



Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT

Promoting Resilience in Young Children

RIRO Resiliency Guidebook



Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT

*... helping children learn to Reach IN to think more flexibly
and accurately and Reach OUT to others and opportunities.*



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Resiliency Guidebook

**“Bounce back” thinking skills for
children and adults**

written by
Jennifer Pearson
Darlene Kordich Hall, R.N., Ph.D.
April 2006



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About the Guidebook

The information in this *Guidebook* comes from Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT (RIRO), an evidence-based skills training program designed to promote resilience in young children. RIRO's program is based on a formally evaluated adaptation of the University of Pennsylvania's renowned Penn Resilience Program for school-age children. RIRO helps adults and children "reach in" to think more flexibly and accurately and "reach out" to others and opportunities.

The *Guidebook* was created to increase awareness in child-serving professionals of the importance of promoting resilience in children through adult modelling of resilient thinking and behaviour.

The *Guidebook* is divided into three sections:

- Section 1: Resiliency Guides
- Section 2: Helping Children Become More Resilient
- Section 3: About Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT

Each guide in Sections 1 and 2 is followed by a brief summary to aid professionals 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 stress and adversity and take on new challenges. Thirty 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, maintaining realistic optimism, self-efficacy, and reaching out. **Guide 2** presents detailed information about these resiliency abilities and gives strategies to help children develop in these key areas.

Research suggests that the way we think about challenges and adversity influences whether or not we handle setbacks in a resilient manner. Thinking skills that help us respond resiliently to daily adversity and stress can be learned. **Guides 3 to 7** present information about some of the skills of resilient thinking.

Resiliency thinking skills can be absorbed by children from an early age. Children as young as two years can mimic the thinking style of the adults around them. Resiliency thinking skills can promote the development of strategies that can help children bounce back from life's inevitable pressures and prevent them from developing life views that may lead to depression.



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 the activities, research findings, training programs, and dissemination activities of Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT. Early childhood educators have told us that, since receiving training in the Penn Resilience Program model, their approach and language have changed when talking with children about conflict situations and daily frustrations. Before the training, they typically asked children only about their feelings when there was stress or conflict; now they also ask about the children's thinking. ECEs have found that resiliency skills have helped them handle stress more effectively, role model more resilient thinking and behaviour during their everyday interactions with children, and introduce child-friendly resiliency skills activities to young children.



About the Authors

Jennifer Pearson, a Clinical Member of the Ontario Society of Psychotherapists, works in private practice and in the community. For RIRO, Jennifer consulted with teachers in RIRO's pilot centres to adapt the Penn Resilience Program for work with children under six years of age. Jennifer co-developed the RIRO training program and is the lead skills training scriptwriter. Jennifer has directed several teaching videos, including RIRO's documentary and skills training video, and is the co-developer of a number of programs designed to develop personal strengths in children, teachers, and parents. Her work includes programs in family resilience, trauma assessment, and arts-based prevention/intervention designed to support pro-social change in children with aggressive behaviour. Jennifer is published in the areas of resilience and arts-based work with aggressive and at-risk children, and has extensive experience as a presenter and trainer in education and mental health settings.

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SECTION 1

Resiliency Guides

Guide 1

Resilience—a brief overview



Families today are exposed to high levels of daily stress, and the incidence of childhood depression is increasing.¹⁶ Despite our best efforts, we cannot prevent adversity and stress. We can, however, learn to be more resilient by changing how we think about challenges and adversities.^{16,18,19}

What is resilience?

The definition of resilience varies in different cultures and contexts, but it generally refers to one's ability to "cope well with adversity"²⁵ and "persevere and adapt when things go awry."¹⁶

Resilience helps people deal with stress and adversity, overcome childhood disadvantage, and reach out to new opportunities.¹⁴ In addition, more than thirty years of research shows that people who are resilient are healthier, live longer, are more successful in school and at work, are happier in relationships, and are less prone to depression.^{16,28}

What role does our thinking play in being resilient?

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 daily bumps in the road.

Some people feel helpless in the face of stress and adversity, so they easily give up attempts to change or improve the situation. Other people hold more resilient views. They see situations as challenges or problems that can be solved if they look for options and keep trying.^{3,28}

Studies show that people who manage stress and adversity best have 3 Cs in common:^{11,12}

- **Control:** a belief in their ability to take charge of the controllable aspects of a situation and "influence a more 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.^{16,18,19}

Resilient thinking can be learned.

How can children's resilience be promoted?

Programs to promote resilience in children have existed since the 1970s. These have focused primarily on building self-esteem, increasing school readiness, and supporting the parent-child relationship.^{10,13,28} Most promotion efforts, however, have tended to overlook the importance of thinking processes in the development of resilience and the handling of stress and adversity.

Resiliency skills that help develop accurate and flexible thinking can be absorbed by children from an early age and can optimize the development of resilience.^{19,21} It makes good sense, then, to introduce resiliency-building strategies to children as early as possible in order to help them deal with inevitable adversity and inoculate them against depression.

What role does adult modelling play in children's ability to develop resilient thinking patterns?

Warm, caring adults—whether they are parents, teachers, or other caregivers—who model resilient thinking in the face of daily stresses 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 responding to stressors. Even children two and three years old are able to mimic the thinking styles of caregivers around them.¹⁹



Just as children develop language in a “language-rich” environment, so they will develop the skills of resilience in a “resilience-rich” environment. Research has provided us with the direction and tools to create that environment so that we can put ourselves and our children on the pathway to a resilient future.

Please visit www.reachinginreachingout.com, RIRO’s website, to view a short video on resilience (Skills Video 1).

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?

Resilience is generally defined as the ability to “cope well with adversity” and “persevere and adapt when things go awry.”

Research tells us that resilient people

- are healthier and live longer
- are more successful in school and jobs
- are happier in relationships
- are less prone to depression

Resilience helps people

- deal with stress and adversity
- overcome childhood disadvantage
- reach out to new opportunities

What role does thinking play in being resilient?

- The way we think about daily stress and challenges directly affects our resilience.
- A resilient perspective is based on *accurate* and *flexible* thinking.
- We can become more resilient by changing how we think about challenges and adversity.

Thinking skills that promote resilience can be learned.

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 responses of caregivers around them.
- Adults who model resilient responses to daily stresses and challenges create a “resilience-rich” environment in which children can develop resilient thinking and coping strategies.

Guide 2

Critical abilities associated with resilience



What are some critical abilities associated with resilience, and how can we help children develop them?

According to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, thinking processes directly affect several critical abilities linked with resilience.¹⁶ Developing and maintaining these resiliency abilities is an ongoing process that helps us and the children we work with find ways to bounce back from daily stresses 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 negative emotions or keep them inside. Expressing emotions, both negative and positive, is healthy and constructive. Being in charge of our emotions is about calming 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 emotional 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 while all feelings are acceptable, 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, but 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 to help children (and adults) be in charge of their emotions is the old tried and true method of taking three deep breaths. When we slowly breathe in to the count of three and out to

the count of three a few times in a row, we experience an amazing calming effect. We can ask small children to imagine blowing up balloons, filling their bellies with air, and then blowing out into the balloons.

Dr. Andrew Shatté, resiliency researcher and co-author of *The Resilience Factor*, says that emotional regulation is the most important ability associated with resilience.¹⁶ 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 take action. For example, when we become angry, we may want to shout and get into an argument. Impulse control enables us to stop ourselves and decide that these actions may not help the situation—in fact, they could make matters worse.

Controlling our impulses helps us finish what we set out to do and plan for the future. Impulse control is also the ability to delay gratification—to control our impulse to have something right now just because we want it.

