages you to use the influence you have, which enhances your belief in your ability to steer through challenging situations.

**Permanence: How long will this problem last?**

Sometimes, it feels like the stress will never end. Some situations are permanent, but many are temporary.

Ask yourself, “Is this stressful situation really going to last forever?” Situations such as completing overdue reports or soothing an overwrought child can feel less overwhelming when we acknowledge that the situation is temporary. Being more accurate about how long the situation will last can reduce our stress.

Some situations, such as coping with a disability or chronic illness, are permanent. Accepting this helps us put solutions into place to ease the stress. Ask yourself, “Do I need to reach out for support?”

**Pervasiveness: How much of my life will this problem affect?**

Ask yourself, “Is this stressful situation really going to affect everything in my life? What areas are not affected?” For example, a conflict with a co-worker doesn’t mean that the whole day has to be ruined and that relationships with others will be affected.

Emotional regulation and impulse control stop the negative spiral of “Everything” thinking. It’s easier to bounce back when we look for the specific aspects causing our stress. It makes the situation feels less overwhelming and more controllable.

Some situations, such as coping with the aftermath of a natural disaster, do have a pervasive effect for a period of time. How do people cope in such horrendous circumstances? The media is full of examples of people finding ways to keep going by reaching out for support or giving support to others in greater need.

When we challenge our beliefs, we look for evidence that our assessment of the situation is accurate. Once we check for accuracy, we can exercise our flexible thinking by generating alternative ways to see and handle the situation.

Refer to Section 2, Helping Children Build Their Resilience, for suggestions and activities to help children challenge their beliefs.

Please visit www.reachinginreachingout.com, RIRO’s website, to view brief videos on challenging beliefs (Skills Video 4) and generating alternatives (Skills Video 5).

**What does one teacher say about challenging our thinking?**

I noticed that I was making statements to myself like “I’m a terrible teacher” when something didn’t go as I would have liked it to with a child or activity. Now, I’m in the habit of challenging that belief right away. I think of all the things I did with the children and in my programming that were successful. It helps me not get stuck feeling down …

I have found that an “Always” belief like “We can never play together” can be disputed in very concrete terms: “Remember, you played with J at the sand table this morning. What else did you do with J today?” I noticed that if I use this kind of conversation as a strategy, I can relate my knowledge of “thinking style” habits into understandable concepts.

—AB (preschool/kindergarten)
Summary of Guide 6
Challenging our thinking promotes resilience

How can we challenge our thoughts to promote our resilience?

1) We can challenge our initial responses to a situation, and check if we are jumping to conclusions or making assumptions.

2) We can routinely ask ourselves the following questions related to the three dimensions of explanatory style:
   - **Who is actually responsible? How much responsibility is due to me? to others?**
     Most stresses are not 100% the result of one person’s failings or actions.
   - **Is this stress really going to last forever?**
     Many stresses are temporary.
   - **Is this stress really going to affect everything in my life? What areas will not be affected?**
     The effects of many daily adversities are limited to one or two areas of our lives. It is easier to bounce back when we see that a situation affects only part of our lives.
Guide 7
“Iceberg beliefs”—underlying beliefs that can undermine our resilience

Some of our thoughts and beliefs are difficult to identify because they are deeper and more complex. These beliefs operate at an unconscious level, lying like icebergs beneath the surface. But “iceberg beliefs” are powerful forces that can significantly undermine our resilience and our relationships.  

What is it like to experience an iceberg belief?

Iceberg beliefs can cause extremely intense reactions that take us by surprise. Here’s an example of how it feels to be under the influence of an iceberg belief:

I KNOW I shouldn’t have blown up at Anna, but I just couldn’t help it!!!! I don’t really even know why I’m so mad at her. All I know is I’m STILL SO ANGRY that it’s hard for me to even look her in the eye. I feel guilty for treating her this way, because it really doesn’t seem fair. I am puzzled by my reaction, because all she did was ask me if I was going to clean up the paint spill on the classroom floor. So now what am I supposed to do? If I don’t even know why I’m so mad, how am I going to talk with her about it?

Logically, we can say to ourselves, “I shouldn’t be feeling like this. Why am I so upset? This shouldn’t be such a big deal. Why can’t I let this go?”

Icebergs cause mismatches between Thought-Feeling Connections

Iceberg beliefs can cause the connections between our thoughts and feelings seem “out of sync” with the universal and predictable Thought-Feeling Connections discussed in Guide 3, on page 10. Here’s an example of a Thought-Feeling Connection mismatch:

I was driving along the highway when, all of sudden, another motorist yelled out his window at me, raced past, and cut me off! It nearly caused an accident!! I kept driving, but I found myself feeling so sad that it was hard to keep focused. I mean, I should have been mad at what he did, but I wasn’t. I just felt sad and lost. My whole reaction was pretty confusing.

Instead of feeling anger—a typical connection to a “violation of rights” belief—the driver was extremely sad, a feeling usually associated with beliefs about loss.

Icebergs form in childhood

Iceberg beliefs start forming in childhood and are often passed down unconsciously, without question, from generation to generation.

Family-transmitted iceberg beliefs like “Never let them know you are hurting” could prevent people from reaching out to others for help.

The belief “The most important thing a woman can do is have a child” may inhibit people from taking advantage of other opportunities that come their way.

Icebergs beliefs are our “shoulds”

Icebergs are deeply rooted beliefs about how the world should operate and how we should operate in the world.

“I should be able to handle anything that comes my way.”

“Women should never show their anger.”

“Things should always be fair.”

“People should always be on time.”

As the example above illustrates, iceberg beliefs cause reactions that seem out of proportion to actual situations. The person in the example felt overwhelmed, stuck, and confused about the intensity of her reaction to a seemingly simple question asked by her co-worker.
Iceberg beliefs can make us over-experience certain emotions. For example, the belief “Things should always be fair” could have us over-reacting to the many inequities that are bound to happen in daily life. As a consequence, our “violation of rights” scanner could be on “red alert,” and we might end up feeling angry much of the time.

**Icebergs can lead to relationship problems**

Icebergs can be at the root of personality clashes at work and in other environments. For instance, a person who believes “It’s important to be liked by everyone,” may not express opinions that could be unpopular. A person who believes “It’s important that people express their opinions” may challenge others when things don’t go a certain way. Conflict and negative judgments about how the other person communicates could ensue. For example, the person who holds back opinions may be offended or feel criticized by the person who always expresses his/her opinions. The person who always expresses his/her point of view may feel that the other person is abdicating a responsibility to others by not sharing his/her point of view.

Icebergs such as “If you want anything done right, you have to do it yourself” could cause a person to develop a generalized lack of trust in others and in their abilities. Such a belief could prevent a flexible response to conflict and stress, and eventually stunt relationships.

**Some iceberg beliefs can be constructive**

Not all iceberg beliefs cause negative outcomes. Many of our values are based on iceberg beliefs, and they can motivate us to maintain positive relationships, resolve conflicts, and make use of opportunities that come our way. Here are some examples:

“Giving people a chance to tell their side of the story is important.”

“Mistakes are part of the learning process.”

“Honesty is the best policy.”

“If you don’t succeed at first, try again.”

**What are some common types of iceberg beliefs?**

Iceberg beliefs generally fall into three general categories: achievement, acceptance, and control.

