



Emotional Resilience

A Guide for Parents



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NB: I will provide examples of how individuals and families have used emotional resilience-building approaches, in a shaded box.



1. Introduction

“Life is a flame that is always burning itself out, but it catches fire again every time a child is born”. George Bernard Shaw

This guide is dedicated to parents who are supporting a child with additional needs. The guide draws on research into resilience, my experience as a parent of a child with complex needs, and my work as an educational psychologist. My hope is for you to discover one supportive approach, which facilitates your unique parenting journey towards emotional resilience.

At 18 months old, my daughter received a diagnosis of a genetic growth disorder at Guys and St Thomas’s Hospital, London. RSS or SRS (Silver Russell Syndrome) is characterised by slow growth, combined with neurological and motor challenges. The UK’s charity The Growth Foundation and the United States charity The Magic Foundation provided us with a wealth of information.

Parenting a child with additional needs is full of challenges. The Chinese sign for ‘crisis’ illustrated below consists of two symbols, danger and opportunity. At times during parenting, there is the danger of sinking into a negative downward spiral. There is also an opportunity to develop empathy and greater emotional resilience. We will start by defining what we mean by emotional resilience.





2. Defining Emotional Resilience

The definition of resilience stated below has been adapted from Warwick University. It emphasises that resilience is the ability to adapt flexibly to life's challenges and resilient people do not allow challenging life events to define them as a person.

'Resilience is the ability to adapt to challenging situations and cope with life's ups and downs. Resilient people do not allow adversity to define them or their lives and they have the confidence to try new experiences'.

It is refreshing when we choose not to be defined by adversity. Having the willingness to try new experiences without fear of failure is another sign of our resilience.

When we travel on airplanes we often hear, *"in case of a cabin pressure emergency, put on your mask first before assisting others."* This analogy reminds us how essential it is to look after our wellbeing before we can help our children.

We can draw inspiration from how different cultures cope with adversity. The Sankofa bird pictured above is a symbol from African culture. The bird is looking back, symbolising the need to look to our past and learn from our ancestors.



The bird is holding an egg, symbolising birth and new life. This symbol encourages us to focus on making a new life that will support the next generation. Just like the Sankofa bird, resilient people learn from those who inspired them in the past, to help build a better future for the children of tomorrow.

Maintaining a spiritual connection with people from our past can help us manage loss as well as inspire us. Having a child with additional needs can sometimes result in feelings of loss. For instance, we may be grieving the loss of the child we were expecting. We may be grieving that we are not able to participate in the same range of experiences that children without additional needs may enjoy. Our time is limited, due to attending numerous appointments and adapting to the child's neurological and learning challenges.

The understanding normal response to loss can help us cope with a greater understanding of our emotions and we will focus on this topic in the next section.

3. Understanding Loss and Change

‘When you hit rock bottom - that is when you make the biggest changes in your life’.
(Vishen Lakhiani, Founder of Mindvalley)

I spent the first six years of my daughter's life attending hospital appointments for various assessments, interventions, and surgery. Over these years, the accumulative worry was tiring and I was often in a 'fight or flight' state, reacting to each situation.



They say that a change is as good as a holiday. Small positive changes started when I decided to change my approach to life, by becoming more strategic and less reactive. I consciously crafted a life vision with clear goals for my family life, work, health, and emotional well-being. It was this shift from being reactive to strategic, where I took back some control that started my journey towards emotional resilience.

Understanding normal responses to loss can help make sense of our emotional responses to loss and change of any kind. It normalised my emotional response to my daughter's diagnosis. Figure one below illustrates the range of typical emotional reactions to loss and change in the form of a curve. This 'change curve' was identified by research into loss by Kubler-Ross.



Figure one: The Kubler-Ross change curve

The Kubler-Ross curve illustrates the emotional journey that individuals experience during a period of change and loss. The individual goes through several stages from shock and denial, anger, rejection,



depression, acceptance, and healing. Everyone grieves in a unique way and individuals can move back and forth between stages.

Shock and denial are experienced on hearing the news of the diagnosis and while adapting to the practical life changes. Over time a range of emotional responses is experienced including anger at why you have a child with additional needs while others are healthy. Over time you accept that the child will be what they will be and adapt in a healthy way to help them achieve their potential.

Understanding how our brain works in response to loss and anxiety can help us to normalise our emotions and prevent us from becoming overwhelmed by strong emotions or physiological responses. The next section will look at changes to the brain that happen throughout the lifespan in response to new experiences, known as brain neuroplasticity.