The "Marshmallow Experiment," an interesting study about delaying gratification, was done in the 1960s by researchers at a preschool on the Stanford University campus. The researchers invited four-year-olds into a room and told them, *"You can have this marshmallow right now, but if you wait until I come back from running an errand, you can have two marshmallows."* When a follow-up study was done



fourteen years later, the researchers found that the four-year-olds who were able to wait and not eat the marshmallow right away were better able to cope with the frustrations of life and were doing better academically and socially in their teen years.²²

We can help young children develop impulse control by modelling it ourselves and acknowledging their achievements when they control their impulses. For example, we can say, *"You did it! It was really hard to wait, but you did it!"*

Impulse control and emotional regulation are closely related. Both are very important to resiliency development. Once we have these two abilities under our belts, the other abilities follow more easily.

Ability 3. Causal Analysis

Causal analysis is the ability to analyze a problem and accurately decide what its cause is. 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 problems, we may not be accurate about the causes of the problems. Resilient thinking allows us to be flexible—to step back and assess problems 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 negative situation is temporary and affects only a specific part of our lives helps us feel less overwhelmed. When a negative situation is actually permanent and affects many aspects of our lives, resilient 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, 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 changed by first acknowledging the child's feeling and then offering a gentle reminder like, *"Remember, yesterday you and Alicia played together with Sunny 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 changed by reminding the child of past achievements: *"You seem frustrated right now, but remember, you thought you would never be able to put on your jacket without my help and now you can do it all by yourself!"*





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 turning a blind eye to 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 aspects¹⁶ (p. 56)." It is the ability to work toward positive outcomes with the knowledge that they don't happen automatically, but are achieved through 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 the growth of resilience.

Ability 6. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the feeling of being effective in the world—making a difference, having an impact. It is the belief that what we do matters. People who possess self-efficacy believe that they have what it takes to tackle most of the problems they face and bounce back when things get tough. This attitude influences their 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—that we all need support from others sometimes.

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 list of children's storybooks that promote the resiliency abilities, see page 46.

Summary of Guide 2

Critical abilities associated with resilience



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; also the ability to delay gratification and persevere
- **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 and handle stress; the ability to 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 under stress, 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 just sit and wait, while still another will be flooded with anxiety about being late. Why do people have different reactions to adversity and stress?

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 adversity and stress. Research tells us that our reactions are based on our thoughts about the adversity.

When adversity happens, the first thing we try to do is explain to ourselves why it happened. Our beliefs about the cause of the adversity set off our reaction—how we feel and what we do.

The ABC model

Psychologist and researcher Dr. Albert Ellis created the ABC model to help us understand the meaning of our reactions to adversity:

- A is the adversity—the situation or event.
- B is our belief—our explanation about why the situation happened.
- C is the consequence—the feelings and behaviours that our belief causes.

Adversity → Beliefs → Consequences

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 gets very sad, doesn't go out jogging, and eats a whole box of candy instead.



So what are the ABCs in this scenario?

Adversity = didn't get invited to the party to which her friend was invited

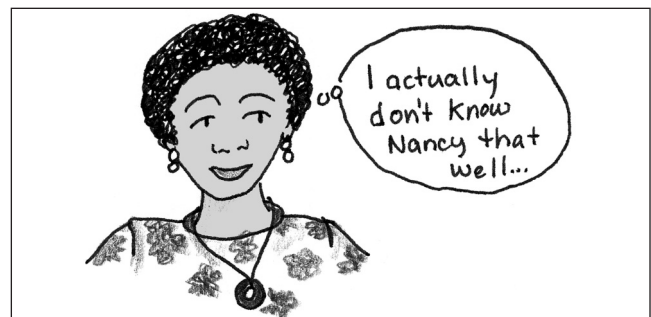
Beliefs = "I am such a loser—nobody likes me."

Consequences = feels sad, even depressed. Has no motivation to go jogging and eats a whole box of chocolates despite her focus on healthier living.

Here is another reaction:

Here's an ABC showing how another person, Anna, reacts 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. She goes for a run, stops at a video store to rent a new comedy, and calls a girlfriend to come and watch it.



The adversity (A) remains the same, but Anna's belief (B) is different. Thinking that she wasn't invited because "I actually don't know Nancy very well" helps Anna let go of initial feelings of disappointment, do things that help her feel more positive about herself, and enjoy the rest of the day (C). Using the ABC



model can help us develop key resilience abilities discussed in Guide 2, such as emotional regulation, impulse control, causal analysis, and empathy.

HOW TO USE THE ABC MODEL

Vividly recall a recent adverse event. After recording the A, fill in the C, then the B. Or, you might follow an ABC order. Choose the method that works best for you.

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

B-C connections

Drs. Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté, authors of *The Resilience Factor*, have created a useful tool to help people identify their beliefs when they are doing the ABC model. The tool, shown in the following chart, outlines the links between specific beliefs and emotions that people predictably and universally experience. The authors of the “B-C Connections” have charted only the “negative” emotions, as they are commonly the ones we experience in times of adversity.

COMMON B-C CONNECTIONS

Beliefs	Consequences (emotions)
violation of our rights	→ anger
actual loss or loss of self-worth	→ sadness, depression
future threat	→ anxiety, fear
violation of another’s rights	→ guilt
loss of standing with others	→ embarrassment

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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. A belief involving loss causes sadness, perhaps even depression. A belief that something negative is going to happen (future threat) leaves us feeling anxious and fearful.

How can we use the B-C connections to identify our beliefs?

Sometimes it’s hard to identify our *beliefs*; we often have more experience labelling our *feelings*. The B-C connections can be used in reverse to help us identify our beliefs. For example, feelings of guilt are often aroused when we believe that we have violated another person’s rights. We feel embarrassed if we believe that we have lost standing in another’s eyes. B-C connections help us increase our self-awareness—an important first step to a resilient response to adversity.

Refer to Section 2, “Helping Children Become More Resilient,” for information about using B-C connections with children.

Please visit www.reachinginreachingout.com, the RIRO website, for a brief video on the ABC model (Skills Video 2).

What do teachers say about using the ABC model and B-C connections?

Using the ABC model helped me recognize 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 ABC 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 beliefs 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 beliefs or thoughts about adversity cause our reactions—how we feel and what we do in stressful situations.
- Psychologist Dr. Albert Ellis developed the ABC model to help us understand the connection between adversity (A), our beliefs (B), and our emotional and behavioural responses (C).

Adversity → Beliefs → Consequences (feelings and actions)

- Sometimes our beliefs about a situation are not accurate, and our reactions undermine resilient responses.
- We can use the ABC model to identify our beliefs and, if necessary, challenge whether they are true.
- Using B-C connections can help us identify our beliefs. If we know what our emotional reactions are, we can identify what types of beliefs we may have, e.g., sadness = loss; anxiety = future threat; anger = violation of our rights.

COMMON B-C CONNECTIONS

Beliefs	Consequences (emotions)
violation of our rights	anger
actual loss or loss of self-worth	sadness, depression
future threat	anxiety, fear
violation of another's rights	guilt
loss of standing with others	embarrassment

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Guide 4

Explanatory 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 explanatory [thinking] style.¹⁶

What is “explanatory style”?

Researchers have found that how people explain their successes and failures influences whether they persevere or give up when faced with adversity.²⁶

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 the reasons for things that happened to them, and 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 styles can help or hinder our ability to respond resiliently to inevitable bumps in the road.¹⁸

How does our explanatory style affect our resilience?

Our explanatory 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 are often self-defeating.”¹⁶

Our explanatory style may be the same at home, at work, and on the social scene, or it may vary according to our roles in these environments. The important thing about explanatory 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 look for answers to three questions when trying to make sense of what happened to them. These questions relate to what Seligman calls the three

dimensions of explanatory style: personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness.^{16,18}

■ Personalization:

Who caused the problem?
Me/Not me

■ Permanence:

How long will this problem last?
Always/Not always

■ Pervasiveness:

How much of my life does this problem 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 responses again to help us understand the concept of explanatory 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 this adversity was:

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

This explanation is typical of “Me/Always/Everything” thinking—an explanatory pattern related to “pessimistic” thinking. Researchers say that this kind of thinking can lead to a loss of hope and to depression among people who habitually use it in response to adversity.