1) **Achievement**

People with “achievement” icebergs see success as the most important thing in life. Mistakes are seen as failures. This tendency toward perfectionism can produce unrealistically high expectations of oneself and others. Here are some examples of achievement icebergs:

“A person’s life is measured by what he/she achieves.”

“If you don’t do it right, it isn’t worth doing.”

Since the expectation is perfection, people with achievement iceberg beliefs often feel anxious about their performance, or are highly critical of others’ contributions. They can also feel overwhelmed and immobilized by their own unrealistic standards and may use procrastination as an attempt to avoid any sense of failure.

2) **Acceptance**

“Acceptance” icebergs are found in people who have a strong need to be liked, accepted, praised, and included by others. Here are some examples of acceptance icebergs:

“I always want people to think the best of me.”

“People need to be appreciated for what they do.”
These icebergs tend to make people “personalize,” or blame themselves for situations. For example, they might think that something they said or did caused a friend’s bad mood. Or they might interpret a lack of positive comment about an activity they organized as an indication that others thought the idea was of no value.

This intensive focus on gaining others’ acceptance can lead people to say things they don’t believe to get approval or, conversely, to not say things they do believe to keep approval.

3) Control
People with “control” icebergs tend to be uncomfortable when circumstances are out of their direct control, and have unrealistic expectations about the level of influence they have over themselves and the environment. Here are some examples of control icebergs:

“Only cowards buckle under pressure.”
“If I can’t make it happen, no one can.”

“Control” icebergs can cause people to believe they are not doing “enough,” or that an unsuccessful event or encounter is a sign of personal failure. This internalization of failure may cause a person to withdraw from others, putting relationships at risk. In addition, people under the influence of control icebergs may experience feelings of exhaustion, anxiety or depression when things move out of their control.

What happens when icebergs conflict?
Sometimes, more than one iceberg belief is activated in the same situation, and the two beliefs can clash.

The feeling of tension that results from these clashing beliefs can paralyze a person’s decision-making process. For example, a woman with a family who is offered a “dream” job that would require long hours and a high degree of personal commitment may experience a significant dilemma if she had the following conflicting “Achievement” and “Acceptance” iceberg beliefs:

“Women should be ambitious and have equal opportunities to men.” (Achievement)
vs.

“Children and family should come first.” (Acceptance)

Why is it important to examine our iceberg beliefs?
It can be helpful to ask ourselves what types of icebergs might be operating in our lives. Is our behaviour influenced more by the need for acceptance, achievement, or control?

Our iceberg beliefs activate a radar in us that is hard to tune out—a sensitivity to our “shoulds” about a situation. This radar is based on confirmation bias. As described in Guide 5, this process causes us to take in only information that fits our already held beliefs about a situation and filter out information that doesn’t fit these beliefs.

We see what we want to see, and we hear what we want to hear.

Thus, our iceberg beliefs often cause us to assess a situation using incomplete and inaccurate information.

Getting to know our iceberg beliefs can help us become more flexible in how we think the world should operate and how we should act in the world.

In addition, when we become more conscious of our iceberg beliefs, we begin to uncover our biases about all kinds of issues related to people, such as sexism, ageism, and racism:
“Boys shouldn’t cry.”
“Girls shouldn’t show anger.”
“Old people are too fragile to mountain climb.”
“Asian students are the brightest.”

When we acknowledge our biases about diversity, we take the first important step toward increased understanding, acceptance, and respect for interpersonal differences. Children learn to accept themselves and to negotiate differences associated with common biases from the adults around them.

Awareness of our iceberg beliefs can also help us develop several critical resiliency abilities that can be modelled for children:

- Emotional regulation: A broader perspective helps us understand our reactions and let go of stuck emotions.
- Empathy for others: Openness to differing perspectives increases our understanding of others and helps us resolve conflicts and problem solve.
- Reaching out: Our views become less limited, and we find it easier to try new ways of relating to others and situations. We can take on challenges and opportunities with less fear of failure, which leads to an increased sense of competency in the world.

**How do we detect our iceberg beliefs?**

- **First,** use CAR to examine the event.
- **Then,** ask these three questions
  1. Are my Rs (feelings and actions) **out of proportion** with my As? (automatic thoughts)
  2. Is there a Thought-Feeling Connection **mismatch**?
  3. Do I feel paralyzed by a decision I am trying to make?
- **If the answer to any of the above questions is “yes,” use the questions in the box “Understanding Iceberg Beliefs” to gain more understanding of what the iceberg belief might be. It doesn’t matter in what order you ask the questions, but it is important to follow up the first question with other questions.

This process is like tunneling into the ice to discover the core belief at the centre of the iceberg.

**UNDERSTANDING ICEBERG BELIEFS**

Use your **automatic thought** from CAR to start the process.

**Questions**

Assuming the belief is true:

- What does that mean to me?
- What is the most upsetting part of that for me?
- What is the worst part of that for me?
- What does that say about me?
- What’s so bad about that?

The process of answering one question, followed by another, and so on helps us chip away at frozen, inflexible beliefs so we can see beneath the surface of our reactions. Increased insight into our underlying beliefs is the first step toward change and a more resilient response.

Adapted from How to Detect Your Iceberg Beliefs, Chapter 6, *The Resilience Factor* by Reivich and Shatté.

**What do teachers say about iceberg beliefs?**

*I now see the reality that our thinking is deep rooted and that others will trigger our iceberg beliefs until we resolve the beliefs within ourselves.*—SL (centre director)

*Detecting icebergs helps identify our biases and embedded thoughts. Going through the process of asking myself questions provides me with an immediate connection to what is driving my reactions and helps increase personal awareness and growth.*—JP (preschool teacher)

*I am learning how deep these beliefs are and how they affect our day-to-day lives.*—PH (resource teacher)
Summary of Guide 7

“Iceberg beliefs”—underlying beliefs that can undermine our resilience

Some of our thoughts and beliefs are difficult to identify because they are deeper and more complex. We call these beliefs “icebergs” because they lie below the surface, beneath our awareness. They are a powerful force that can undermine our resilience.

What is it like to experience an iceberg belief?

- Icebergs can cause intense feelings that seem out of proportion to the situation and that take us by surprise.
- They can cause a mismatch between our automatic thoughts (A) and emotional reaction (R), which can cause confusion.
- Icebergs start forming early in life and are passed down unconsciously from generation to generation.
- Iceberg beliefs are the shoulds in our lives—our deeply rooted beliefs about how the world should operate, and how we should operate in the world.
- Icebergs are important because they can lead to relationship problems and are at the root of personality clashes, stereotyping and discrimination.

What are some common types of iceberg beliefs?

Iceberg beliefs often fall into three categories:

- Achievement
- Acceptance
- Control

Sometimes, more than one iceberg belief is activated in a situation. If the beliefs are in conflict, they can paralyze our decision-making process.

Why is it important to examine our iceberg beliefs?

- Our icebergs may cause us to assess a situation using incomplete and inaccurate information and, thus, contribute to non-resilient thinking.
- Getting to know our icebergs helps us become more flexible about how we think the world should operate and we should operate in the world.
- Becoming more conscious of icebergs helps uncover our biases and promotes understanding, acceptance, and respect for interpersonal differences.
- Examining our iceberg beliefs helps us develop important resiliency abilities—emotional regulation, empathy, and reaching out.

