Building Resilience to Psychological Problems: Improving the Mental Health of Young People

Presented by
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Lifetime prevalence of mental illness in Australia is 45%

1 in 4 young people live with mental illness

Up to 75% of all mental issues first begin before the age of 24

Most common mental illnesses:
- mood disorders
- anxiety
- schizophrenia
- eating disorders

Ref: Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2011 “Young Australians: Their Health & Wellbeing 2011”
Topics

- Relationships between vulnerability, resilience and the development of mental health problems in young people
- Resilience concepts and domains
- ‘Headstrong’ - a school-based resilience training programs for young people and ‘Bite Back’ - a youth positive psychology online program
What does ‘resilience’ mean to a young person? (adapted from Rew et al., 2001)

- Dealing effectively with the everyday pressures and stresses of life e.g. academic, social (peer), family, technological, relationship, etc.
- Being able to deal with discrimination or rejection by others
- Recognising and acknowledging mental health issues, and willingness and ability to seek help when necessary
- Having a sense of optimism and hope
- Feeling connected to significant others, feeling connected to their social group
Global definitions of resilience are problematic

Definitions of resilience vary according to gender, lifespan stages and across cultural contexts

Definitions vary according to whether we are looking at individuals, groups and communities

Definitions depend upon perspective e.g. public health, schools, organisations, individuals, etc.
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Building Resilience: The Impact of Adversity
Dilemmas in resilience research

- Very little is known about how individuals transition through coping and adaptation, finally to becoming resilient.
- Recent research suggests that coping, adaptation and resilience is relatively common amongst children and adolescents exposed to disadvantage, trauma and adversity.
- Despite exposure to potentially traumatic events during their lifetimes most children do not go on to develop severe distress or psychopathology.
- We continue to know very little about the process of resilient adaptation through to adulthood.
Key vulnerabilities

- History of psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse (Beeghly & Cicchetti, 1994; Cichetti et al., 1992)
- Living in ‘violent’ or dysfunctional communities (Luthar, 1999; Richters & Martinez, 1993)
- Sense of displacement, lack of social supports, lack of a sense of belonging (Gonzalez et al., 1996; Baker & Bugay, 2011)
- Chronic alcohol and drug use, and alignment with these subcultures (Lloyd, 1998)
- Chronic and disruptive mental illness in parents/carers (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Abela et al., 2005)
- Family history of suicide (Runeson & Asberg, 2003)
Living within a hostile and/or critical home environment (Repetti et al., 2002)

Feeling that parents/carers lack warmth and/or care (Baumrind, 1991)

Lack of self discipline and/or difficulty in regulating emotions (Taylor et al., 2002)

Low IQ and learning difficulties (Masten et al., 1999; White et al., 1996)

Personality traits, temperaments and thinking styles (Parker & Manicavasagar, 2005; Campbell-Sills et al., 2006)

Significant adversity or traumatic events (O’Dougherty-Wright et al., 1997)
How can these vulnerabilities lead to mental health problems?

1. Dysfunctional attachments which lead to a sense of insecurity, lack of confidence and low self-esteem

2. Lack of opportunities to learn adaptive coping strategies (cognitive and behavioural). Lack of opportunities to build confidence in dealing with stresses

3. Learning and reinforcing of maladaptive coping styles

4. Social and culturally ‘normative’ behaviours which are maladaptive in other environments

5. Care-giver burden, exposure to overwhelming challenges that tax physical and mental resources
Increasing positive adaptation to stress

From ‘coping’ to ‘adapting’ and becoming more resilient
Coping

- Developing skills to regulate emotions
- Improving physical health
- Developing skills in goal-setting and problem-solving
- Improving communication and negotiation skills
- Learning skills in coorporation, sharing and compromising
- Setting boundaries and limits
- Asking for help where necessary (help-seeking)
Adapting

- Developing a vision of oneself in the immediate and far future that is consistent with one’s values and beliefs
- Developing a sense of attachment to family, sub-group and community
- Setting both long- and short-term goals and working towards these goals
- Incorporating life events (positive and negative) into one’s life story
- Developing a sense of personal control where appropriate. Recognising strengths and limitations
Becoming more Resilient