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. She believes that she never gets invitations because no one likes her.

People who habitually take things personally often believe that negative 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. It is hard to respond resiliently to daily stresses with “Me/Always/Everything” habits of thinking.

Thinking habits associated with aggression

“Not me/Always/Everything” thinking can also restrict resilient responses to adversity. People with “Not me” thinking have a habit of blaming others or taking little responsibility for adversity. If “Not me” thinking is paired with “Always” and “Everything” thinking, people typically view situations as permanent and affecting many aspects of their lives. They 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, or cause them to lash out at others. An extreme version of this pattern is sometimes seen in people who act out or engage in delinquent behaviour.²¹

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, might explain why she wasn’t invited to a party to which her friend was invited:

Janice always gets invited to things; I never do. When Janice and her friend Nancy get together, they are such snobs. Katina becomes angry, phones Nancy, 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 she goes to bed without eating.



Katina gets angry because she blames the situation on Nancy and Janice. 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 explanatory 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. She goes for a run, stops at a video store to rent a new comedy, and calls a girlfriend to come and watch it.

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, or “Not always,” thinking that she might be included in a future social event when she and Nancy know each other better. Anna’s “Not everything” belief about this adversity shows that other aspects of her life are not affected. She continues with her healthy lifestyle activities and her relationships with other people.



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 in all situations run the risk of losing out on genuine relationships, since their cheerful outlook might ignore difficult issues that exist between themselves and others. In addition, they may be doing themselves a disservice during other times of serious adversity, such as when they are experiencing acute health problems, if 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 explanatory style and restrict our resilience.

WHAT'S YOUR EXPLANATORY (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 problems will be permanent and all encompassing? (“Always/Everything” thinking)
- Do I typically look for aspects of problems that are temporary and specific? (“Not always/Not everything” thinking)

Refer to Section 2, Helping Children Become More Resilient, for suggestions and activities concerning children’s emerging explanatory styles.

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

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)

Summary of Guide 4

Explanatory style—thinking habits that affect our resilience



What is explanatory style?

Research shows that how people *explain* their successes and failures influences whether they persevere or give up when faced with adversity.

Social psychologist and researcher Dr. Martin Seligman says that people develop *habits of explanation* that become preferred ways of viewing the world. He calls these thinking habits our “*explanatory styles*.” These habits can help or hinder our ability to respond resiliently to adversity.

How does our explanatory style affect our resilience?

Explanatory 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 unconsciously look at the three dimensions of explanatory style—personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness—when trying to make meaning of the things that happen to them.

- **Personalization:** Who caused the problem?
Me/Not me
- **Permanence:** How long will this problem last?
Always/Not always
- **Pervasiveness:** How much of my life does this problem affect?
Everything/Not everything

Our explanatory style is a mix of these three dimensions. Each style is associated with a typical response to stress. Here are a few examples of explanatory 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 resilience, we need to challenge our explanatory styles on each dimension by thinking accurately and flexibly about each situation we face.

Challenging explanatory style → Increased resilience

Guide 5

Thinking Traps



In Guide 4, we discussed how our thinking habits affect our explanations of why situations occur, and our predictions of what will happen next. In this guide, we'll deal more specifically with common thinking errors and how they contribute to the development of our explanatory 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.¹⁶ As we discussed in Guide 1, it is this accurate and flexible thinking that helps us bounce back from stress 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.¹⁶

- 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. When externalizing becomes a habit, it leads to "Not Me" thinking, which 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 professional 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, after a long, difficult conversation with a friend, we might feel relieved that we've resolved a problem between us. 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 tells us that s/he 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 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. Alternatively, we might view a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Overgeneralizing can lead to an overly 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 worse case scenario:

The fact that I didn't get a promotion means that my supervisor doesn't like me. And that means that I'll never get promoted at work. And that means 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 always have to live with family. 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 K. Reivich and A. Shatté.



Common Thinking Traps & Explanatory Style Links

Thinking Traps	Description	Examples
Jumping to Conclusions	Making assumptions with little or no evidence to back them up (All thinking traps involve making assumptions.)	Martha comes home, the house is quiet, and the living room is a mess even though her significant other was home all day. She thinks, <i>"Well, looks like he's gone out and left the mess for me."</i> He calls downstairs, <i>"Martha, I'm in bed—got the flu."</i>
Personalizing (<i>"Me"</i> thinking)	Blaming oneself for problems for which one is not primarily responsible	<i>"The kids are so hyper today. I'm just not cut out for this kind of work."</i>
Externalizing (<i>"Not me"</i> thinking)	Blaming others for things for which they are not primarily responsible	<i>"If she had pulled her weight, our team would have come out on top."</i>
Mind Reading (Contributes to <i>"Me"/</i> <i>"Not me"</i> and <i>"Always/</i> <i>Everything"</i> thinking)	Assuming we know what another person(s) is thinking Expecting another person to know what we are thinking	<i>"I just know that they are talking about me right now."</i> <i>"If he really cared, he'd know that I'm too tired to go out tonight."</i>
Emotional Reasoning (Contributes to <i>"Me"/</i> <i>"Not me"</i> and <i>"Always/</i> <i>Everything"</i> thinking)	Making an assumption about an experience based on feelings rather than facts. Linked to thoughts of <i>"I should"</i> or <i>"they should."</i>	Jan looks around at her untidy house and feels overwhelmed by the prospect of cleaning it: <i>"I should be able to keep things orderly, but it's hopeless. Why even try?"</i>
Overgeneralizing (Contributes to <i>"Me"/</i> <i>"Not me"</i> and <i>"Always/</i> <i>Everything"</i> thinking)	Making an assumption about someone (or a situation) based on only one or two experiences Assuming the cause of a problem is due to a character flaw instead of a person's behaviour	<i>"People like her can't be trusted."</i> <i>"I am such a loser. I can't do anything right." OR</i> <i>"S/he is such a jerk."</i>
Magnifying/Minimizing (Contributes to <i>"Always/</i> <i>Everything"</i> and <i>"Me"/</i> <i>"Not me"</i> thinking)	Magnifying the <i>negative</i> aspects of a situation and minimizing the <i>positive</i> parts Magnifying the <i>positive</i> aspects and ignoring the <i>negative</i>	James was laughing and playing during outside play, but told his mom, <i>"My day was terrible. Ben only wanted to play with Zach."</i> Jenna's oldest and best friend leaves a message saying she's really upset with her. Jenna thinks, <i>"We are such good friends; it can't be anything serious. She's probably just tired."</i>
Catastrophizing (Contributes to <i>"Always/</i> <i>Everything"</i> thinking)	Exaggerating the likelihood that something bad will happen, or exaggerating how bad it will be	<i>"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"</i>



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: "Johnny and Alba won't play with 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 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 Become More Resilient, 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 false conclusion about a situation based on how we *feel* as opposed to outside 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 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 beliefs 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 beliefs 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 gathers more accurate and flexible evidence to challenge her beliefs:

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 playing with Lisa in the kitchen centre.

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 beliefs, 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.

Explanatory style dimensions as a guide for challenging our beliefs

We can also challenge our thinking habits and traps by regularly asking ourselves questions related to the three dimensions of explanatory style:

Personalization: Who caused the problem?

Ask yourself, "Who is actually responsible? Me? Not me?" It's important to remember that most stressful situations are not 100% the result of just one person. Some problems may be due to you and your actions, but others are not. Then, 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 to challenge “Me”/“Not me” beliefs. Ask yourself, *“How much of the pie is my responsibility? How much of the pie is the responsibility 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? Always? Not always?

Ask yourself, *“Is this stress really going to last forever?”* Sometimes, it feels like the stress will *never* end. Some stressful situations are permanent, but many are temporary.