How can we detect our iceberg beliefs?

We can ask ourselves the questions on page 27, which are designed to reveal our deeper beliefs.
SECTION 2

Helping Children Build Their Resilience
Guide 8
The importance of relationships and role modelling

Section 1 focused on several evidence-based resiliency thinking skills that help adults handle stress and adversity, gain perspective in times of trouble, and deal with problems, conflict, and opportunity. In this Guide, we will focus on developing young children’s resilience through relationships with warm, responsive adults who consistently model and teach resiliency skills.

How do our relationships with children affect their resilience?

As we discussed in Guides 1 and 2, very young children can develop critical resiliency abilities by watching adults around them model resilient thinking and behaviour in response to stressful situations. We also mentioned that the quality of our relationships with young children is critical to their development of resilience. In fact, researchers have found that relationship experiences affect children’s early brain development, social perceptions, as well as their abilities to self-regulate and develop a capacity for interpersonal communication.

Relationships are a protective factor

Studies also show that relationships can be an important protective factor in helping children who have been exposed to harsh conditions, including poverty, neglect, and abuse. Children who successfully negotiate the transition from such conditions to healthy adulthood consistently cite the importance of their relationship to one adult in either a family or community environment. That adult encouraged them to believe in themselves and their capacity to steer through life’s challenges.

A person’s capacity to steer through challenges is highly related to their self-efficacy, or their belief in their ability to influence their environment.

How can we support children’s self-efficacy?

Social psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman states that a sense of self-efficacy precedes the development of genuine self-esteem. He suggests that caregivers can foster self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resilience in young children by providing them with opportunities to:

1) experience true mastery
2) gain a perspective of “positivity”
3) observe adults modelling resilient thinking styles

Let’s look more closely at each of Seligman’s suggestions.

Experiencing mastery

Mastery involves a child’s behaviour—what a child does to control certain outcomes. True mastery is experienced when there is a direct relationship between the child’s action and the outcome. For example, an infant causes a rattle to make a sound when he shakes it. Experiences that promote mastery can be facilitated by

- offering children choices that give them appropriate control over their environment, for example, choosing what activities they do, the amount of food they eat, whether they rest or sleep at nap time, etc.
- “scaffolding” the experience—providing children with opportunities that challenge them, but are within their ability, for example, a child accomplishes the task of dressing for outdoor activities in winter by mastering one article of clothing at a time
- identifying and reinforcing competence—highlighting small changes or accomplishments for the child, for example, “You remembered to ride your trike in the right direction so you don’t bump into people. You are thinking about riding safely.”
MASTERY THROUGH GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING: A CASE STUDY

The following case study illustrates how one teacher, Yfeng Zhang, promoted mastery in a group of five-year-olds by engaging them in a decision-making process about some problems in their classroom. She adapted the CAR model to make it child-friendly, and used it to help children come up with alternative ways to solve a conflict (generating alternatives).

All six children sitting at my table during lunchtime wanted to play with the Magic Board right after lunch, but we had only one Magic Board. Some children consistently got upset because they were not able to have a turn.

To solve this problem, I held a group discussion with these five-year-olds and helped them generate alternatives. We started out with the CAR model. I asked them why some children were upset so often because of the Magic Board. With this question, they identified the Circumstance (C) and their Automatic thoughts (A). Almost everybody said that they couldn’t get turns (C) and they thought it was unfair (A). When asked how they felt when they couldn’t get a turn, they identified the Reaction (R). One said, “Mad”; three said, “Sad”; one said, “Don’t know”; and one said, “OK.”

We then began to generate alternatives. I asked them how we could solve the problem so that everybody would be happy and everybody would get a turn using the Magic Board. Some of them suggested that they should share; some suggested that people who behaved well at the lunch table should get the turn; some said that they did not know; and some suggested that we should make a schedule.

Finally, we all agreed to make a schedule. Then we developed a plan and worked out a schedule together. The schedule was helpful in two ways. It helped the children respect each other’s right to use the Magic Board, and it helped them remember the sequence of their turns.

The success of the group discussion for the Magic Board challenge helped us solve another problem. Right before lunch, each child in my group would try to wash her/his hands as fast as possible so she would be able to sit on the chair next to mine at the lunch table. Several times, some children were so upset about not being able to sit in the chair beside me that they refused to eat lunch.

I used the same strategy as above, and it worked out very well. Through a group discussion, we again agreed to make a schedule for sitting on the special chair. Since two schedules are hard to remember, I suggested that we use the same schedule for using the Magic Board and sitting on the special chair. The children all agreed. They said it feels like a “super duper day” when their turn comes up on the schedule. This schedule has been in effect for about a month, and no fighting for the Magic Board or the chair has recurred. The children have been following the schedule very nicely.

Based on the above two episodes of making schedules, it appears that group discussion can be an effective method for teaching age-appropriate resiliency skills.

With a teacher’s guidance in group discussions, five-year-olds can use the CAR model, generate alternatives, and develop new solutions. The process can help children develop impulse control, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills.
Gaining “positivity”

Positivity relates to children’s feelings toward, and connection to, significant adults in their lives. Adults can enhance children’s experience of “positivity” in the following ways:

- We can provide children with unconditional love, by letting them know that they are accepted as a person even if their behaviour is sometimes not appropriate. For example, we might say, “I like YOU, but I don’t like when you hit me. Next time, you can ask for my help if you’re frustrated.”

- We can help children refrain from focusing on the negative by first validating their feelings, then encouraging them to actively search for the positive or controllable aspects of situations. For example, if a child says, “This whole day has been terrible!” the teacher could respond:

  “Mmm, you sound pretty upset. Let’s think about your day so far.

  “Remember making the puzzle with Jonah? You worked hard together and you got the puzzle finished! What was that part of the day like for you?

  “Let’s think about what we had for lunch … pineapple slices. Aren’t they one of your favourites? What other desserts do you like?

  “Let’s think about something else you like to do and I can help you get started.”

- We can boost children’s self-esteem by encouraging their efforts and accomplishments using descriptions of what we see in their actions. For example, we might say, “I see you have been working hard to tidy up. You put all the blocks back in the bin.” Or, we might say, “I see everyone sitting quietly. You are getting good at waiting.”

Genuine self-esteem is gained through a sense of mastery and self-efficacy. Using “descriptive feedback” is a way to help children see the relationship between their actions and the outcomes, feel encouraged by their efforts, and own their achievements.

In addition, describing what we see helps us avoid using empty praise, such as, “Good job!” or “Good girl/boy!”

Research also shows that we can help children develop a “growth mindset” to increase their confidence, perseverance and willingness to make mistakes when trying new things. We can do this by noticing their effort instead of praising their intelligence or talent.25

Adult modelling of resilience

Adult modelling relates to the thinking and coping styles that children are exposed to, and to how well adults around them challenge their own thinking habits. Adult modelling of resilient (accurate and flexible) or positive thinking styles is crucial during children’s early years.

How can we model resilient thinking and coping styles?

Talk “out loud” about our thoughts

We can model accurate and flexible thinking by talking “out loud” about our own struggles and encounters with daily stress:

“Right now, I feel frustrated because I can’t get the lid off the jar. I will try one more time, then I will ask Marina for help.”

“Sometimes I feel angry when ....”

