

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Teaching Students the ABCs of Resilience

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From natural disasters to economic meltdowns, from wars abroad to tragic shootings close to home, this year brought to light the increasing complexity of the world in which we raise kids. Our natural instinct as teachers, parents and caretakers is to protect children from hardship, yet we know walking between the raindrops of adversity is not possible. Instead of sidestepping challenge, we can teach kids to cope positively, to learn and grow from adversity. We can arm our youth with skills of resilience, and these lessons can begin in the classroom.

Understanding the Roots of Resilience

Have you ever wondered why one student may be more resilient than another? Let's say Lisa and Jenny are students in the same eighth grade math class. They both struggle during the quarter and, in the end, they both receive low final grades. Upon hearing the news, Lisa and Jenny share myriad negative emotions: disappointment, anger, fear and sadness. However, after a few days, they diverge in their coping strategies. Lisa picks herself up; she finds a tutor and commits to making a greater effort in math going forward. Meanwhile, Jenny tumbles into a downward spiral of negativity; she sulks and starts performing poorly in all of her subjects. Lisa and Jenny faced the same adversity, so why did one bounce back while the other did not?

You may guess the difference lies in their genetic disposition or family circumstance. Maybe Lisa was born a "stronger" person, or maybe Lisa's parents are more supportive than Jenny's parents. While this may all be true, one factor supersedes the influences of genes, childhood experiences, and opportunity or wealth when it comes to resilience. In fact, according to decades of research (1), the biggest influence on resilience is something within our control. The biggest influence is our cognitive style -- the way we think.

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Students can adjust their own cognitive style by learning about the ABCs of resilience.

This model was first proposed by psychologist Albert Ellis **(2)** back in 1962, and it is still used as a foundational lesson in resilience. Let's learn about the ABCs by going back to our example.

If you asked Lisa or Jenny why she was unhappy upon receiving low math grades, she would probably look at you quizzically. It's obvious, isn't it? She was upset because she received a low grade. This seems to be the correct answer, but it's not. Many people mistakenly believe that facing an *adversity* like receiving a low grade leads to a *consequence* like feeling unhappy.

Myth: Adversity Leads to Consequence

If a particular adversity led to a particular consequence, then Lisa and Jenny would have shared the same enduring reaction to their poor grades. In fact, everyone would have the same reaction to every adversity in life, and we know this is not the case. People react differently to the same exact challenges, because between A (adversity) and C (consequence) lies the crucial letter B. Here is the more accurate model: every *adversity* one faces triggers *beliefs* about that situation, which in turn causes a reaction or *consequence*.

Reality: Adversity Leads to Beliefs Leads to Consequence

The ABC model explains why Lisa and Jenny coped differently with the same challenge. Lisa knew she received a low grade, but she *believed* she would improve by making a greater effort; she also felt that one bad grade wasn't the end of the world. Lisa's beliefs led her to acquire a tutor. Jenny, on the other hand, *believed* that doing poorly in math had spoiled her chances of getting into a good college. Jenny thereby decided there was no point in trying at all in school and began skipping her classes and neglecting her studies.

Lisa's optimistic and more realistic beliefs contributed to her high resilience in an adverse situation. Jenny's pessimistic and unrealistic beliefs contributed to low resilience in the same adverse situation. Optimistic and realistic belief systems combine to create a cornerstone of resilient mindsets. The great news is that once students learn the ABC model, they can hone in on their *beliefs* and begin fine-tuning them for greater optimism and accuracy.

The ABC model is a simple yet powerful tool in cultivating self-awareness -- a crucial element of resilient mindsets. Do you think it's a model you would teach in your classroom?

Source: www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-the-abcs-of-resilience-renee-jain

Links

- 1 www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/prpsum.htm
- 2 albertellis.org/

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