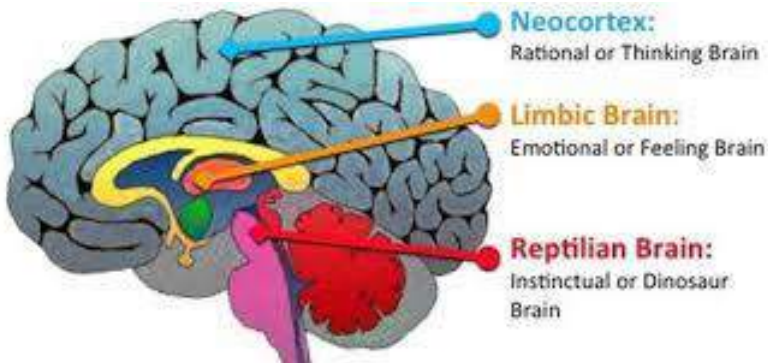
4. How the Brain Works

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to rewire itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. In brain circuitry, emotional resilience is about 'survival of the busiest'. When forming emotional healthy neural connections in the brain we need repetition to create a strong pathway.

Let's take the analogy of walking through the woods. If we walk through a wood several times a week, over time we will create a clear pathway. If we consciously develop our emotional resilience daily, over time we will develop a strong pathway and become emotionally resilient. Figure two below illustrates a picture of the human brain.



Figure two: A picture of the human brain



The human brain has evolved over the years to become the most sophisticated brain on the planet. The basic reptilian brain (coloured in red) is the oldest part of our brain. It controls our body's heart rate, breathing, body temperature, and balance. It includes the main structures found in a reptile's brain: the brainstem and the cerebellum.

The emotional limbic brain (coloured in yellow) in the middle part of our brain, and it emerged in the first mammals. It records memories of behaviours that produced positive and negative experiences for us. The limbic system is responsible for our emotions and value judgements.

The reptilian brain and limbic brain form the primitive brain. The primitive brain deals with routine tasks and needs little energy to operate quickly. This is why we often experience strong emotions or take action long before we use logic to problem-solve.



The thinking neocortex (coloured in blue) is the newest part of our brain. The neocortex or ‘higher brain’ is responsible for our abstract thoughts, imagination, and consciousness. It is highly flexible and has an almost infinite ability to learn. Our higher brain is extremely powerful but needs a lot of energy to run. It works at a slower pace than the primitive brain.

Our neocortex is designed to engage in higher-order thinking. If the primitive brain is triggered by fear or anger, we struggle to engage in higher-order thinking, planning, and problem-solving. We can learn ways of reducing our stress levels so that we can engage this part of our brain.

We are programmed to look out for danger. In caveman times, we needed to be sensitive to signs of danger to survive. If we were unable to quickly identify a lion from a rock, we would fail to have survived. Today we do not need to be vigilant of lions but we are still wired to look for danger and be negative because this helped us survive.

When we feel threatened, or experience anger or anxiety, it can help to understand that our physiological responses such as increased heart-rate or butterflies in the stomach are normal. We can choose to observe these responses and allow them to pass. Each time we ‘feel the fear and do it anyway’ the fear response becomes weaker inside us and we become emotionally stronger and more resilient.

The adolescent brain is undergoing natural changes in its development called synaptic pruning. During synaptic pruning, the brain removes extra synapses. Synapses are brain structures that allow the neurons to send an electrical or chemical signal to another neuron. Understanding the



adolescent brain can help us make sense of the changes and normalise cognitive and emotional responses at this stage of development.

The Adolescent Brain

The adolescent brain is not fully matured until the age of 25. During adolescence, the brain is still developing, as the brain works on removing extra synapses. The principle of synaptic plasticity follows the rule of "use it or lose it". This means synapses that are frequently used have strong connections while the rarely used synapses are removed.

The prefrontal cortex is the last area of the brain to fully develop and it is responsible for planning, judgement, decision making, and impulse control. Adolescent brains are hypersensitive to the effects of alcohol and drugs.

Research studies have identified the strong link between substance misuse and later mental health difficulties. On the positive side, young people are also capable of great creativity at this time. There are many examples in the history of adolescents who have used their brilliant minds in creative ways.

Understanding how the brain works can help young people normalise this time in their development. Young people often need support in developing their planning and problem-solving skills. Adolescents can be supported in learning problem-solving approaches to develop their frontal lobes. We will look at two problem-solving approaches below. The 5-step problem-solving approach and a coping step plan.



5-Step Problem Solving Plan

The 5-step problem-solving plan involves the following steps:

1. Defining the problem: What is the problem?
2. Brainstorming Solutions: Write down as many solutions as possible without judgement. Think about the long-term the outcome of the solutions.
3. Picking a Solution: Choose a solution that provides you with the best long-term outcome, which is realistic to carry out.
4. Implementing the Solution: Try out your solution or goal. You may want to practise first with a supportive person with you.
5. Reviewing the results: How did it go? What were the positives? What would you do differently next time?

Coping Step Plan

A coping step plan is used to break an overwhelming goal into small manageable steps. The goal is broken down into as many steps as needed. The individual starts by working on the easiest step first. It is motivating to reward yourself for completing each step and to identify people or strategies to help you cope each step of the way.

A coping step plan could be used to help a child cope better with a fear of having injections or a blood test. Figure three overleaf illustrates a coping step plan used to help a seven-year-old girl cope with having a blood test.