“Whoops, I spilled the milk. I’ll get a towel to wipe it up.”

Talking out loud helps children see that stressful situations don’t have to last forever, which reduces “Always” thinking. It also demonstrates that these situations don’t have to affect everything else, which diminishes “Everything” thinking. In addition, children begin to learn that stressful situations are rarely the result of just one person, thereby reducing “Me”/“Not me” thinking.
Model calming and focusing

Adults can model and talk about strategies that help them calm down, refocus their attention, and put things into perspective. Strategies include:

- taking three deep breaths and counting out loud: "I was feeling angry. So, I took three deep breaths and counted to five. Now I feel calmer. That helps me talk nicely to others."

- changing the environment by turning off some lights or putting on quiet music: "When I put on quiet music, it helps me feel calm inside." Or, "Let's turn off some lights. That will help us all calm down a bit."

- choosing a quiet activity: "Everyone is pretty loud and jittery right now. Let's calm down in our 'quiet spot' and read a story."

- waiting to see what happens: "I'm not going to worry about that right now. It might not even happen. If it does, I'll deal with it then."

When we are calm and relaxed, chances are better the children will be calm and relaxed. In addition, maintaining a sense of calm helps us “catch ourselves” before we make statements based on thinking habits and traps that may not demonstrate a resilient response to the situation.

Some children, due to their temperament, find it more challenging than others to calm themselves and bounce back from challenges and adversity. It’s harder for these children to cope with change or to risk trying new things, so they can benefit from additional patience and encouragement from the significant adults in their lives.

Many children are overstimulated by noisy environments, bright lights and colors, and too many things posted on the walls. Creating a physical environment that addresses these issues will help these children feel more relaxed, able to self-regulate and make positive behaviour choices.
Summary of Guide 8
The importance of relationships and role modelling

*How do our relationships with children affect their resilience?*

Research shows that the quality of our relationships with young children
- has a critical impact on children’s developing brain and resilience
- cushions children from risk factors such as poverty, inadequate parenting, abuse, and neglect
- helps children develop self-efficacy, the belief in their ability to influence the world

Self-efficacy precedes the development of self-esteem.

*How can we support children’s self-efficacy?*

Social psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman suggests that caregivers can help young children develop self-efficacy by providing them with opportunities to:

- **experience true mastery**—offering choices, scaffolding challenges, identifying and reinforcing competence
- **gain a perspective of “positivity”**—providing unconditional love, offering guidance in identifying positive aspects of a situation, using “descriptive feedback” to encourage children’s efforts and to promote a “growth mindset”
- **observe adults modelling positive thinking & coping skills**—verbalizing positive thoughts, demonstrating calming and focusing strategies

If we are aware of our own thinking styles and consciously challenge our thinking habits, we are more likely to model a resilient response.

Some children, due to their temperament, need additional patience and encouragement from adults to help them cope more successfully with stress and frustration.

A calm, uncluttered physical environment can help children who are easily overstimulated to self-regulate and make positive behaviour choices.
Guide 9
Helping children develop resilient thinking styles

We can identify and interrupt young children’s non-resilient thinking patterns so that they do not become habits. As discussed in Guide 4, “Me/Always/Everything” thinking patterns can lead to depression, and “Not me/Always/Everything” thinking patterns can lead to aggression.

A study by Dr. John Abela, of McGill University, supports the need to help children challenge their emerging thinking styles. The study found that children with a pattern of negative and self-critical thoughts were more susceptible to depression than those with a more positive outlook. Children whose parents were depressed were more likely to exhibit thinking styles associated with depression (“Me/Always/Everything” thinking).

Children in the study were given “optimism training.” They were taught to challenge “pessimistic” styles of thinking with good results. Abela recommended that schools offer this type of training to help children handle daily stresses and to reduce the risk of childhood depression.

How do we challenge children’s non-resilient thinking patterns?
Challenging children’s emerging thinking styles involves helping them develop more accurate and flexible thinking. It’s important to start with empathy. After acknowledging their feelings, gently challenging their assessment of the situation. Here’s an example:

David and Maurico are friends, who’ve been playing together all morning. After lunch, Maurico is playing on a teeter-totter with Robert. When David tries to join them, they tell him only two can play on the teeter-totter.

Here’s how David explains the situation:

I never get to play with Maurico (“Always” thinking). Maurico doesn’t like me anymore because I’m stupid (“Me” thinking). David is so glum that when his teacher suggests another activity, he tells her, “The other kids don’t like me!” and “There is nothing to do at daycare” (“Everything” thinking).

To challenge David’s “Me/Always/Everything” thinking

- help him understand that Maurico just wanted to play with his other friend for a while. That doesn’t mean Maurico doesn’t like David (“Not me” thinking).

- remind him that he was playing with Maurico just that morning, and that they had fun (“Not always” thinking)

- challenge his belief that he has no other friends by talking about the enjoyable time he had yesterday building the structure with Troy and Billie. Help him remember all the activities that he likes at daycare (“Not everything” thinking).

We can help children practice accurate and flexible thinking by engaging them in activities such as the puppet play on page 37, which allows them to challenge a character’s “Always/Everything” beliefs.

What does one teacher say about helping children develop resilient thinking habits?

Doing the puppet play helped me assess a certain child’s emerging thinking style. In my interactions with that child later on, it helped me understand how I could program for this child to help her challenge her “Always” thinking by giving her opportunities to think of alternative ways to look at the situation. Also, I find it helps children to hear what their peers say about a situation—it can help a child hear that there are other ways of looking at it, not just her way. So I’m doing a lot more group work, where children can sort of mentor each other. —LD (kindergarten)
Not Always Nessie
(A Puppet Play to Challenge “Always/Everything” Thinking)

Narrator: Once upon a time, there was a child care centre where children came to stay while their families were busy. The children and teachers spent the days together playing and learning new things.

Q: What do you think the children did when they were playing? (Gather answers from children.)

Narrator: They also had lunch, rest time, and snack.

Q: I wonder what their favourite lunch was? What about snack? (Gather answers from children.)

Narrator: Nessie was one of the children at the child care centre (show puppet).

Nessie: I never get to play with the toys I want. I never get a turn to play with Jody. I always have to play by myself. I am never going to have any friends.

Nessie was feeling so mad and sad. She sat in the corner with a big frown on her face. Her teacher, Karen (show puppet), came and sat beside her.

Karen: Hi, Nessie. You look so mad and sad. What's the matter?

Nessie: I hate this place. I never get to play with the toys I want. I always have to play by myself. I'm never going to have any friends.

Karen: Oh dear! You're feeling very unhappy right now. Let's talk about this.

Nessie: (nods quietly) Okay.

Karen: Remember this morning when you and Jody built the block tower? You were playing together. You were laughing and smiling. You looked like friends having fun.

Nessie: Yeah, but now she is playing with Jessica. I'm all by myself. I'll never have any friends.

Q: Nessie believed if she didn’t play with Jody now, she would never have any friends. What do you think? (Gather answers from children.)

Karen: It’s disappointing you aren’t playing with Jody right now, but does that mean that you’ll never have any friends? It’s not always like this. Sometimes you play with Jody, sometimes you play by yourself, and sometimes you play with other children. (pause) Let's think of some things you could do to enjoy the rest of your day.

