



Building Resilience in the Classroom Quick Guide

Introduction

Everyone in the school community plays a role in promoting student mental health and well-being. One way that teachers can positively shape student mental health is by integrating opportunities for students to build resilience throughout the school day. Resilience is the ability to bounce back, even in the face of negative events or circumstances, disruptions, or changes in demands through mental, emotional, or behavioral flexibility (APA 2025).



For example, if a student experiences the death of a loved one, they will likely experience grief or pain, but resilience will help them to move past it and avoid getting stuck, feeling like a victim, or using unhealthy strategies like drugs, alcohol, or risky behaviors to cope.

Resilience also can protect students from developing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychological research shows that resilience can be cultivated and practiced (Cornell Health 2025). Students can work to build social connections, flexibility in how they think about and respond to stress, increase their sense of purpose, emotion regulation skills, and their sense of agency or ability to influence the world around them, all of which increase a person's resilience.

Five Strategies for Increasing Student Resilience

- 1. Practice Skills for Coping and Emotion Regulation:** Coping skills are ways that students think or behave that help them deal with stressful situations. Develop students' emotion regulation skills by helping them recognize and label their emotions, understand how they show up in their body, and ways to calm when they are feeling stressed. Provide students opportunities to explore and practice coping strategies, like movement, deep breathing, visualization, music and art, etc., during low-stress situations so they can identify helpful strategies and use them in high stress times.
- 2. Model and Practice Healthy Thinking Patterns:** Help bring awareness to students' thinking patterns that are unhelpful, rigid, and that increase a child's stress level. Provide opportunities to practice healthy thinking, using strategies such as:

- ❑ Visualizing positive outcomes before a potentially stressful event, like a test or presentation, rather than focusing on fears related to the event. This can help foster an optimistic outlook (Johns Hopkins 2025).
 - ❑ Developing cognitive flexibility by helping students recognize that although change and uncertainty can be scary, it is a part of life. When a student is unable to meet a goal, help them brainstorm new goals, focusing on what is in a student's control. Ask students to create a timeline of their own personal development and notice how those changes have positively impacted them (APA 2012).
 - ❑ Thinking about painful events as something that can be overcome, taking a broader perspective on the event, and recognizing that there is a happy future beyond the current situation. Ask students to consider how the situation could improve in the future and identify small ways they may already be feeling better about the situation (Johns Hopkins 2025). Teachers can use history to show the ways that life keeps moving forward after difficult events (APA 2012).
 - ❑ Helping students notice and appreciate the positive things in their lives. Create routines for celebrating successes individually with students and as a class. Help students practice gratitude through journaling or group sharing of daily gratitude (Cornell Health 2025).
3. **Teach Self-Care:** Teach students about the importance of caring for their mind and body with healthy habits like good nutrition, getting enough sleep, integrating exercise and movement into daily life, and finding regular opportunities to play and have fun. When students practice self-care and regularly participate in activities they enjoy, they are more able to stay balanced and cope with stressful times in their lives (APA 2012). Teachers and other school staff can also model self-care, especially in times of stress, when students look to the adults in their lives for cues on how to respond to challenging situations.
 4. **Nurture a Positive View of Self:** Provide opportunities for students to recognize their strengths and identify times they have used those strengths to solve a problem. This helps students develop a sense of self-efficacy or the belief that they can use their behavior to influence their environment to achieve specific goals (APA 2025). When students make mistakes, emphasize that making mistakes helps people learn and grow. When tough situations arise, help students think about times in the past when they have contributed solutions and trusted their own instincts to solve problems. After a tough situation has been resolved, engage students in a class discussion about what each student has learned from the situation (APA 2012).
 5. **Increase Social Connection:** Integrate opportunities for students to build positive relationships with peers, school staff, and members of the larger school-community into their learning to strengthen social connection and resilience. Strategies could include:
 - ❑ Promoting positive peer to peer relationships by teaching skills and practicing positive social interactions every day. Classroom lessons that focus on helping students

develop empathy, practice listening, resolve conflicts, and provide feedback to others are examples of important skills needed for developing and maintaining positive social connections (NCSSLE 2025a).

- Integrating volunteer opportunities into the curriculum. Volunteering can enhance a student's social connection by encouraging new social relationships with those they are serving (Alganami et al 2025). Volunteer opportunities could be internal, like mentoring or tutoring a younger student, or external, like writing to someone in a nursing home.
- Providing opportunities to strengthen teacher-student connections, such as engaging students in conversations about their lives, being accessible to students during passing times to lend a nonjudgmental, empathetic ear, sharing personal information as appropriate, and affirming and celebrating students' identities. (NCSSLE 2025b).

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Student Service Section
Liz Krubsack, School Mental Health Consultant
201 West Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 264-6719
Elizabeth.krubsack@dpi.wi.gov
<https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health>

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