Sometimes negative thoughts can slow us down when achieving our goals. Understanding how our thoughts can affect our feelings and actions can help us to ‘boss back’ negative thoughts and take control.



Figure three: A Coping Step Plan for having a blood test

My Goal: To tell myself, “I will be ok” and keep my body calm when having a blood test.



Step 5: On the day of the test, I will tell myself, “I will be ok” and keep my body calm. I will remember my reward for being brave. afterwards.

Step 4: I can choose a reward that I will have after the test for being brave.

Step 3: I can watch a video of a person having a blood test and see that they are ok. afterwards.

Step 2: I will talk about how the sensation of the needle lasts a few seconds, just like a bubble that pops after a couple of seconds.

Step 1: I will read a book and talk about having a blood test, so I understand what will happen.



A coping step plan was effective in helping an eight-year-old girl overcome her fear of dogs. In discussion with the girl's mother, we devised a coping step plan as follows.

Step 1 involved looking at photographs and pictures of dogs in books and magazines and learning to read their body language.

Step 2 focused on watching dogs in television programmes and films, observing and predicting how they behaved in different situations.

For **Step 3**, the girl and her mother took a walk in their local park and watched dogs at a distance.

Step 4 involved talking to an owner of a dog and with the owner's permission stroking the dog while it was held on a lead.

For **Step 5**, with the permission of the dog's owner, the girl was able to stroke a dog without its lead and enjoy the experience.

5. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Approaches

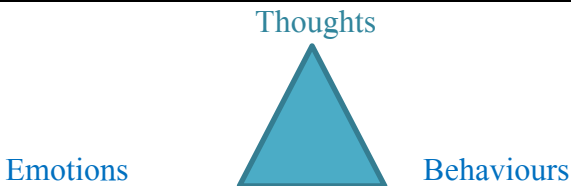
The average person has 16,000 thoughts per day according to the National Science Foundation (2005). We call these thoughts 'self-talk'. If you were best friends with yourself, you would want to give yourself encouraging empowering thoughts.

So why do we tend to focus on the negative? As we discussed earlier in the neuropsychology section, we are wired to be negative and look out for danger, because that is how we learned to survive many years ago. The good news is that we have more control over our thoughts than we realise. We can consciously choose to rewire our brains to develop a positive mindset.



Dr. Aaron Beck pioneered Cognitive Behaviour Therapy in the 1960s, while he was a psychiatrist at the University of Pennsylvania. A key concept of this approach is the Cognitive Behaviour Emotions triangle, illustrated in Figure 4 below.

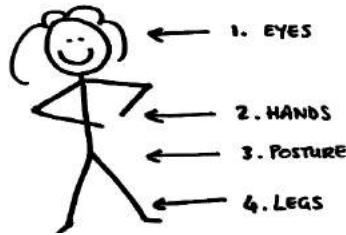
Figure four: The Cognitive Behaviour Emotions triangle



The Cognitive Behaviour triangle has thoughts at the top. Our thoughts and beliefs affect how we feel and act. Behaviours are the second point of the triangle. Behaviours are what we do and the actions we take, affecting how we think and feel. Emotions such as joy or sadness are the third point of the triangle, affecting what we think and do.

Individuals can increase their emotional resilience, by making changes to any of the three areas of the thoughts, behaviours, and emotions triangle. For instance, one teenage boy with Autism was obsessive about needing to wash his hands repeatedly.

To overcome the fear of getting dirt on his hands, we changed his behaviour by asking him to feed bread to the birds. Over time he became less obsessed with the need to constantly clean his hands and he was able to sit on a bench on which there were bird droppings. A change in his behaviour leads to a change in his thinking and a reduction in his need to wash his hands obsessively.



Identifying Body Clues

Understanding the connection between our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours can increase our emotional resilience. Our ability to identify emotions and how they link to body clues is a key part of developing our emotional resilience. We need to be able to identify how our body uniquely reacts to emotions so that we can take action to change them.

When we feel happiness, we may experience high energy levels and other physical reactions such as smiling. When we feel peaceful, we may experience a regular heartbeat and deep breathing. When we feel angry, we may identify that we clench our fists and have a faster heartbeat. When we feel sadness, we may experience a sense of heaviness and lack of energy. Feelings of worry sometimes present themselves with ‘butterflies’ in the stomach or sweaty palms.

We can increase our awareness of our body cues, by noticing how our body reacts to different emotions. We can comment on our body clues and model ways of coping with our emotions. E.g. “I am feeling worried about ... and I can feel butterflies in my tummy. I know I will be okay. I will do some breathing in and out for 5 counts. If I keep going the butterflies will eventually go away”.

Parents can develop their child’s vocabulary of emotions and ability to regulate their emotions through reading books on feelings and using Social Stories to develop an understanding of social situations.

A Social Story, as developed by Carol Gray, is a social learning tool that enables information about social rules and behaviours to be exchanged



and understood. A few suggestions of books are included in the resources section as well as Carol Gray's Social Stories website.