Then ask yourself, *“Can I see an end to the stress?”* In the case of temporary situations, such as completing overdue reports or soothing an overwrought child, being accurate about how long the situation may last makes it feel less overwhelming.

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? Everything? Not everything?

Ask yourself, *“Is this stress really going to affect everything in my life? What areas will not be 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 areas of our lives that are affected by the stress, because then 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 the situation. This helps us develop other ways of dealing with the situation.

Refer to Section 2, Helping Children Become More Resilient, 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 beliefs?

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 beliefs promotes resilience



How can we challenge our beliefs 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 really mine?*
Most stresses are not 100% the result of one person's failings or actions.
 - *Is this stress really going to last forever? Can I see an end to the stress?*
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 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.¹⁶

What is it like to experience an iceberg belief?

Iceberg beliefs cause intense feelings

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 that way, but I just couldn’t help it!!!!

I don’t even really 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?”



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.

Icebergs cause mismatches between B-C connections

Iceberg beliefs can cause the connections between our beliefs and feelings to seem “out of sync” with the universal and predictable B-C connections discussed in Guide 3, on page 10. Here’s an example of a B-C 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.”



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, if one person believes “It’s important to be liked by everyone,” s/he may not express any opinions that might 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 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**.¹⁶ 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, do an ABC of the event.
- Then, ask these three questions
 - 1) Are my Cs out of proportion with my Bs?
 - 2) Is there a B-C 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 “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 the belief from your ABC 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.

For a comprehensive explanation of how to detect your iceberg beliefs, see Chapter 6 of *The Resilience Factor* by K. Reivich and A. 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 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 surface beliefs (B) and emotions (C), 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.

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 Become More Resilient

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 section, 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 adversity and stress. Therefore, 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 social perceptions, as well as their abilities to regulate their emotions and develop a capacity for interpersonal communication.²³

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.²⁹ 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.¹⁵

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.⁵

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 children six years and under by providing them with opportunities to:

- 1) experience true **mastery**
- 2) gain a perspective of "**positivity**"
- 3) **observe adults modelling** resilient explanatory styles¹⁹

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 s/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.
- **"grading" the experience**—providing children with opportunities that challenge them, but that are within their ability, for example, a child accomplishes the task of dressing for outdoor activities in the 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 didn'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 ABC 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 ABC model. I asked them why some children were upset so often because of the Magic Board. With this question, they identified the Adversity (A) and their Beliefs (B). Almost everybody said that they couldn't get turns (A) and they thought it was unfair (B). When asked how they felt when they couldn't get a turn, they identified the Consequence (C). 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 s/he 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 ABC an adversity, 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 it 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 preschoolers 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!”*

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 situations of adversity don’t have to last forever, which reduces “Always” thinking. It also demonstrates that stressful 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: *"Before, I felt angry. Then I took three deep breaths and counted to five. Now I feel calmer. That helps me talk nicely to my friends."*



- 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 verbalize non-resilient thinking statements based on our explanatory styles.

Some children, due to their temperament, find it more challenging than others to calm themselves and bounce back from 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.

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 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 children six years and under develop self-efficacy by providing them with opportunities to

- **experience true mastery**—offering choices, providing children with measured risks, 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 help them own their accomplishments
- **observe adults modelling positive explanatory styles**—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 resilient responses.

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

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 recent study by Dr. John Abela, of McGill University, supports the need to help children challenge their emerging explanatory beliefs. 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.¹ 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 recommends that schools offer this type of training to help children handle daily stresses and to reduce the risk of childhood depression.²

How do we challenge children's non-resilient thinking patterns?

Challenging children's emerging explanatory styles involves helping them develop more accurate and flexible thinking. We can start by first acknowledging their feelings, then gently challenging their assessments of situations. Here's an example:

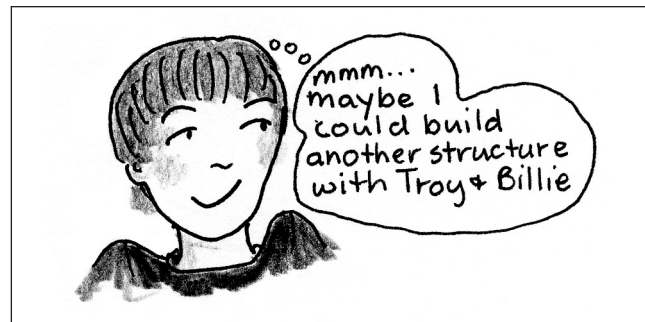
David and Maurico are friends, who've been playing together all morning. After lunch, Maurico is playing on a teeter-totter with Robert. When David tries to join them, they tell him only two can play on the teeter-totter.

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 explanatory 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.

Narrator: 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.”)

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 violence.
 - "Me/Always/Everything" explanatory styles can lead to depression.
 - "Not me/Always/Everything" explanatory styles can lead to aggression.
- Challenging children's *emerging* explanatory 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 ABC model—using B-C connections with children



As we discussed in Guide 3, sometimes it's hard to identify our *beliefs*. We often have more experience labelling our *feelings*. The B-C connections can be used in reverse to help us identify *our* beliefs and the beliefs that drive *children's* feelings and behaviour.

Andrea, a teacher who works with toddlers, explains how using the B-C connections in reverse helped her deal with a two-year-old child's outburst as the group prepared to go outside to play:

The B-C 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. By getting a hold on his emotion—the C part of the ABC model—I could get a hold on the B part 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 (C), so I “guessed” that he believed his rights were being violated (B). He'd been so content playing with the blocks that, when he was told that he had to stop, 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 B-C connections to help children express their beliefs:

B-C 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 the belief. I learned this approach could be used in everyday problem solving.

In the box below, you'll find guidelines to help you analyze the B-C connections you see in a particular child and to create interventions to help him/her.

B-C 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 B-C connections might be operating? For example, if the child generally responds to situations with anger (C), is it possible that s/he feels as if her/his rights are being violated (B)?
- 3) Use your assessment of the B-C connections to develop a plan to help the child cope more effectively with stresses that s/he encounters on a daily basis.
 - 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 stress. Use “Where?” “When?” and “What?” as guidelines for your plan.

B-C connections—make a guess, then observe again

When we use B-C connections with children, it's very important to check our “guesses” about the children's beliefs by continuing to observe their interactions and reactions. The following case study illustrates how one teacher used the B-C connections to focus her observations and further understand a child's behaviour.



CASE EXAMPLE: USING B-C 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 B-C 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 B-C 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 behaviour

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 use his own controls with just a visual cue from me.

What do teachers say about using the B-C connections with children?

*B-C connections can help teachers identify the usually unseen B in a child. Once the B is identified, it's easier to understand the C.
—AZ (kindergarten/preschool)*

After analyzing children's behaviour using B-C 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 ABC model—using B-C connections with children



- Adults can use the “B-C connections” in reverse to help understand the beliefs that drive children’s feelings and behaviours.
- By observing children’s behaviours and identifying their feelings (the Cs), we can “guess” what their belief (B) 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 B-C connections helps adults
 - analyze the cause of a problem
 - design appropriate interventions
 - engage in a step-by-step approach to help children develop more resilient approaches

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."*¹⁹

Yet, often when we ask children, *"Why do you think that happened?" "What do you think about that?"* or *"Tell me what you are thinking,"* 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 behaviours.

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?"
- "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 their beliefs 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.