Q: What are some things Nessie could do to enjoy the rest of her day? (Gather answers from children and summarize, for example, "Nessie realized there were lots of things she could do to enjoy her time at daycare.")

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Summary of Guide 9

Helping children develop resilient thinking styles

- We can identify and interrupt children’s emerging thinking styles so they don’t become habits.

- This is an important step in promoting resilience and preventing depression and aggression that can lead to violence.
  - “Me/Always/Everything” thinking styles can lead to depression.
  - “Not me/Always/Everything” thinking styles can lead to aggression.

- Challenging children’s emerging thinking styles involves helping them develop more accurate and flexible thinking.

- We can help children develop more accurate and flexible thinking by
  - first acknowledging their feelings
  - then gently challenging their thinking about situations

- Teachers can identify children’s “Always” and “Everything” statements and suggest more positive alternatives.
Guide 10

The CAR model—using Thought-Feeling Connections with children

As we discussed in Guide 3, sometimes it’s hard to identify our automatic thoughts. We often have more experience labelling our feelings. The Thought-Feeling Connections can be used in reverse to help us identify our thoughts and the beliefs that cause children’s feelings and behaviour.

Andrea, a teacher who works with toddlers, explains how using the Thought-Feeling Connections in reverse helped her deal with a toddler's outburst as the group prepared to go outside to play:

The Thought-Feeling Connections helped me have empathy and patience for Alex. I realized that he really wanted to stay in the room, but it was difficult for him to articulate that because he is only two years old. So, I used the CAR model. By getting a hold on his emotion — the R part of CAR — I could get a hold on the A part — his thinking — and let him know that I understood why he was reacting with an outburst. For example, I could see that he was feeling pretty angry (R), so I “guessed” that he believed his rights were being violated (A). He’d been so content playing with the blocks that, when he was told that he had to stop (C) — the circumstance — he considered this a violation of his rights to choose his activity. With this in mind, I said to him, “I can see you’re angry, Alex. You really would like to stay inside and play with the blocks. Right now, we’re all going outside to play, but when we come back in, you can play with the blocks again.” I guess he felt really understood, because he did calm down and let me help him get dressed to go outside.

Here’s another case example showing how Laura, a teacher working with four- to six-year-olds, uses Thought-Feeling Connections to help children express their beliefs:

Thought-Feeling connections help me understand what a child is thinking about a situation, so they’re good for everyday problem solving with kindergarten children. For example, I was working with two children (M and N). M said, “N always plays with G.” Instead of just asking, “How does that make you feel?” I asked her, “What do you say to yourself when that happens?” When she replied, “She likes G better than me,” I was able to get at the belief that led to her hurt feelings. Then I helped her generate alternatives and dispute her explanation about why her friend was playing with someone else. I learned this approach could be used in everyday problem solving.

In the box below, you’ll find guidelines to help you analyze the Thought-Feeling Connections you see in a particular child and to create interventions to help.

THOUGHT-FEELING CONNECTIONS:
ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION GUIDELINES

1) Note the 4 Ws of the child’s response to daily stress:
   When does it happen?
   Where does it happen?
   Who does it happen with?
   What does the child do? (the behaviour)

2) Consider why the child might be responding this way. What Thought-Feeling Connections might be operating? For example, if the child generally responds to situations with anger, is it possible that the child is stuck in a “violation of rights” belief?

3) Use your assessment of the Thought-Feeling Connections to develop a plan to help the child cope more effectively with daily stressors.
   a) State your goal for the plan, for example, “I want to help Sammy join a group without becoming angry and aggressive.”
   b) Describe how you will help the child develop a more resilient response to this circumstance. Use “Where?” “When?” and “What?” as guidelines for your plan.

Thought-Feeling Connections—make a guess, then observe again

When we use thought-feeling connections with children, it’s very important to check our “guesses” about children’s beliefs by continuing to observe their interactions and reactions. The following case study illustrates how one teacher used thought-feeling connections to focus her observations and further understand a child’s behaviour.
CASE EXAMPLE: USING THOUGHT-FEELING CONNECTIONS AS AN ASSESSMENT TOOL

Told by Olia Ciurpita (ECE, Casa Loma Child Care Centre, Toronto)

Anthony, a five-year-old in my school-age room, is very bright, but has a difficult time socially and emotionally. He often has a hard time beginning his day on a positive note, becoming quite aggressive and seeming angry with both me and his peers after his mom leaves.

I used the Thought-Feeling Connections to observe his behaviour. Initially, I just saw his anger, so I watched for evidence that he believed his rights were being violated.

As I observed morning drop-offs more closely, though, I realized that his mom, who was understandably concerned about getting to work, frequently attempted to leave very quickly. As she tried to get out the door, I noticed a worried look on Anthony’s face and could almost feel his anxiety mounting. I wondered if Anthony was experiencing a “future threat belief”—perhaps that his mom was hurrying to get away from him, causing him to worry about his importance to her.

After his Mom left, Anthony would try to join the other children, but he’d end up knocking over their structures, become verbally aggressive, and blame them. Using the Thought-Feeling Connections again helped me see his intentions in a new way. When Anthony behaved aggressively while trying to join the group, instead of viewing him as angry, destructive, or inconsiderate, I began to attribute a more positive intent. I saw that he was attempting to soothe the anxious feelings caused by his mother’s quick departure by trying to connect or belong, but didn’t yet have the skills to do so. So I focused first on trying to help him calm his anxiety, then I worked with him to develop his joining skills.

In addition, I found that my new hypothesis about the intention behind Anthony’s aggressive behavior helped me talk with Anthony about it. When Anthony would tell me that he hit a peer “because I am angry,” I would try to find out more details, hoping to get an accurate view of the situation: “Ohhh … can you tell me what you are angry about? What made you angry?” When we investigated the situation this way, we’d often find out that he wasn’t really angry at the other person or situation. Instead, he expressed a future threat belief—he was worried that he wouldn’t be included in the activities with his peers. This confirmed my hypothesis that Anthony’s aggression was related to anxiety not anger.

I find if I put myself in close proximity to Anthony when he predictably has more trouble, like at the beginning of the day and in less structured times such as free play, it helps relieve his anxious feelings. If I see him beginning to lose control, I immediately go over, we take some deep breaths together, and this helps him regulate his emotions and calm down. If I can get to him before his anxiety takes over and he “loses it,” we can often talk our way through the incident and problem solve together about other ways to handle the situation.

I find that I am no longer just stopping the aggressive behaviour; I am trying to increase his awareness of his behaviour and the impact it has on other people. I have noticed that, more and more, I’m taking the time to help him identify his feelings and find out what meaning he gives to the situation.

This step-by-step process of analyzing the cause of the problem is helping him respond more appropriately in groups. He still needs support to regulate his emotions and control his impulses, but he is beginning to self-regulate with just a visual cue from me.

What do teachers say about using Thought-Feeling Connections with children?

Thought-Feeling Connections can help teachers identify the usually unseen thoughts in a child. Once the child’s thinking is identified, it’s easier to understand the child’s behaviour.

—AZ (kindergarten/preschool)

After analyzing children’s behaviour using Thought-Feeling Connections, it is much easier to plan strategies that help deal with the behaviour and understand the causes.

—SD (preschool)
Summary of Guide 10

The CAR model—using Thought-Feeling Connections with children

- Adults can use the “Thought-Feeling Connections” in reverse to help understand the beliefs that drive children’s feelings and behaviours.