One primary-aged girl loved listening to Social Stories each night, to help her make sense of all the social rules and expectations around everyday activities, e.g., table manners, conversations. She learned how to behave and regulate her emotions at a faster rate when a Social Story around the area was introduced.

Parents can help their children develop their self-awareness, by labeling their child's emotions and making possible connections for them. For instance, a parent may comment as follows: 'You are pacing up and down and your fists are clenched. I think you might be getting a bit worried. Let's take a short break'.

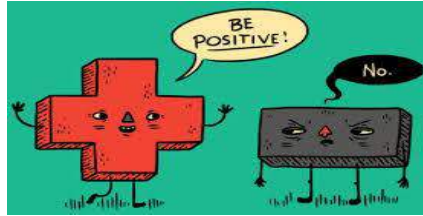
In the next section, we will look at how we can change our thoughts to increase our well-being.

Identifying and fighting back negative thoughts

We can identify our negative thoughts and consciously learn ways of bossing the negative thoughts back to where they belong. The common negative thinking styles are outlined below.

Wearing negative glasses: When we only focus on the events that have gone badly it increases their importance in our mind. We can consciously decide to stop and look for the positives when things went well.

Saying the positive doesn't count: Discounting the positive experiences reduces our well-being. Successful people make a point of celebrating their



successes. By making time to celebrate our successes we create positive pathways in the brain, which encourages future success.

Blowing things up: When we engage in catastrophic thinking we make a negative thought bigger and bigger, by thinking about how it will lead to worse problems. By gaining perspective, we can make the difficult seem smaller. We can imagine viewing our problem like a bird viewing the situation from high up in the sky.

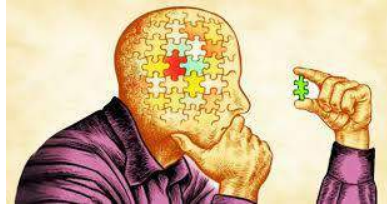
Fortune Telling: Fortune telling or predicting a negative outcome, can increase our anxiety. We can use logical thinking to problem-solve what is happening. For instance, we can ask ourselves questions such as ‘what is another way to look at this?’

Catastrophic thinking: Catastrophic thinking involves having one negative thought and allowing that thought to spiral into a series of more intense negative thoughts. For instance, “I wasn’t invited to the party – She doesn’t like me – I am excluded from this group of friends – I do not belong at school – I will never fit in – I will always have difficulties fitting in socially”.

One approach to changing negative thoughts to positive thoughts is to use Socratic questioning. Socrates, the early Greek philosopher, believed that the disciplined practice of thoughtful questioning, helps individuals to question ideas using logic and change their thinking.

Below are a few Socratic questions that can be used to challenge negative thoughts:

- Is this always true? Am I exaggerating?



- Am I forgetting the positives? What is another way to look at this?
- When are the exceptions when it is not true?
- Is it realistic to expect me to be perfect all the time?

Challenging our negative thoughts can be empowering and lead to positive realistic thoughts. Positive realistic thoughts can result in more positive emotions and positive behaviours. If we have a negative belief about ourselves or about a situation, we will keep generating negative thoughts.

By creating more positive empowering beliefs about ourselves, we will automatically create more positive thoughts. By changing our beliefs, we alter our thoughts, behaviours, and emotions. For instance, if we have a negative belief about parenting this will lead to negative thoughts. For instance:

- I find it frustrating when my child...
- I am always so busy. I never have time to just be with my child.
- You are driving me crazy.
- I don't have enough time or energy to do what I need to do.
- I am not good enough as a parent.

It can be helpful to write down our negative beliefs and to consciously re-write them so that they are more positive and empowering. For instance, the negative beliefs stated above can be reframed. Below and overleaf are some examples:

- I can take time to 'pause' and remain calm when my child
- I make time to spend quality time with my child.
- You are so fun to be with. I have all the energy I need.
- I am a good enough parent and my child is my teacher.



People who are kind to themselves are more likely to persist than those who are hard on themselves when they make mistakes. Overleaf is an exercise for turning negative beliefs into more empowering ones.

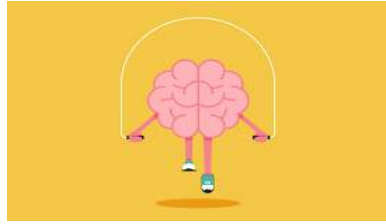
Exercise: Turning negative beliefs into positive beliefs

Focus on identifying any negative self-talk that you engage in daily. You may wish to write down your negative beliefs or thoughts below.

Choose a ‘hot thoughts or belief’ that you would like to change, then challenge it. You may wish to use a few of the following Socratic questions to help you:

- Is this always true?
- When are the exceptions when it is not true?
- Am I exaggerating? Am I forgetting the positives?
- What is another way to look at this?
- Is it realistic to expect me to be perfect?