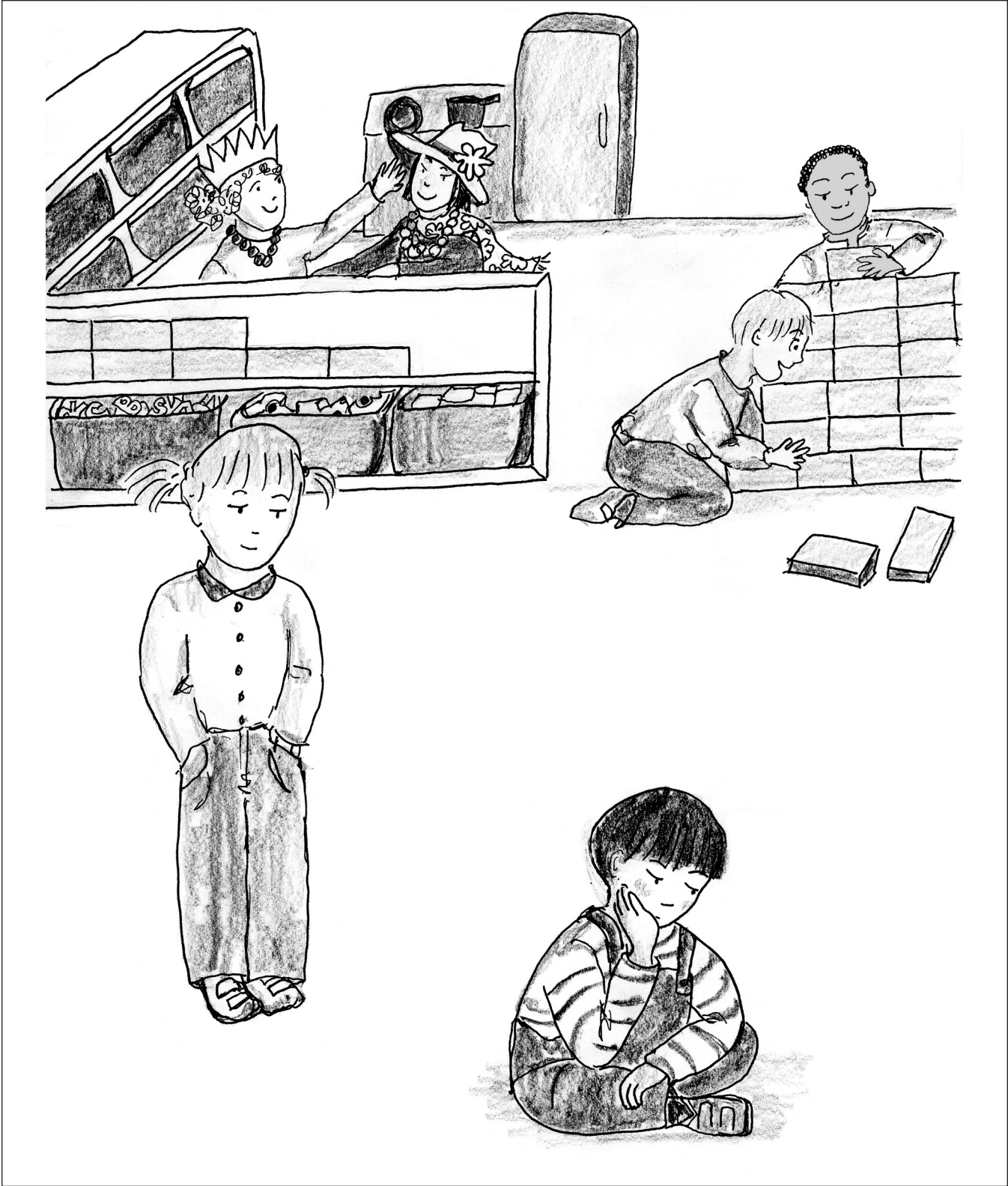
PEOPLE IN PICTURES: LET'S MAKE A STORY!

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 B-C connections.)
 - *What could the people in the story be "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 B-C 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.)
- 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.

Children love to listen to stories. Not only can literature be used to help children articulate their beliefs and expose them to others' thoughts and feelings, it can be used to help children challenge their assumptions and biases, and discover new ways to overcome obstacles and deal with the inevitable challenges of life.

Following this guide is a list of children's storybooks that relate to the critical resiliency abilities discussed in Guide 2. This list is just a starter. You probably have your own 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.

Highlighting storybook characters' resiliency abilities provides children with examples to emulate. 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.

We encourage you to share your favourite stories about resilience. E-mail your suggestions to us at info@reachinginreachingout.com, and we'll add them to RIRO's website.

What do educators say about using stories and actively promoting a resilient view with very 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, we actually could tap into and see the pattern of beliefs 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 feelings and behaviours

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 resilience. 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 the inevitable challenges of life.

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.

Children's Storybooks that Promote Resilience



The themes in these storybooks relate to **seven abilities** associated with *resilience* in children. Most of these books are available in public libraries or through online booksellers.

Letters in parentheses after each book's title indicate which of the seven resiliency abilities are highlighted in the book.

KEY: (ER) = emotional regulation
(IC) = impulse control
(CA) = causal analysis
(SE) = self-efficacy
(E) = empathy
(O) = optimism
(RO) = reaching out

Aliki
Feelings (ER) (IC)
Mulberry Paperback Book, 1984

Pictures, poems, and stories portray various emotions, including jealousy, anger, fear, joy, and excitement.

Asch, Frank
Moondance (ER) (IC) (O) (RO)
Scholastic Inc., 1993

Little Bird helps his friend Bear challenge some negative beliefs and follow his desire to dance with the clouds, the rain, and the moon.

Blake, Quentin
Mr. Magnolia (O)
William Collins Sons & Co., 1980

Mr. Magnolia's positive attitude helps him cope with having only one boot to wear, as he focuses on all the other things he *does* have.

Bottner, Barbara
Bootsie Barker Bites (SE)
G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1992

A shy girl is intimidated and terrorized by a bully named Bootsie until she stands up to Bootsie and discovers the bully is really a chicken.

Buchanan, Joan
It's a Good Thing (O) (SE)
Annick Press, 1984

Daydreamer Marie finds her competence when she saves her sister from an icy river.

Bunting, Eve
The Pumpkin Fair (SE) (RO)
Clarion Books, 1997

A young girl feels pride and a sense of accomplishment when she wins a prize for the best pumpkin in the show at the annual fair.

Burningham, John
Mr. Gumpy's Outing (IC) (CA)
Holt, 1970

Mr. Gumpy and his animal friends learn what happens in an overcrowded boat.

Burningham, John
Would You Rather ... (SE) (CA)
Random House Children's Books, 1994

A source for discussion about making choices and the consequences of the decisions.



Carle, Eric
Little Cloud (ER)
Philomel Books, 1996

It's calming to watch the different pictures and shapes formed by moving clouds.

Carle, Eric
The Very Busy Spider (SE) (RO)
Philomel, 1984

A spider works hard to create his web.

Carlson, Nancy
Harriet and the Roller Coaster (ER) (SE)
Puffin Books, 1982

Harriet is afraid to ride the roller coaster, but she faces her fear and has a wonderful time.

Cole, Babette
Three Cheers for Errol! (CA) (SE) (RO)
Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd., 1989

Young rat Errol is a talented, persistent athlete who creatively overcomes the mean-spirited competition at the annual ratathlon.

Feelings, Tom
Daydreamers (ER) (O) (SE)
Dial Books, 1981

Simple poetry voices the benefits of daydreaming to maintain hope, and to develop and mature.

Foon, Dennis
The Short Tree and the Bird that Could Not Sing (O) (E) (RO)
Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1986

A short, lonely tree becomes friends with an out-of-tune songbird when they accept each others' shortcomings and focus on the things they like about each other.

Freymann, Saxton and Joost Elffers
How Are You Peeling? Foods with Moods (ER) (E)
Arthur A. Levine Books, 1999

Real fruits and vegetables are creatively used to show a range of emotional expressions.

Gilmore, Rachna
A Gift for Gita (ER) (SE)
Second Story Press, 1998

A young immigrant girl misses her grandmother who remained in India, but finds comfort remembering what they did together.

Hastings, Selina
Peter and the Wolf (CA)
Walker Books, 1991

Peter uses his wits and problem-solving skills to protect his farm animals from a hungry wolf.

