

# A Pro-active Positive Education Approach to Resilience

“What every parent wants desperately is for their children to transcend whatever difficulties they will inevitably confront in life and thrive.” To thrive one must generate a positive to negative emotion ratio of at least three to one (for individuals).

Problems will be faced in every aspect of life by children, young adults and adults. To move from being dependent on others (usually adults) to partial dependence, to independence to interdependence as the child grows to adulthood requires an equivalent resilient set development. The capacity to move confidently from the dependent stage of human and social existence through to the “complex to manage” interdependent stage is established intrinsically by each individual. Extrinsic influences exist; however, the capacity to cope is very much a personal (intrinsic) thing. The establishment of this confidence to make positive decisions is really what resilience is about. There are times when survival is an essential and important goal for such ‘survival skills’ present as the base for the positive beliefs tied essentially and eventually to thriving. Reflection, living in the moment rather than trying today to live tomorrow, is an important realisation in establishing the wherewithal to lead a positive and empowered future. The search for identity is at the essence of being human, and it is within this search that the true skills parents want their children to possess (to manage the tribulations life presents) are discovered, considered, learned, developed and woven into a ‘life strategy’ to do better than cope, to thrive. Ancient and learned cultures describe, and recognise one important aspect of this maturation process as ‘a rite of passage’ and have constructed ‘markers’ on this passage where public celebration and recognition is given to boost the confidence of the learner. These events mark for each individual a step in confidence. This confidence establishes a positive belief in capacity, a positive mental attitude nurtured by supporters through acknowledgement of effort and progress towards interdependence, the end goal. It is necessary, in this journey, to recognise and appreciate the darker sides of life, the more challenging aspects of this progress path. The main negative emotions of fear and anxiety focus attention on discovering the nuances and complexities of the challenges; however, once these are acknowledged and understood it is then necessary to establish a positive and strategic approach (a resilient approach) to these challenges, to leave ‘the negative emotions’ behind.

The way forward to a positive future where one can take charge in the context as it presents, and thrive, is directly tied to character strengths and the positive emotions which inform the individual that all is possible to manage and it is possible to thrive. One critical element to this is ‘to keep all in perspective’, to live in the real rather than the fanciful world. The real living context must be understood and it is this understanding that provides opportunity to develop skills and strategies to take one beyond the existing context to what may be a more desired context, if such is the want.

The aim is to become interdependent, to move from the “I” to the “We”. Humans live in families and these are found in the family, in the School, in the workplace, in clubs and in social settings. ‘Families’ are defined by belonging. The sense of belonging, or attachment, to a family or a number of families is essential. Such attachments are based upon trust. Trust is based upon respect, kindness, forgiveness and an unconditional purpose of giving to others. The worth of the contribution is critical for the “We” rather than “I” determines the honour of the relationship and the security found therein. Trust in others and their trust in you underpins positive human existence. The actual universal values found in each person’s character strengths should guarantee a confident and positive journey through dependence, independence and on into interdependence.

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS:

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| <b>1. Wisdom:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Curiosity</li><li>• Love of learning</li><li>• Judgement</li><li>• Ingenuity</li><li>• Emotional intelligence</li><li>• Perspective</li></ul> | <b>3. Humanity:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kindness</li><li>• Loving</li></ul> <b>4. Justice:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Citizenship</li><li>• Fairness</li><li>• Leadership</li></ul> <b>5. Temperance:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-Control</li><li>• Prudence</li><li>• Humility</li></ul> | <b>6. Transcendence:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appreciation of beauty and excellence</li><li>• Gratitude</li><li>• Hope</li><li>• Spirituality</li><li>• Forgiveness</li><li>• Humor</li><li>• Zest</li></ul> |
| <b>2. Courage:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Valor</li><li>• Perseverance</li><li>• Integrity</li></ul>   |   |   |

The ability to think flexibly and accurately, to understand oneself emotionally and one's emotional profile, to cultivate the capacity to change one's emotional reactions, and to reach out to others every step of the way is essential. The skills needed to successfully navigate the journey from dependence to interdependence can be learned and developed through practice. Those (children) who demonstrate resilience often demonstrate five descriptors:

1. Strong cognitive abilities;
2. Self-efficacy;
3. Faith and a sense of meaning;
4. Talents that are valued by self and others; and
5. Sense of humour.

The actual skills possessed by resilient individuals are:

1. Emotional awareness and regulation;
2. Impulse control;
3. Optimism (a sense of hope);
4. Flexible and accurate thinking;
5. Empathy;
6. Self-efficacy; and
7. Connection to others.

The teaching of these skills and the strategic and honourable deployment of these skills is possible through the scaffolding framework of Positive Psychology supplemented by further self discovery through meditation. The study and application of character strengths, positive and negative emotions, the allied and promoting processes of reflection found in meditation (and allied activities), the understanding of the power of altruism, of the fundamentals associated with the values found in all world faiths all combine to present a quality 'life curriculum' to enable all to progress through life challenges from being dependent on others to being alone or independent of others (an essential stage of knowing the self) to interdependence where others jointly work with you to enable life to flourish. (How we treat others determines how others treat us.)

The inoculation against the negative emotions ruling life is possible. Such inoculation does mean that each will have acquired the skills needed to employ strategically, and appropriately, the character strengths (moment to moment, in life). This then will enable all to navigate to interdependence, to understand, appreciate and contribute to being human, to cooperate, to not seek advantage in relationships and to give unconditionally to others. This does lead to contentment where pleasure, engagement and meaning in life come together to establish a more peaceful repose where flourishing is possible.

Geelong Grammar School is doing this by teaching resilience and the tenets of positive psychology through the study of emotion and character strength plus developing in each student the capacity to adopt positive resilient life strategies, ie. the appropriate applications of strength to life challenges in

the moment. It has asked the real question (of schooling), perhaps found in the opening paragraph, of every parent, what do you want for your child? The response is “a good well managed and happy life where a sense of contentment abides”. John Keats, a leading English religious educator, in a lecture titled ‘Clever Devils and How to Avoid Them’ referred to a conference that took place on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1942 when a group of fifteen men gathered at Wansee in Berlin. They were to plan the “final solution”; we now know this as the Holocaust. Amongst them were several PhD’s and a theology graduate. A number of these were products of Christian Schools; some were the sons of clergymen. Here is a letter from a holocaust survivor:

*Dear Teacher,  
I am a survivor of the concentration camp.  
My eyes saw what no man should witness:  
gas chambers built by engineers;  
children poisoned by educated physicians;  
Infants killed by trained nurses;  
Women and babies shot and burned by high school graduates;  
So, I am suspicious of your education.  
My request is: help your students become human.  
Your efforts must never produce learned monsters,  
Skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.  
Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.*

The real purpose of education is to enable each and every person grow to an understanding of self within the context of family, (in every sense) to be humane, to be able to positively deal with life’s tribulations in a moral and positive (resilient) way, and to live with meaning a peaceful life. This is achieved by living the life journey from dependence, through independence to interdependence with confidence, dignity and with respect for all other humans (and living things), to move from the “I” to the “We” with kindness and forgiveness of and to others. This can be taught.

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