Change your negative thought or belief into a more empowering one. Below are some examples: From ‘I don’t have enough time’ to ‘I have time for what matters to me’. From ‘I am a stressed, negative parent’ to ‘I am a positive, good enough parent.’



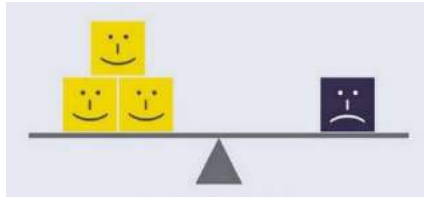
We can help our children develop a growth mindset (i.e. the belief that their abilities are not fixed and they can grow in their abilities with effort). Dr. Carole Dweck coined the term growth mindset. Adults can praise a child for their effort and their persistence with tasks. They can encourage them to not be afraid of making mistakes and use them as learning opportunities. One girl who was fearful of making mistakes found it empowering to read a story about all the opportunities that can arise from making mistakes.

Adults help all children develop positive beliefs about themselves, through praising them for simply being, rather than praising them for doing or achieving. For instance, we can praise them for being kind, being funny, being positive, being interesting, teaching us, and being honest. Children must realise they are good enough as they are without the need to achieve or succeed.

6. The Positivity Ratio

Research has shown that we have more control over our emotions than we realise. We can consciously create more positive experiences in our lives. The positivity ratio states that people who have positive emotions in a ratio of three positive experiences to one negative experience are more likely to:

- Be more generous, caring, and dedicated in their actions.
- Have thoughts that are more creative, insightful, and clear.



People with a ratio of one positive experience to one negative emotion, tend to be more depressed and lacking in energy or vitality. The positivity ratio of three positive experiences to one negative applies to small groups and communities as well as individuals. This is good news in that we can consciously create several positive experiences and make them part of our daily habits. In brain circuitry, it is about the survival of the busiest.

To improve your positivity ratio, you can either decrease your negative emotions or increase your positive emotions. Positive Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson developed a twelve-item toolkit to help achieve this ratio. All the items in the toolkit are backed by science. Below and overleaf, I will provide an overview of a few of these approaches that have resonated with me.

Being mindfully in the present

The first approach in the toolkit invites us to temporarily put expectations and judgments aside and allow ourselves to be mindfully present in the moment.

Mindful walking can be used to practise mindfulness. For example, on your morning walk, ignore the mental to-do list and practice being open to nature. Use your senses to be in the present, rather than in your head. Taking a walk using the five senses, noticing the sights, and sounds around you and the feel of leaves under your feet, the taste of the fresh air, and the feel of the sun on your skin.

Adults with depression who engaged in ten minutes of mindfulness activities daily showed a reduction in symptoms. (Segal et al. 2012)



Connecting Mindfully with your Child

Connecting with your child involves spending time with your child, with the main focus on being. There are several ways in which we can build high-quality connections:

1. Being present, attentive, and affirming by fully focusing on others and encouraging their endeavours.
2. Showing support for what the other person is doing and do what you can to help them succeed.
3. Demonstrating trust by believing that the person can meet your expectations (and let it show).
4. Allowing time for 'play' by spending time with this person with no outcomes in mind.

Parents can increase their child's well-being by noticing and commenting on their positive approaches to tasks. For instance, noticed that you kept going with that work even when it was hard'. 'I noticed that you were thinking when you showed an interest in how I was feeling'.

Gratitude

Being grateful means noticing and appreciating the people around you and taking stock of what is good in your life. Doing so draws your attention to positive events. Emmons and McCulloch completed research into gratitude. In one study, they asked all participants to write a few sentences each week focusing on a particular topic. One group wrote about things they were grateful for and that had occurred during the week. A second group wrote about daily irritations or things that had displeased



them and the third wrote about events that had affected them (with no emphasis on them being positive or negative).

After 10 weeks, those who wrote about gratitude were more optimistic and felt better about their lives. Surprisingly they also exercised more and had fewer visits to physicians than those who focused on sources of aggravation.

Gratitude can be incorporated into your life in many ways, according to how you learn and your daily routine. For some this may fall best into their morning routine and for others, it is a night-time ritual. If you love writing and words, you may find recording your ideas in a journal regularly works for you. There are also gratitude journals for children to record their appreciative thoughts.

My daughter once took her gratitude diary into school. While showing her diary to her class, she lost her balance and fell backward unharmed into a box. She promptly said, "I am very grateful I am not hurt!"

One individual used to place a pebble in his pocket each day with his keys. At the end of the day, he would empty his pockets of the keys and the pebble. The pebble would act as a reminder to recall something for which he was grateful.

My family developed a nightly ritual of expressing something that we were grateful for during the day. The parent told their child they felt grateful to have her as a daughter.



Visualise your future with a vision board

We can use visualisation to increase our success and create images of what we want to achieve. A vision board can be created using pictures, photos, and drawings of your hopes and goals for the future.