Hazen, Barbara Shook
Stay Fang (ER) (SE)
Atheneum Books, 1990

A young boy learns from his dog how to face disappointment.

Henke, Kevin
Bailey Goes Camping (ER) (CA)
Greenwillow Books, 1985

Bailey is too young to join his brother's activities, but his parents help him cope with disappointment by creating an imaginary camping experience at home.

Henke, Kevin
Chester's Way (RO)
Penguin Books, 1989

Two mouse friends develop flexibility by accepting a new mouse in the neighbourhood even though she does things differently.



Henke, Kevin
Chrysanthemum (O)
Greenwillow Books, 1991

Adult support helps Chrysanthemum when her peers tease her because of her name.

Henke, Kevin
Sheila Rae, the Brave (SE) (RO)
Mulberry Books, 1987

Brave Sheila Rae suddenly finds herself lost and afraid. Her usually timid sister assumes a brave persona and helps Sheila get back home.

Hughes, Shirley
Alfie Gets in First (ER) (CA)
Mulberry Press, 1981

When Alfie inadvertently locks his Mom and baby sister outside, he finds a way to solve the problem.

Hutchins, Pat
The Doorbell Rang (IC)
Greenwillow Books, 1986

Young children figure out how to share cookies as more and more friends come to call.

Lalli, Judy
I Like Being Me (ER) (CA) (E) (SE)
Free Spirit Publishing, 1997

A collection of poems about being kind, solving problems, learning from mistakes, telling the truth, dealing with feelings, and more.

Leghorn, Lindsay
Proud of our Feelings (ER) (E)
Magination Press, 1995

A book designed to stimulate discussion about people's feelings.

Lindenbaum, Pija
Elsa-Marie and her Seven Little Daddies (O) (CA)
Douglas & McIntyre Publishing, 1991

Elsa-Marie spends the day worrying about how others at daycare will react when they find out she has seven little daddies! All ends well when she changes her perspective.

Lionni, Leo
Frederick (ER) (O) (E)
Alfred A. Knopf, 1967

The story demonstrates acceptance of different people's strengths and contributions, highlighting visualization as a useful coping strategy in times of stress.

Lionni, Leo
It's Mine! (RO) (CA)
Alfred A. Knopf, 1985

Three frogs bicker and fight about everything until a storm forces them to work together and appreciate the good things they have.

Lionni, Leo
Swimmy (CA) (SE)
Alfred A. Knopf, 1968

A school of fish discovers it can defend itself against a bully shark by working together.

Lionni, Leo
Tillie and the Wall (O) (RO) (CA) (SE)
Alfred A. Knopf, 1989

A curious, imaginative, and persistent mouse takes a risk and leads her mouse community in a problem-solving effort that helps them connect with another mouse community.

Lite, Lori
A Boy and a Bear (ER)
Specialty Press Inc., 1996

A boy and a polar bear share a friendship and learn how to relax together.



Lottridge, Celia Barker
The Name of the Tree (SE) (RO)
A Groundwood Book, 1989

In this Bantu folktale, the animal that tries the hardest, not the one endowed with the greatest talents, helps alleviate the suffering caused by a drought in the forest.

MacDonald, Amy and Sarah Fox-Davies
Little Beaver and the Echo (ER) (SE)
Walker Books, 1993

A sad, lonely beaver discovers he can make friends when he follows the echo of his own voice.

Modesitt, Jeanne
Sometimes I Feel Like a Mouse (ER) (E)
Scholastic, 1992

Animals are used to teach about feelings. Excellent as a source for physical expression and movement.

Moss, Geoffrey
Henry's Moon (CA) (O) (SE)
Somerville House Publishing, 1989

Henry loves the moon, but the city's tall buildings and smog sometimes block the view. So Henry constructs his own moon, one that would "always be there, always be right for him, to make him feel good."

Moss, Marissa
Regina's Big Mistake (IC) (O) (RO)
Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990

A young girl learns that making mistakes is okay.

Murphy, Joanne Brisson
Feelings (ER) (E)
Black Moss Press, 1991

"It's nice to have feelings, as many as can be, 'cause it helps me to know and to understand me." Different scenarios help children identify, accept, and express their feelings.

Novato, C.A.
The Tortoise and the Hare (ER) (SE)
Living Books, 1993

The tortoise's slow and steady pace helps him win the race.

Passen, Lisa
Fat, Fat Rose Marie (SE) (CA) (E)
Henry Holt and Company, 1991

A new girl at school gets teased by a classmate, but is able to bounce back because of a friendship she forms with another peer.

Payne, Lauren Murphy
Just Because I Am (ER) (SE)
Free Spirit Publishing, 1994

This colourfully illustrated book provides examples of how children can talk to themselves to encourage self-acceptance and recognition of their feelings.

Peet, Bill
Pamela Camel (RO) (SE) (E)
Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984

A misunderstood circus camel receives recognition when she prevents a train from derailing.

Penn, Audrey
The Kissing Hand (ER) (SE)
Scholastic, 1998

A mother raccoon reassures her child of her love and gives him a way to soothe himself as he begins to separate from her to go to school.

Pinkwater, Daniel
The Big Orange Spot (O) (CA) (E) (SE)
Scholastic Press, 1977

Mr. Plumbean inspires his neighbours to redecorate their homes to reflect their unique visions and dreams.



Reynolds Naylor, Phyllis
King of the Playground (EM) (CA) (SE)
Aladdin Paperbacks, 1994

Dad helps Kevin challenge his beliefs about a schoolyard bully and gain self-confidence and perspective about the situation.

Shannon, David
Duck on a Bike (SE) (RO)
Blue Sky Press, 2002

The farmyard animals have a range of thoughts and feelings as they watch Duck peddle past on a bicycle. In the end, all the animals follow Duck's lead and try biking for themselves. A great book to introduce discussion about B-C connections with children.

Steig, William
Spinky Sulks (SE) (RO) (ER)
A Sunburst Book, 1988

Spinky rejects his family's efforts to console him, believing they don't love and understand him. Eventually, he develops a more flexible outlook and reaches out to them.

Thomas, Frances
What If? (O) (ER)
Hyperion Books for Children, 1998

A young monster is worried about what will "happen if?" His mother calms him by reframing the negative thinking into positive thinking.

Varley, Susan
Badger's Bad Mood (ER) (RO)
Arthur A. Levine Books, 1998

Badger's friends help him out when he can't seem to shake his bad mood.

Viorst, Judith
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (ER)
Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972

A young boy has a day when nothing goes right. His mom tells him that some days are like that, helping him accept that it is not a permanent situation.

Williams, Vera B.
A Chair for My Mother (CA) (RO) (SE) (E)
Mulberry Books, 1982

Neighbours help a young girl, her mother, and her grandmother when a fire destroys their home and possessions. Then, the three relatives save enough money to buy a comfortable chair for their new apartment.

Zolotow, Charlotte
The Hating Book (CA) (ER) (E)
Harper Collins Publishing, 1969

A young girl initially feels rejected by her best friend, but the misunderstanding is cleared up when she talks to the friend and finds out the real story.



SECTION 3

**About Reaching IN...
Reaching OUT**

What is Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT (RIRO)?



Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT (RIRO) is an evidence-based skills training program designed to promote resilience in young children. RIRO helps adults and children learn to “reach in” to think more flexibly and accurately and “reach out” to others and opportunities.

RIRO began as a multi-stage research and demonstration project. In 1998, the Child and Family Partnership conducted a search for best practice models to promote resilience in young children. The Penn Resilience Program (PRP) model, developed at the University of Pennsylvania, was chosen. The Partnership consulted with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania to develop RIRO and, in 2002, received funding for a pilot study.