- By observing children’s behaviour and identifying their feelings (the Rs), we can “guess” what their automatic thoughts (A) about a situation might be.

- Teachers report that increased understanding of the reason behind children’s challenging behaviour helps them respond with empathy and patience and, thereby, maintain a positive relationship with the child.

- Using Thought-Feeling Connections helps adults
  - analyze the cause of a problem
  - design appropriate interventions
  - engage in a step-by-step approach to help children develop approaches that build their resilience
Guide 11

Helping young children express and challenge their thoughts

Social psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman notes that by age two, children begin to verbalize the meanings of their actions. For example, a toddler wails, “It’s mine!” as she grabs a toy from another child. By age three, children are actively trying to figure out why things happen. For example, a child might say, “Mommy and Daddy are fighting ‘cuz I’m a bad boy.”

Yet, often when we ask children, “Why do you think that happened?” “What do you think about that?” they will reply “I don’t know” or simply shrug their shoulders.

We want to encourage children to express their thoughts about the world for several reasons. It gives them an opportunity to practice language and interpersonal skills, as well as enjoy the experience of being heard by an interested and caring adult. And, when children tell us what they are thinking, we can gain valuable insight into their feelings and behavior.

Child-friendly questions and approaches

Teachers working with young children have found that the following child-friendly questions help children express their thoughts:

- “What are you saying to yourself?” (point)
- “What are you thinking inside your head?”
- “What is your head telling you?”

In addition to asking children directly about their experiences, we can use indirect methods to help children articulate what they are thinking and expose them to others’ thoughts and feelings.

People in pictures: let’s make a story!

“People in pictures: let’s make a story!” which follows, shows how using a hand-drawn image or a single picture from a storybook or magazine can help individuals and groups discuss their thoughts and feelings, deal with cause and effect, and generate positive solutions to everyday problems.

PEOPLE IN PICTURES: LET’S MAKE A STORY!

Helping children express their thoughts and generate alternatives

Here are five steps to get you started:

1) Show the children the picture on page 43 or a picture from a storybook.
2) Say to the children: “Let’s make up a story about the people in this picture.”
3) Start by describing the location and people in the picture, for example, “Once upon a time, there were some kids playing outside …” or “There was a dad and his kids ….”
4) Ask the children the following questions to continue making up the story:
   - What’s happening in the picture?
   - How are the people in this story feeling? (“Feeling” questions are the most familiar for young children, so we start the story with them.)
   - What’s making them feel sad/angry/happy, etc.? (Find out about each person in the picture and listen for Thought-Feeling Connections.)
   - What are the people in the story “saying to themselves” about what is happening? What are they thinking in their heads? (Get a response about each person in the picture.)
   - What is going to happen next in our story? How come? (Look for cause and effect statements, and listen for Thought-Feeling Connections.)
   - Now let’s try to think of some different things that could happen. What else could the people in the story do? (Help children generate alternatives.)

If the children cannot generate any positive alternatives, ask them to think of some “happy” or “good” things that might happen next.

5) Congratulate the children on their story. Restate positive alternatives they generated for the characters in the story.

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Using children’s storybooks to generate discussion about resilience

Children’s stories can be a rich and powerful resource for promoting critical resiliency abilities and thinking skills. In addition, stories provide us with a way to challenge children’s assumptions and biases about differences. Promoting cultural competence is a key factor in supporting resilience, and a positive self-concept and a sense of belonging.

Children love to listen to stories. Literature can be used to help children articulate their thinking and expose them to others’ thoughts and feelings. It can also help children discover new ways to overcome obstacles and deal with the inevitable challenges of life.

Storybooks can introduce children to resilient thinking and behaviour. You probably have some favourites—stories that are rich with examples of optimism, perseverance, personal competence, dealing with emotion, triumphing over setbacks, and making the most of life’s opportunities.

Drawing attention to the resiliency abilities that storybook characters demonstrate provides children with examples to imitate. For example, to highlight causal analysis, realistic optimism, or self-efficacy, you might say, “They figured out what the problem was, then they made a plan to solve it. They didn’t give up, did they? They kept on trying.”

Developing resiliency abilities is an ongoing process—something we continue for our whole lives. The magic of reading and listening to stories joins adults and children in the spirit of lifelong resilience development.

For a comprehensive list of children’s storybooks go to the RIRO website.
http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-booksKids.htm

The books relate to the critical resiliency abilities discussed in Guide 2, as well as stories that promote flexible thinking and cultural competence in young children.

We encourage you to share your favourite storybooks about resilience. E-mail your suggestions to us at info@reachinginreachingout.com and we’ll add them to our list.

What do educators say about using stories and actively promoting a resilient view with young children?

I learn so much about children’s thoughts and feelings when we read or make up stories together. It’s fun and also a great way to get to know them better. Hearing the children’s ideas about why characters act in certain ways actually helps me understand the children in my group better. —NB (kindergarten)

This is the age when children are forming their beliefs about themselves. They are receiving feedback from parents, from their friends, from their teachers. This is the stage where they haven’t got their beliefs consolidated yet. We, as educators working with the children day after day, could actually tap into and see the thinking patterns that may be forming in the child. So if we intervene by giving them a different perspective, generating alternatives—by talking with the child—the child can develop a more resilient set of beliefs. —JG (supervisor)
Summary of Guide 11

Helping young children express and challenge their thoughts

Social psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman notes that by age two, children begin to verbalize the meanings of their actions. By age three, children are actively trying to figure out why things happen.

We want to encourage children to express their thoughts about the world because it gives

- children the opportunity to practice language and interpersonal skills
- children the opportunity to be heard by an interested and caring adult
- adults the opportunity to gain valuable insight into children’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour

We can use child-friendly questions, such as the following, to encourage children to express their thoughts:

- “What are you saying to yourself?”
- “What are you thinking inside your head?”
- “What is your head telling you?”

We can also use children’s literature or made-up stories to

- promote discussion about the children’s beliefs
- give them exposure to others’ thoughts and feelings
- challenge children’s assumptions and biases

Using children’s storybooks to generate discussion about resilience

Children’s storybooks can also be used to develop children’s resiliency abilities. Good stories offer multiple layers for learning and discussion—opportunities for readers and listeners alike to validate their own experiences, broaden their perspectives, and discover new ways to overcome obstacles and deal with life’s inevitable challenges.

Most good stories contain themes related to the critical abilities that researchers associate with resilience. The magic of reading and listening to stories joins adults and children in the spirit of lifelong resilience development.
SECTION 3

About Reaching IN …
Reaching OUT
About Reaching IN …
Reaching OUT

Overview
Since 2002, Reaching IN…Reaching OUT (RIRO) has been an innovator in promoting resilience on various levels—from providing evidence-based skills training programs to adults who live and work with young children to helping organizations and communities create "cultures of resilience" through training leaders and sharing important research findings and implications for practice.

Our two skills training programs, RIRO Resiliency Skills Training for service providers and Bounce Back & Thrive! (BBT) for parents are delivered through a network of RIRO and BBT Trainers who work in non-profit and government-funded organizations in Canada and beyond.