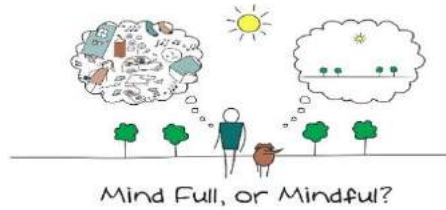
The vision board can include pictures of people you will be with, what you will be doing and where you will be living. Words can be included on the vision board expressing how you will feel when your goals have been achieved.

The vision board can be placed in your home, where it will remind you of your hopes and dreams. You may wish to put the picture on your phone as a screen saver to increase the times you see it each day.

Developing Healthy Distractions

When we are feeling low, distractions can reduce the grip of negativity. Healthy distractions aim to shift your focus away from anxieties and troubles. Fredrickson suggests making two lists, one of the healthy distractions and the other list of unhealthy distractions.

Healthy distractions might include going for a bike ride, walking your dog, playing a game with your child or a friend, reading a novel, etc. Unhealthy distractions to avoid might include excessively eating, drinking alcohol, or playing video games for hours. When you are feeling negative, aim to engage in any activity from the list of healthy distractions.



Meditating

Sitting in a quiet place for a few minutes, take several deep breaths. Breathe in cool air through your nose and warm air out through your mouth. Notice how you feel. Where do you feel your breath? Continue to observe your breath. The goal in attending to your breath is to practice being present in the here and now.

It is normal for people to have difficulty focusing during meditation and their 'mind' likes to jump from one idea to another. If this happens to you, it can help to be kind to yourself. Just observe your mind wandering without judgement and gently bring it back to the breathing. The effect of meditation on positivity levels increases with time. Let's look at the effect of practising mindfulness approaches over time.

7. Mindfulness Approaches

Research on the positive effects of mindfulness has come from the field of neuroscience. One study investigated the brain grey-matter concentration of individuals who had completed an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme (MBSR).

Gray-matter concentration is the number of neurons that are working in the brain at a given moment in time. The study showed that after eight weeks of mindfulness practice there were significant increases in grey-matter concentration in brain regions involved in learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing (processing of information relevant to oneself), and perspective-taking.



In one study, MRI scans were taken after each three-month mindfulness-based stress reduction course. The scans showed that parts of the cortex involved in the specific skill that was trained grew thicker in comparison with scans from a control group.

Mindfulness meditation increased thickness in the prefrontal cortex and parietal lobes, both linked to attention control. Compassion-based meditation showed increases in the limbic system, which processes emotions, and the anterior insula, which helps bring emotions into conscious awareness. Perspective-taking training boosted regions involved in theory of mind (the ability to understand and take into account another individual's mental state). All of the brain changes were matched by improvements in tests of the relevant skills.

Informal Mindfulness Practice

Informal mindfulness practice can be built into your everyday routines and chores. You may wish to practise paying attention while doing one activity and asking yourself "What do I see/hear/feel/taste/smell?" Below are a few suggested informal mindfulness practices:

- Drinking coffee or tea.
- Cooking a meal.
- Listening attentively to someone.
- Filling the washing machine or hanging up the washing.

Like New Year's Resolutions, good habits can be great to start and harder to keep. It is easy to be enthusiastic in the beginning and then for life to get in the way. Understanding how habits are formed can help us learn to consciously form habits that will support our emotional health.



8. Developing a Healthy Lifestyle

Being a parent requires lots of energy. If your child has additional needs, and you need to attend more appointments and put into place more interventions it can become quite exhausting.

Over the first seven years as a parent, my energy levels were slowly reducing. I would limit the number of social interactions with others to conserve my energy and I lacked the energy levels to be able to fulfil my goals.

I started to investigate the relationship between diet and energy levels. I had listened to a few talks by Eric Edmeades regarding the WildFit diet. When searching for opportunities to learn about this I came across the Pharmacy Counter website and Dr. Ryan Wagner's coaching programme.

Dr. Ryan Wagner has a Pharmd in Pharmaceutical Medicine and he is a certified WildFit coach. I signed up for Dr. Wagner's coaching programme alongside the WildFit programme. Completing the coaching with Dr. Wagner while doing the WildFit 90-day programme helped me make the changes to my diet. It kept me on track and motivated. Even after 5 weeks of the programme, I noticed that I had higher energy levels and I was enjoying life.

Below and overleaf, I will provide you with an overview of the WildFit programme and weblinks to finding out more information. During the first two weeks of the programme six types of hunger are introduced.

1. The first is **Nutritional** hunger, which is the only real form of hunger. It is when your body signals that you need more nutrients.



2. **Thirst** is the second form of hunger. We need 6-8 glasses of water a day. When we feel a signal of hunger, we may need water to hydrate our bodies. When we experience this type of hunger, drinking a glass of water should address it.

3. **Variety** is the third form of hunger. The body craves variety in the diet so that a full range of nutrients can be received. By changing our weekly menu, we can help our bodies feel more satisfied.