- Adapting to stresses in ways that are positive (e.g. adopting positive attitudes, engaging in proactive behaviours)
- Emotional/psychological growth as a consequence of exposure to stress (e.g. through reflection and learning)
- Focusing on personal strengths, talents and virtues (intrinsic attributes) – using these to address challenging life events
Long term effects

At the Individual Level

“The happy knack of bungy jumping through the pitfalls of life.’
(Andrew Fuller, 1998)

At a Group/Community Level

“...the universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity.” (Edith Grotberg, 1995)
Resilience Interventions: ‘Headstrong’ and ‘Bite Back’
The Black Dog Institute together with the Inspire Foundation have developed HEADSTRONG, a curriculum resource on mood disorders, mental health and resilience.

The HeadStrong curriculum resource aims to raise awareness and build understanding about mood disorders and the impact that they can have on young people.

This resource is free to download from the Blackdog Institute website: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
HeadStrong Curriculum Resource

- Focuses on teaching young people how to cope and adapt to stressors, and to recognise early warning signs of a mood disorder
- A creative way of thinking, talking & teaching about mood disorders for PDHPE teachers
- Easy to understand, implement, & teach ready-to-use activities with teacher development notes.
- Aligned to the NSW PDHPE curriculum (Years 9-10)
- National rollout until the end of 2014
- Professional development teacher training: one-day face to face workshops and webinars (online seminars)
Black Dog Institute Youth Website ‘BITE BACK’

- BITE BACK is a the new Black Dog Institute website for youth
- Young people can tell their personal stories, including their struggles and joys
- Specifically created for 12-18 year olds
- Focuses on teaching young people to become more resilient

www.biteback.org.au
‘Bite Back’ - aims and principles

- Online program to help develop skills in resilience and promote overall wellbeing
  - based on the principles of positive psychology - the science of optimal functioning.
  - For young people aged between 12 and 18, with priority for 14-16 year age group

- Key Principles:
  - Weave activities into daily life (away from the computer).
  - Balance fun with psychology
  - Recognise life difficulties alongside the positive things
  - Ensure full anonymity, whilst allowing community interaction
  - Provide varying levels of challenges to suit differing maturity levels
Bite Back Domains

Focuses on 9 positive psychology domains:

1. Mindfulness
2. Meaning
3. Gratitude
4. Flow
5. Social relationships
6. Optimism
7. Character strengths
8. Hope
9. Healthy lifestyles
Activities

Thank Tank
Record 3 things that you are grateful for (can be funny, unusual or serious). Share or keep private. Encourage once a week for best results. Hope to introduce SMS and email submissions in future
*Domain: Gratitude*

Real Stories
Share and read stories about overcoming difficult times, your best day etc.
*Domain: Not specific*

Snap That!
Scavenger hunt concept where you can hunt, find and take photos of things in your life (according to predefined themes). Upload photo to site and obtain the next theme. Share or keep private.
*Domain: Mindfulness*

In the Zone
Listen to interviews to learn about flow and how different people (incl. famous people) experience this. Participate in online discussions about flow.
*Domain: Flow*

Power Up
Meditation tracks that utilse taste, sound, sight, touch and smell. You can participate in 7, 14 or 21 day challenges and share your learnings with the community.
*Domain: Mindfulness*
Resilience can be conceptualised in multiple ways and from several different perspectives.

The path to resilience can be understood as a process from learning to cope and adapt to stress (chronic and/or acute).

Research on ‘vulnerability’ indicates that there are multiple ways in which an individual may be affected by stressful life experiences.

Intervening variables (process variables) may be responsible for moving individuals through the different stages of coping, adapting, and becoming more resilient.
Youth Professional CPD Workshops

- Bumps in the Road: Recognising and Diagnosing Mood Disorders (6-hr)
- Practical Resilience Building Strategies for Young People (3-hr)
- Managing Bipolar Disorder in Young People (3-hr)
- Tackling Teenage Depression (3-hr)
- Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents (3-hr)
- Pathways to Building Resilience in Young People (1-hr)
- Understanding Bipolar Disorder in Young People (1-hr)

Contact us: education@blackdog.org.au

See the Health Professional section of the website
Thank you!