The cornerstone of RIRO’s programs is training adults in resiliency skills they can role model or introduce directly in daily interactions with children under 8 years of age. In the context of caring relationships and role modeling, RIRO’s programs teach adults “3Rs of Resilience” – relaxation and reflection skills to help them respond instead of simply reacting to challenging situations. These programs help adults and young children learn to “reach in” to think more flexibly and accurately and “reach out” to others and opportunities.

Our 12-hour resiliency skills training for service providers, and 10-session activity-based version for parents, focus on: enhancing relationships as well as supporting self-regulation (emotion and behavior); executive functioning/problem-solving; agency/mastery motivation and meaning making (optimism, participation, hope). The skills training content is consistent with the framework of world-renown resilience researcher, Dr. Anne Masten.

Based on the evaluation results of RIRO’s training programs, many additional resiliency resources have been created for service providers and parents. These free resources are available on both our websites.

If you are a service provider, please visit “Resources” at: http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/index.htm to find videos, articles, reports, ResilienC (our quarterly e-newsbrief), resources to use with parents and more.

If you are a parent, please visit: http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents.htm to find tips, activities, videos and more to build resilience in yourself and your children.

Our websites offer a vital and unique clearinghouse for people around the world wanting to learn more about building resilience and well-being in young children and families.

Our history and development
From 2002-2012, project grants from government sources and foundations funded the first five of six inter-related phases of our development, evaluation and research.

Beginning in 1998, RIRO’s founding sponsor, the Child and Family Partnership, conducted a systematic search for best practice models to promote resilience in very young children. The Penn Resilience Program (PRP), developed by Dr. Martin Seligman and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania was chosen based on the model’s evidence-base and world-wide program implementation with adults and children over eight years of age.

In 2002, RIRO received funding for Phase 1, a pilot study to adapt and test the feasibility of using key content from the PRP and adult resiliency skills training programs at the University of Pennsylvania to train Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) working with young children in child care. After receiving this training, ECEs practiced the resiliency skills in their own lives. And then, they systematically introduced the skills through role modeling and direct teaching during their daily interactions with children.

RIRO staff and ECEs worked together to create and pilot developmentally-adapted activities centred on the resiliency skill areas with children at the pilot centres. The activities were used to support children’s development of the critical abilities associated with resilience discussed in Guide 2. A year later, ECEs completed structured surveys and interviews about the impact of the training on themselves, co-workers and children. The formal evaluation results were very promising and led to a larger replication in Phase 2.
Over the next several years, Reaching IN…Reaching OUT systematically developed special training programs for RIRO trainers, leaders and parents based on RIRO Resiliency Skills Training (Phases 3 to 6). Here is a brief summary of the six phases of our program development, research and evaluation:

Phase 1 (2002-2003) – Model adaptation and testing – multi-site pilot project to adapt University of Pennsylvania’s (Seligman) resiliency skills training for use with ECEs working with young children in child care.

Phase 2 (2003-2006) – Multi-site and sector replication using the RIRO Resiliency Skills Training Program (developed based on findings of Phase 1). Testing of multiple delivery models. Development of website, curriculum and video resources.

Phase 3 (2006-2009) – Large scale evaluation of RIRO Resiliency Skills Training Program and development/piloting/evaluation of RIRO Trainer “Intensive” Program (based on findings of Phases 1 & 2)

Phase 4 (2009) – “RIRO-Wellington Reflective Leadership Training Pilot Project” – Multi-site pilot project and formal evaluation of an enhanced version of RIRO Resiliency Skills Training with working sessions offered to leaders of child care centres. This program was created to help leaders mentor their staff to create a “culture of resilience” as a framework to guide policies, practices, hiring, professional development and resources in child care centres at multiple levels – i.e., children, staff, supervisors, parents, boards and community (based on findings of Phases 1, 2 & 3).

Phase 5 (2010-2012) – “Resilient Parents – Resilient Kids” – Multi-site project to adapt RIRO Resiliency Skills Training for use with parents of young children experiencing significant challenges and formally evaluate its impact (Bounce Back & Thrive!). Creation and evaluation of public awareness session, group and individual parent-child activities, videos, print and online resources and parent website to support resilience in children and families (based on Phases 1, 2, 3 & 4).

Phase 6 (2012 to 2017) – Formal evaluation of the impact of Bounce Back & Thrive! (BBT) resiliency skills training programs for parents facilitated by authorized BBT Trainers in sites across Canada (based on the findings of Phases 1 to 5). Evaluation Studies #1, 2 & 3 have been completed.

In 2016, the RIRO Resiliency Skills Training program was revised and updated to include relevant information and research from the burgeoning field of resilience promotion. The revisions were done in collaboration with 23 RIRO Trainers inside and outside Canada. The new program was piloted over six months with very positive feedback from participants and trainers. The final version, launched in September 2016, has been well-received. Results of formal follow-up evaluation show the positive impact is comparable or greater than the original program.

In August 2017, RIRO Resiliency Skills Training for service providers will be available in French.

Our research and evaluation

In this section, key findings from the Phase 1 pilot study will be presented. Over more than a decade, these results have been replicated and expanded with different groups in the subsequent five phases and ongoing evaluation studies. Because of the consistency of these findings, the results of all six phases will be combined and highlighted.

One of our strengths lies in the way we use multiple ways of evaluating the processes and impact of our programs. The effectiveness of our resiliency skills training programs is formally evaluated using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. These include: formal structured surveys and scales, structured interviews, trainer/facilitator evaluations, focus groups, participant stories in written and video format and more.
PHASE 1 (Initial Pilot Study)

Two questions guided the pilot study:

- What is the impact of the resiliency skills training if adults introduce the skills indirectly with children through role modeling?

- How early can the resiliency skills be directly introduced effectively to children through developmentally-adapted activities? (The impact of these activities was evaluated with various age groups, i.e., toddler, pre-school, and kindergarten-age children).

Impact on Service Providers and Practice

One of the most important findings is that since receiving resiliency skills training, ECEs say their approach and language has changed when they speak with children about daily frustrations and conflicts. Before the training, they typically asked children only about their feelings in these situations. Now, they also ask about the children’s thinking.

They expressed some surprise at how much young children can tell us about their thoughts, if they are asked in age-appropriate ways. Educators told us about how they uncovered children’s thoughts by asking, “What did you say to yourself?” or “What did you say to yourself inside your head?”

When a particular child was very upset about another child not playing with her, I talked to her about it. I tried not to ask, “What were you thinking?” but rather, “What did you say to yourself when N didn’t want to play with you?” And, what was interesting was the child could actually say, “She doesn’t like me—that’s what I said to myself.” So, I was getting to the actual thought behind the feelings of being very sad and upset about the friend not playing with her.

—LD (kindergarten)

On a comprehensive formal survey and interviews about the impact of the skills training on them and their work with children, here are some other things ECEs reported:

- The resiliency skills helped them deal with adult communication issues (with co-workers, parents in the centres as well as their own families and friends). This resulted in better adult communication overall. And it reduced job stress and increased teamwork.

  The resiliency skills have affected every aspect of my life, both in personal relationships and as a manager. The skills give me a better understanding of where I’m coming from and help me read other people’s reactions... I’ve just become more effective in my relationships with other adults. —LD (supervisor)

- The skills helped them assess and better understand child behaviour through: greater awareness of their own thinking styles and use of the skills as a framework for reflective practice.