RIRO adapted and tested the feasibility of using the PRP model with young children in child care. Based on the promising results of the pilot stage, funding was received to develop a specialized evidence-based resiliency skills training program targeting professionals and students working with children six years and under. The skills training program and curriculum modules were completed in April 2006 and are available for broad dissemination.

What is the Penn Resilience Program?

In the 1980s, Martin Seligman and his fellow researchers at the University of Pennsylvania began creating and evaluating programs to prevent depression and promote resilience in preteen children and adults.¹⁹ One of these programs, the Penn Resilience Program, consists of twelve sessions of skills training, comprising cognitive behavioural and social problem-solving components.²⁰

The PRP program trains educators and children from eight to thirteen years of age to develop skills such as identifying personal explanatory styles and challenging habitual thinking processes. After the training, people are able to assess situations more flexibly and accurately during times of stress and adversity, thus the training promotes more resilient behaviour. In contrast with most intervention programs, those most at risk for feelings of

helplessness and depression benefit most from the skills training.^{20,21}

These resiliency thinking skills have also been taught to adults in the workforce, college students, and adolescents with positive results. Because of compelling research results showing the benefits of resiliency skills training programs, the PRP program and its adult counterparts have been adopted by educational institutions and businesses around the world. The aim of these programs is to increase social problem solving and productivity and reduce the risk of depression.¹⁶ Until recently, however, there have been no specific programs to introduce these thinking skills to young children.

What are the results of the RIRO pilot project (Stage 1)?

Two questions guided the pilot research:

- What is the impact if adults who are taught resiliency thinking skills introduce them *indirectly*, through role modelling, in their everyday interactions with children?
- How early can these resiliency skills be introduced *directly* to children through developmentally adapted activities?

Participants

Early childhood educators (ECEs) were chosen as the target group for this pilot project because they interact daily with young children and their parents. Their intensive contact places them in a unique position to influence the development of children's thinking styles and emerging belief systems, and thereby their resilience. Controlled studies of high-quality early child care and education have shown their benefits for all children and their ability to promote resilience in children who are at a disadvantage.^{6,7,8,24}

Skills training and consultation

Researchers from the Penn Resilience Program trained ECEs at four pilot child care centres in Ontario in theory and skills related to resiliency promotion and thinking habits. Ongoing training and consultation by



RIRO staff increased the ECEs' awareness of how important their own thinking styles are in modelling resilience for young children. The ECEs engaged in structured reflective journaling and activities designed to integrate the training at a level required to developmentally adapt and pilot skills activities, as well as to model the skills with children. Teachers found the journaling and related activities to be very valuable:

When I write down observations and ideas [in the journals], I tend to put the info into action and plan solutions for the problems I see.

—CK (supervisor)

I really like the activities for working with the children, like asking children to make up a story based on a picture from a storybook, because they give me a basis of where to start. And the children love giving us their ideas, and because they show such an interest in doing it, it gets me excited as well. I say, "Wow, tell me more of what you think." It helps me understand that child. I find myself thinking, "I didn't know that this is what you thought about certain things." Then it jogs my memory and I think, "Ohh ... this why you reacted to that situation last week. This is why you said that, because this is what you believe..." Then I can say to the child, "It's okay to believe what you believe, but can you look at it this way?"

—AY (kindergarten)

Introducing resiliency skills to the children

After the ECEs integrated the skills into their own thinking and became more comfortable using them, they were asked to model the skills with the children in their daily interactions. Then, ECEs and RIRO staff worked together to create and introduce developmentally adapted activities centred on the resiliency skill areas to children at the pilot centres, and evaluated the impact of these activities in various age groups (toddler, pre-school, and kindergarten).

Results of the pilot project

What ECEs told us

Early childhood educators in the four pilot centres told us that, since receiving training in the PRP model, their approach and language has changed when they speak with children about conflict situations and daily frustrations.

Before the training, they typically asked children about their *feelings* when there was stress or conflict. Now, they also ask about the children's *thinking*.

ECEs expressed surprise at how much young children can tell us about their thoughts if they are asked in age-appropriate ways. One teacher told a story about how she got at a young child's beliefs by asking, "What did you say to yourself?"

What surprised me about working with the children was that some children were actually able to think about their thinking. And that was something I didn't think they would be able to do. I knew they could tell me what they felt, but not about the thinking that went behind that. For example, 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)

The PRP model adds a whole new layer to early childhood education practice—understanding the importance of children's beliefs and inquiring about them. This expanded focus has major implications for ECEs' observations, their assessments of children, and their interventions.

Over the course of a year and a half, RIRO research staff interviewed early childhood educators in the pilot centres about their use of the resiliency skills.



One year after the initial training, the teachers completed a comprehensive survey about the impact of the skills training on them and on their work with children. Here are some of the things ECEs said:

- The ECEs had to learn the skills and reflect on their own thinking styles before they could model resilient responses during daily interactions with children.
- The skills helped them assess and understand child behaviour better, through greater awareness of their own thinking styles and 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)

- The resiliency skills helped ECEs deal with communication issues and adversities that they experienced with other teachers and parents in the centres, and with their own family and friends.

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. They provide clarity for the issue at hand. Knowing that my emotions are in check and that I'm trying to get a good picture of what's happening really helps mediate my reactions to things and the words I use. I've just become more effective in my relationships with other adults. —LD (supervisor)

We are in a field where we have to communicate so much, not just with the children, not just with the parents, but also with our co-workers. The

whole daycare works as a team, and I'm finding that, by having these tools, my colleagues and I can communicate with one another much more clearly. —MS (preschool)

- They used the skills on a daily basis in the centres and in their personal lives.
- Resiliency thinking skills can be modelled in daily interactions with children of any age. Teachers believe this training should start as early as possible.

If something falls and breaks, instead of showing frustration and anger, 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 teacher-designed skills activities, were most effective with children four years and older, although some verbal three-year-olds also made effective use of these activities.
- ECEs observed that children model some of the resiliency skills with their peers, for example, generating alternatives, catching "Always" statements, and calming strategies.

Older children will role model the skills for younger children. There was a situation where J and M were upset because we had asked them to take a break from each other, as a consequence for some of the behaviour that was happening between them. M, who quite upset, was sitting on the couch 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. The interesting part was that I had



intervened in the same way with A when she was upset about not playing with one of her friends. Then I see her turn around and use the thinking skill with one of her peers. —AB (kindergarten)

- ECEs observed positive changes in children, especially in impulse control and emotional regulation, which they believe is a 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—EVERYDAY! After the training, my team teacher and I came to realize that child N was feeling anxious, and she didn't know how to express herself other than throwing stuff around the room. She had a lot of insecurities and didn't believe she was going to be heard or understood. Through the B-C 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)

These findings show that the Penn Resilience Program school-age model can be adapted to help young children of any age. If adults are trained in the adult skill set, they can learn to model these important skills in their daily interactions with children.

These resiliency skills and abilities really need to be looked at, primarily by ECEs and people working with young children. I really feel that society is moving so fast, that we don't often ask, "How are our children doing?" They give us cues—they have temper tantrums, they sit down and they cry. And the only thing we can think of sometimes is, "How are we going to make them conform to what society is expecting from them? How are they going to survive in life?" The resiliency skills training tells you how to do this. It makes you stop and think—learn about the children, learn about yourself, learn about their emotions, learn how to deal with life. That's what you want to do to prepare children—give them the skills that they can take with them. —LD (supervisor)

Those who work most closely with children also found that certain resiliency skills can be adapted for use with verbal children as young as three, using child-friendly activities, such as stories, puppet plays, drawings, and movement-based activities. (See Section 2 for examples of using stories and puppet plays.)



What parents told us

RIRO staff offered a parent information session on promoting resilience and resilient thinking at each of the four participating child care centres. The session included an overview of the resiliency abilities and an explanation of how thinking habits influence our responses to adversity. In addition, the parents received booklists of children's stories that relate to the resiliency abilities, such as emotional regulation, analyzing the cause of problems, and maintaining realistic optimism.