4. **Low blood-sugar** can occur after eating low-quality sugared foods. The food industry places a lot of sugar in processed food as it makes us feel hungry and eat more of their product. Natural sugars from fruit and honey are better but they need limiting to avoid the rise and fall of our blood sugar level.

5. **Emotional hunger** is common today. This is when we link food to our emotions. For instance, we may link eating chocolate with treating ourselves and self-soothing. Advertising influences our perception of food and emotions. The happy meal as advertised by one food giant links fast food with positive emotions. When we can identify the advertising aims we can use alternative ways of responding to our emotions.

6. **Empty Stomach Hunger**. As cave dwellers, we were often faced with coping with either feasting or famine. We learned to feast on as much as we could when food was available because we never knew how long we would have to cope with famine. Today, we have access to plentiful food but we are not regularly faced with famine. When we experience a feeling of an empty stomach, we feel we are in famine but never the



famine. You can learn to recognise this feeling is only in your head and choose to ignore it. Further information can be found on the website: <https://farmacycounter.com/wildfit-90-day-challenge/> If you use the coupon code “health500” you will receive \$500 off the WildFit challenge product. This is an affiliate coupon. Further information about WildFit can be found at the website: <https://getwildfit.com>

9. Habit Formation and Understanding Change

Researchers at University College London have studied the way we form habits. They found that on average takes 66 days for a person to develop a habit (Lally et al. 2009). Some people take longer and others shorter amounts of time. After 66 days the habit forms part of daily behaviour and it involves less conscious effort to do. Once a good habit is formed it is easier to continue with that behaviour than to stop doing it.

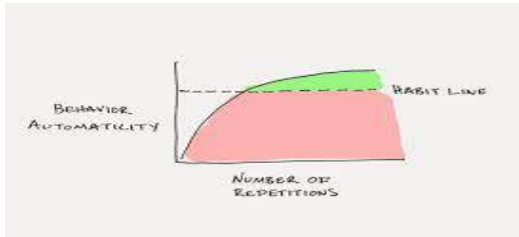
So how can we start to form new habits and fit them into our daily schedule? The next section will focus on habit stacking as an approach to achieving this goal.

Habit Stacking

‘You’ll never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine’.

(John C. Maxwell)

We can make small permanent changes by choosing actions that we can link to our daily routine. Brushing our teeth at night is such an ingrained habit that it can feel ‘wrong’ going to bed without doing it. Once a habit is ingrained it is easier to do that to it than to forget.



When forming new habits, the concept of ‘Habit Stacking’ is an invaluable tool. Habit stacking involves linking a new behaviour to something you already do. For instance, below and overleaf are some examples of habit stacking:

I drink tea every morning. It reminds me to go for a mindful walk, or do a mindfulness exercise.

I place a sticker on my computer lid. It reminds me to practise gratitude when I turn it on each morning and wait for it to set up.

I brush my teeth every morning. A note on the bathroom mirror reminds me to “Drink your green smoothie. Have 6 glasses of water a day”.

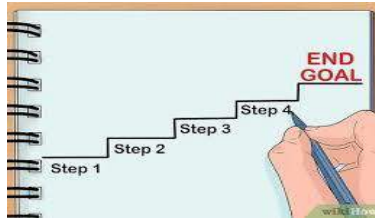
When making changes to our daily routines, it can be helpful to focus on our progress and to avoid comparing ourselves with others. In the next section, we will look at different ways in which change occurs.

Assessing change in ourselves

We change in unique ways. Sometimes change can be instant and we see immediate benefits. Often change takes time and we need to stay motivated when we struggle to experience obvious results.

Marisa Peer (Therapist, Author, Speaker) motivates her clients to make changes by understanding the process of change. She reports that change may be accumulative and occur little by little over time.

Marisa reports that change can also be retroactive. For instance, we may have been working on developing our emotional resilience for months or years without noticing any difference in our wellbeing. Then one day we



notice we have changed and we suddenly feel more positive and content but we do not know how or why this change has suddenly come about.

We ‘zig-zag’ through life when learning new skills. It is normal to make progress and observe some success and then to experience a set-back. If we recognise that the setbacks are part of our upward learning curve, we can prevent having relapses.

So now we know about how to form healthy habits, link them to existing routines and manage the change we need to craft a unique plan to develop our emotional resilience and that of our child.

10. Crafting a Plan to develop your Emotional Resilience.

When crafting your unique pathway to developing emotional resilience, you may wish to start by creating a vision board of how you would like your life to be. Vision boards were discussed in Section 6.

It is motivating to define why you wish to develop your emotional resilience and that of your child. For instance, ‘I commit to develop my emotional resilience, so that I can give my child the experience of a calm and consistent parent to support their through their childhood’. We have discussed different ways of developing Emotional Intelligence (Emotional IQ), managing loss, and developing resilience. Below and overleaf, these approaches have been collated using the acronym EMOTIONAL IQ, as an aide-mémoire.