  The resiliency skill set has helped me refine my observation skills. It gives me another thing to look for. I’m not only looking to see, “Does this child have the fine motor skills to print?” or “Does this child have the self-regulation skills to calm himself at naptime or during a transition?” It’s also helping me see, “Are the children resilient when things happen? If they have conflicts with peers, are they able to work through them? Are they able to be upset, but then they’re okay later in the day? Or, do they think that their whole day has been ruined because this one thing has happened?” —AB (kindergarten)

- They said that the resiliency thinking skills can be modelled in daily interactions with children of any age and should be started as early as possible. They role modeled how to deal with daily challenges by voicing out loud their thoughts, feelings and problem-solving in addition to their actions.

  If something falls and breaks, instead of showing frustration and anger, I say, “OK, we can deal with this. It’s not a problem!” That’s really important for children to know—that little things don’t have to be such a big deal. I think, in the future, it will teach them that some bigger things can be dealt with in that sense, too. —CP (toddlers)

- Direct introduction of the resiliency skills, using educator-designed skills activities (such as stories, puppet plays, drawings, and movement-
based activities) was most effective with children four years and older. However, some verbal three-year-olds also made effective use of these activities.

Impact on Children

- They observed the children modeling some of the resiliency skills with their peers such as: generating alternatives (i.e., finding other ways to look at things); catching “Always” and “Never” statements as well as calming strategies like taking deep breaths.

  M was quite upset... and said, “I never get to play with J.” One of the older children, A, was in the area and she actually said to him, “But you were playing with him this morning. Do you think you are going to play with him when you go outside today? I bet you are going to play with him outside.”

  I heard M agreeing with A. It seemed to help him calm down and regulate his emotions, so he could focus, do something else for a while, and then have that reassurance that he would be able to play with this person again, just not right now. — AB (kindergarten)

- They observed positive changes in children, especially in impulse control and emotional regulation, which they believe is a direct result of their resiliency training.

Before the training, I looked at child N as a child who was having a temper tantrum, just an everyday temper tantrum—EVERY day!

Through the “Thought-Feeling Connections” we were able to work with her and pinpoint what was wrong. We had to start with her insecurities. We had to give her those words—we had to help her understand her feelings.

Now she is a wonderful, well-adjusted child who can solve her own problems and help others who are feeling the same way that she felt. — JH (preschool)

- They reported the skills also helped children be:
  - less upset about making mistakes
  - more likely to persevere
  - more likely to follow through on expected behaviour
  - more empathic with peers
  - able to problem solve more effectively.

SUMMARY: Phase 1 Pilot Study

- The adult skills help service providers personally and professionally.
- The skills can be adapted to help young children of any age.
- Educators trained in the adult skill set can learn to model these important skills successfully in their daily interactions with children of any age.
- The skills can be introduced directly through child-friendly activities with children four years and older.

(See results of Phase 1: Pilot study at http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/documents/RIRO-Thinking_skills_and_resilience.pdf)
COMBINED RESULTS (PHASES 1 - 6)

Looking at these results together helps us to better understand the key impact of our resiliency skills training programs on service providers, parents and children. (See results of all six phases at http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/effectiveness.htm)

From 2002 to 2016, many organizations and 2,109 participants (including 561 parents) took part in these projects and evaluation studies, and completed the full formal evaluation protocols. Here are some highlights:

**Use of resiliency skills & satisfaction**

- 97% of service providers said they use the skills training regularly at work (93% outside work).
- 97% BBT parents said they use the skills at home (59% use the skills daily).
- Parents and service providers rated the training as “very useful/helpful.”
- Both said they are “very satisfied” with the training; 96% would recommend the training to others.

**Impact of resiliency skills personally**

- Service providers and parents reported a significant increase in knowledge about building resilience in children and themselves.
- **Major impact** reported by parents & service providers:
  - Become calmer/reduce stress levels
  - Gain perspective
  - Challenge beliefs/thoughts
  - Problem-solve better
  - Improve communication with adults and children
- Service providers and parents said they have a better understanding of how they respond to challenges as well as other people.
- Parents said they:
  - believe in themselves more
  - find more positive things to appreciate
  - feel more hopeful and optimistic
  (These outcomes were also reported by service providers on qualitative measures.)

- Parents had a significant positive change on scales measuring:
  - attitudes related to resilience, children & parenting
  - depression & stress
- Parents doing the most poorly to start showed the greatest improvement on these scales.

**Impact of skills at work**

- Service providers and leaders said the skills help them: reduce job stress, support teamwork, improve communication and promote reflective practice.
- Leaders reported they feel less burned out and stressed, have greater leadership skills and are able to mentor staff more effectively.
- Leaders said the skills increased their ability to use resilience as a framework in developing programming, resources, policies and personnel practices at their centres.

**What parents say about BBT…**

“The strategies were very useful, but I think most of all I realized that I have to work on my resilience first. This is the first great step.”

“I learned new things about me that translate directly to my kids. I have finally realized that the more calm and collected I act, slowly they act the same.”

“It makes you a better parent – relaxing your body, rethinking before you act, controlling your impulses, knowing your thinking habits…”

“It is so good to learn how to challenge our own and our children’s thinking. It taught me how to find my children’s strengths instead of always feeling bad about their shortcomings.”

“The group helped me see the child’s perspective better. It taught me to calm down and think before reacting.”
How the skills helped adults help children

- Adults reported the skills help them understand children better
- 91% say the skills helped them support positive changes in children
- 97% of adults say they role modeled the skills with children.
- **Top ways** the skills helped adults help children:
  - Greater understanding and empathy
  - Improved relationships
  - More positive attitudes about challenging behavior and children's uniqueness
  - Better able to see children's strengths and positives
  - Better able to assess children's thinking and behavior
  - Understand that “Calmer adults = Calmer children”

Impact of resiliency skills on children

- **Top changes** service providers and parents observed in children:
  - Calm down easier and more patient
  - Problem solve more effectively
  - See mistakes as OK
  - More confident and try new things
  - Ask for help appropriately
  - Persevere
  - Empathize and help others

- 51% of service providers and 47% of parents saw the children use these skills with peers:
  - Empathize and help others calm down
  - Help others challenge their thinking/beliefs
  - Help others generate alternatives and problem solve

What service providers say…

“This is training that every person, whether working with children or parents, needs in their lives. The adult skills are so important. Maybe the conflicts in the world will reduce if future generations get these skills taught very early in their lives.”  – HS (professional development coordinator)

“It makes you more aware of how you interact with children and how you can misread cues or situations. It teaches you to be more empathic towards children and parents – to think twice before assuming and thinking you’re right.”  – RB (ECE-frontline, teen parents)

“How we role model resilience with young children on a daily basis is an essential part of their learning-it is a far more important than we realize.”  – CJ (center resource worker)

“I feel in our society it is so important to empower ourselves and children with these skills. It will affect our future success—school/work, relationships, parenting, health…”  
– LP (manager, OEYC)

**SUMMARY**

Based on consistent results of systematic formal evaluation and research since 2002, there is strong support for the efficacy of RIRO’s resiliency skills training programs in building capacity for resilience and well-being in service providers, parents and young children living in diverse settings and communities.

For more information, visit www.reachinginreachingout.com
References


33. The Child & Family Partnership consisted of the following four organizations: the YMCA of Greater Toronto, Child Development Institute, University of Guelph and George Brown College.