Six weeks after the information sessions, parents completed surveys to help RIRO staff determine whether they found the sessions and handouts useful. This is what parents and caregivers told us:

- They had increased knowledge and awareness about resilience in children. (average = 1.8 point increase in knowledge and 1.3 point increase in awareness, based on 5-point scale)



- They had increased interest in finding out more about resilience, as well as increased awareness about their own and others' thinking about adversity. (average = 3.6 increase in each, on 5-point scale)
- They gave high ratings to how important it was for teachers at their child's centre to promote resilience in the children. (average = 4.5, on 5-point scale)
- More than half the parents reported already having read the RIRO handouts, and nearly a third had read or planned to read books to their children from the children's booklist on emotional regulation.
- Nearly 20% of the parents had already shared the handouts with friends and neighbours.
- Parents expressed the hope that RIRO would develop a resiliency skills training program for parents and caregivers.

What are the results of Stage 2—developing RIRO's skills training program?

Skills training program development

Based on the results of the pilot project, Stage 2 funding was awarded in 2003 to develop an evidence-based skills training program with resource materials. The training would be used in a wide variety of settings, including Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC), as well as other child-serving sectors and educational programs with young children.

Over the next two years, four additional pilot centres were added. RIRO's skills training program was piloted throughout southern Ontario, reaching more than 350 ECEs and allied professionals, such as social workers, nurses, psychologists, and other mental-health workers.

RIRO's skills training program currently consists of "Adult Skills" and "Child Applications" courses, covering approximately fourteen hours of content. Because of chronic under-resourcing of the ELCC sector and the additional challenge of arranging in-class coverage when a staff member attends professional training activities, RIRO's skills program was tested in a variety of formats and venues.

Modules were created and tested for full- and half-day sessions, as well as for a six-session after-work series and a two-day intensive training. This *Guidebook* and other written resource materials, a documentary and seven skills videos, and RIRO's website (www.reachinginreachingout.com) were created to increase community awareness about resilience and to help professionals integrate and implement resiliency skills.

Faculty consultants from the University of Guelph and George Brown College collaborated with the RIRO project team to develop and pilot, with their students, three self-contained curriculum modules about thinking processes and promoting resilience in young children. These modules can be offered by community colleges and universities as part of diploma, degree, or continuing education courses.

Results of Stage 2 evaluation activities

RIRO's resiliency skills training was evaluated by participants during, immediately after, and post-training through formal surveys and structured interviews.

The training was consistently well received. Participants' suggestions were incorporated into the skills training program and tested. Interviews with ECEs in the eight pilot centres helped RIRO staff determine which skills most participants used, and what difficulties they encountered integrating the skills and introducing them to children. As a result of this feedback, RIRO developed and piloted a second training session that focused on how to apply the skills in their work with children.

A formal survey was sent to all participants receiving RIRO skills training between September 2004 and December 2005. The purpose of the survey was to determine how useful the participants found the skills at work, whether they had introduced the skills to children, and what impact the skills had on them and on the children with whom they work.

Based on the responses, participants ($n = 77$) confirmed the findings of the initial pilot study. As well, professionals who had participated in the skills



training at least three months before the survey, compared to those who had taken the training less than three months before, reported the greatest number of gains for themselves and the children.

Specifically, professionals reported the skills are

- very useful to their work (rated 4.2 on 5-point scale)
- used frequently at work (95% at least once/week; 64% daily use)

They would recommend RIRO skills training to colleagues (100%) because the skills help them

- reduce their own stress (77%)
- increase their understanding and empathy for children (77%)

These findings were consistent across all professional sectors. Allied professionals, as well as ECEs, found the skills valuable in their work.

ECEs reported that they have introduced the skills to the children by modelling (82%), and through conversations and developmentally adapted activities with individual children (57%) and with groups (41%).

The impact on children, as reported by frontline workers (95%) who had used the skills for more than three months, included more

- problem solving and generating of alternatives
- reaching out to others when needing help
- helping others and being empathic
- ability to see mistakes as being okay

Taken together, the findings from Stages 1 and 2 suggest that the resiliency skills are user-friendly and useful to professionals working with young children. Both professionals and the children they work with benefit by experiencing less stress and enhanced ability in areas that researchers have found to be associated with resilience. (For further information about RIRO research findings, please see our website, www.reachinginreachingout.com, and click on “Research Results.”)

College and university students who piloted the curriculum modules also reported a positive impact on their learning about the importance of resilience. The skills they acquired have enhanced their reflective practice and their promotion of resilience activities with children and youth. Faculty members who piloted the modules reported that the modules could be easily integrated into current college and university curricula.

Finally, parents and caregivers have responded positively to RIRO resiliency promotion materials and information sessions. The high level of interest that they have expressed confirms the importance of developing an evidence-based skills training program for parents and paraprofessionals, such as foster parents and lay home visitors.

What kind of training and dissemination activities is RIRO planning for the future?

Dissemination of RIRO products

RIRO’s website will be the vehicle for disseminating several RIRO products at no cost, including the *Resiliency Guidebook*, *RIRO College Curriculum Modules*, and the seven skills videos. Hard copies of the *Guidebook* and *Curriculum Modules* are available through the Canadian Child Care Federation. (See the copyright page or follow links on RIRO’s website, www.reachinginreachingout.com).

“Train-the-trainer” activities

RIRO has just received three-year funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to design and pilot a “train-the-trainer” program aimed at professional trainers from the ELCC sector in Ontario. This program will increase the number of authorized RIRO trainers in the ELCC sector to more than 120 over three years.

RIRO will also work with its partners to promote use of RIRO curriculum modules in the community college sector. The goal is to make RIRO self-sustaining in the Ontario ELCC community within three years.



RIRO skills training program

The RIRO skills training program will be offered as part of the practicum experience for trainers involved in the RIRO “train-the-trainer” program, in various locales across Ontario. The program will also be available in other provinces/regions and to professionals in other sectors on a fee-for-service basis. RIRO will continue working with the Canadian Child Care Federation to disseminate RIRO skills training and “train-the-trainer” programs across Canada.

Development of a skills training program for parents

RIRO is collaborating with several organizations to develop a proposal for creating an evidence-based resiliency skills training program for parents and caregivers.

For more information about attending RIRO skills training sessions, becoming a RIRO trainer, or assisting with the development of the parent skills training program, please contact RIRO’s coordinator through RIRO’s website, www.reachinginreachingout.com, or e-mail info@reachinginreachingout.com.

For additional resources about resilience, please see page 62 or RIRO’s website.

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Resources About Resilience



Books:

Haggerty, J., R. Lonnie, N. Garmezy, and M. Rutter. 1996. *Stress, Risk and Resilience in Children and Adolescents—Processes, Mechanisms and Interventions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Web links:

Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT Project website:
www.reachinginreachingout.com

Voices for Children, a Canadian advocacy group focusing on the needs of children (See Nov. 2003 article “Resilience—Giving Children the Skills to Bounce Back”):
www.voicesforchildren.ca

ResilienceNet (Information on resilience):
<http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/>

Positive psychology website (Seligman):
www.positivepsychology.org

Adaptiv Learning Systems (Training and evaluation arm of the University of Pennsylvania resiliency research program):
www.adaptivlearning.com

Kids Have Stress, Too (Canadian parent education/support organization offering training to professionals and caregivers):
www.kidshavestresstoo.org

Keywords for web searches:

ABC MODEL, ATTRIBUTIONAL STYLE, CHILDHOOD RESILIENCE, COPING SKILLS, CORE BELIEFS, DEPRESSION PREVENTION, EXPLANATORY STYLE, HARDINESS, LIMITING BELIEFS, OPTIMISM, POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY, PROBLEM-SOLVING, RESILIENCE, RESILIENCY PROMOTION, RESILIENCY SKILLS, SELIGMAN, THINKING ERRORS