E = Empathy – Being kind to ourselves and others. Practising loving kindness meditation and random acts of kindness. Seeing situations from another’s perspective.

M = Mindfulness – Engaging in mindfulness practices, using all our senses. Mindfully listening to others. Mindfully eating and drinking.

O = Open, honest communication with trusted others helps us to cope with life’s challenges and connect with others.

T = Taking time to reflect and process our emotions, through journaling, meditation and talking to trusted others.

I = Inspiring thoughts motivate us to reach our potential. Making time to learn ways to develop our emotional well-being from those who inspire us with their words or actions.

O = Observing the connection between our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Approach triangle) increasing our self-awareness.

N = Normalising strong emotions and feelings regarding loss and life’s challenges.

A = Action. Taking action by engaging in activities that consciously develop emotional resilience.

L = Listening attentively and actively to others – being fully present



creates more positive meaningful relationships. Loving ourselves.

I = Identifying things that we can be grateful for and identifying things that we love about ourselves. Identifying negative thoughts and beliefs and challenging them.

Q = Turning negative thoughts into positive belief using Socratic **Questioning**.

You may choose an approach that resonates with you and incorporate it into your daily routine. It can be helpful to commit to introduce one small change at a time.

Create a short-term goal and review your progress every 3 months. Be gentle with yourself and reward your efforts. In brain circuitry, it is about the ‘survival of the busiest’. Consistency will create a clear pathway for your emotional resilience to grow.





11. Resources

Websites and Apps

www.youngminds.org.uk/shop/publications/c-23/c-70/

Young Minds provide free publications for young people to download, on topics ranging from depression to anger.

www.mindvalley.com

The Mindvalley curriculum is designed to unleash the fullest potential of your mind, body, and spirit.

<https://meditofoundation.org/>

The Medito Foundation has a free-forever meditation app.

www.liberatemeditation.com

Liberate meditation is an app developed for the Black community.

www.winstonswish.org

Winston's Wish is a charity that provides support to children and young people to help them rebuild their lives after the death of a parent or sibling, enabling them to face the future with hope.

<https://www.headspace.com/>

Headspace provides a meditation app.

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

Anxiety UK is a national registered charity.

www.carolgraysocialstories.com

The Carole Gray Social Stories website provides information on Social Stories and a free parents club.

<https://farmacycounter.com/wildfit-90-day-challenge/>

If you use the coupon code "health500" you will receive \$500 off the WildFit challenge product. This is an affiliate coupon.

<https://getwildfit.com>

Further information about the WildFit programme.



Books for children and young people

Brukner, L. The Kids' Guide to Staying Awesome and in Control.

This book is developed by an occupational therapist for children and young people with sensory processing needs. It contains practical approaches to help children and young people regulate their emotions.

Kelley, P. Friendship Troubles (A smart girl's guide): dealing with fights, being left out, and the whole popularly thing.

This book provides strategies for young teenage girls, to help them regulate their emotions and deal with friendships.

Li, Amanda (2019). Rise Up: Ordinary Kids with Extraordinary Stories. *A series of short inspiring stories and suggested actions. It is written for primary and secondary age children and can be read to younger children.*

Morgan, Nicola (2013). Blame My Brain.

This book is written for teenagers to help them understand how the brain is developing at this age.

Potter, Molly (2019). How are you feeling today?

This book provides practical strategies for children at a developmental age of between 4-10 years. It helps them identify different emotions and choose positive coping strategies to regulate their emotions.

Quinn, Patricia. ADD and the College Student: A Guide for High School and College Students with Attention Deficit Disorder.

This book provides advice for sixth form age students with Attention Deficit Disorder who all preparing to transition to Further Education .

Quinn Patricia and Stern, Judith (2009). Putting on the Brakes Activity Book for Kids with ADD. *This practical workbook provides a range of exercises and approaches to help develop a child's awareness of attention deficit disorder.*



Books for adults

Frederickson, B. (2011). *Positivity: Ground-breaking Research To Release Your Inner Optimist and Thrive*.

Lakhiani, V. (2016). *The Code of the Extraordinary Mind: 10 Unconventional laws to redefine your life and succeed on your own terms*.

Peer, Marisa. (2009). *Ultimate Confidence: The secrets to feeling good about yourself every day*.

Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G. & Teasdale, J. T. (2012). *"Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression"* (2nd ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.

Timmins, S. (2016) *Successful Social Stories for Young Children. Social Stories for children, between 4-7 years of age*.

Articles and Videos

<https://www.huffpost.com/entry/productivity-tips>

This article provides tips for developing productivity using Newton's Laws of Physics.

www.newscientist.com/article/2149489-different-meditation-types-train-distinct-parts-of-your-brain/#ixzz6PZDQuCeo

This article provides information about how different meditation types train specific parts of the brain.

www.apa.org/monitor/2015/03/cover-mindfulness

The article explains how mindfulness reduces symptoms of depression.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcFmrVZ0e-I>

This video is an introduction to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.