

# Resilience!

## A Guide for Educators

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Working as a teacher, special educator or administrator, there are times when negative, adverse events at work (and home) can lead you to experience a range of negative emotions such as *anger*, *anxiety* or *feeling down*. While these negative emotions are normal and understandable, when you become extremely angry or highly anxious, or feel very down, not only is your overall social-emotional well-being impaired, but your ability to think clearly, solve problems, and continue to perform at a high level of professional effectiveness is greatly reduced.

A key *personal capability* we all need when the going gets tough is “emotional resilience”. No matter how technically skilled you are in your job (e.g. classroom management, in the design and presentation of lessons, in using ongoing performance feedback of students to guide your instruction, managing budgets, strategic planning) *without emotional resilience, the ability to deliver your abundant professional skills is compromised*.

**Emotional Resilience** means... being aware of your negative emotions (anxiety, anger, down) when something adverse happens, being able to prevent yourself from getting extremely upset, or when you are very upset and knowing what to do to calm down and to feel better. It also means being able to control your behaviour when you get extremely upset. By being able to maintain control of your negative emotions, emotional resilience helps you to “bounce back” from adversity and, specifically, to continue to work towards your goal of being successful and happy.

Emotional resilience as a personal capability involves your use of a variety of ways to think and different coping skills that: 1. help you

regulate the intensity of your emotional response to adverse events in your life, and 2. help you to eliminate the adversity. Some ways of thinking and coping skills are emotion-focused (e.g. not blowing things out of proportion, not taking things personally, switching from negative to positive thoughts, relaxation, finding someone to talk to) and focus on ways you can calm down and be in control of your emotions when the adversity cannot be so readily eliminated from your life (e.g. difficult behaviour of some people). Other ways of thinking and coping skills are problem-focused and involve you using your personal strengths (e.g. asserting yourself, managing your time, steps to solving an interpersonal problem) to make the problem go away (e.g. oppositional student, someone asking you to join another committee).

Emotional resilience is not about eliminating emotions totally. It is about empowering you so that you feel you have some control over your emotional response to adverse situations.

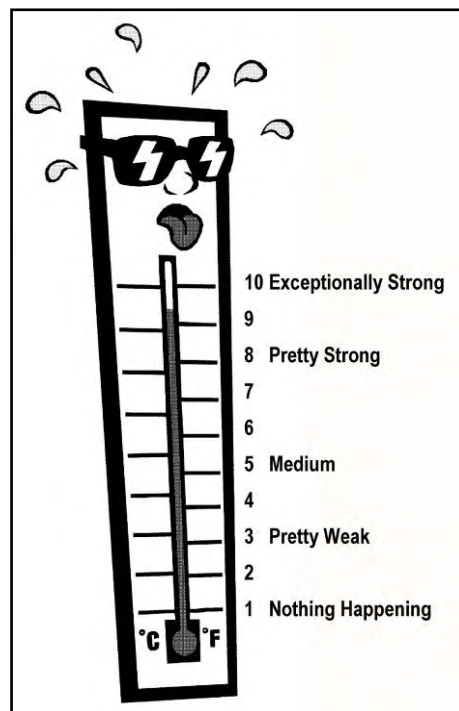
My own recent research throughout Australia, England and the United States into the personal capabilities of educators has yielded some interesting findings. While educators as a group tend to have strong getting along capabilities, are extremely persistent, and are generally organized, they indicate that they need to develop their confidence and emotional resilience.

This brief article provides some ideas that have helped countless teachers, special educators and administrators maintain their calmness and emotional control in the face of the unrelenting and, oftentimes, highly adverse events that make up the territory of schools.

## Emotional Resilience: The "Big Picture"

We have learned that there are three main negative emotions that all people experience at various times when they are faced with adverse events: anger, anxiety and feeling down (depressed). It is quite normal and healthy to experience these negative emotions as they often can help motivate you to eliminate the adversity.

We have also learned that the same emotion can vary in intensity from strong to weak as illustrated by the



Emotional Thermometer

Emotional Thermometer. For example, if a student curses at you, you may experience various degrees of anger from mild annoyance (temperature rating of 1 or 2) to extreme rage (temperature rating of 9 or 10). It is when our emotions become extreme that our behaviour often becomes erratic and self-defeating as when we act aggressively or withdraw.

A goal to set for yourself when you are faced with negative, adverse events at work or home is to not become extremely upset but rather, using the Emotional Thermometer as a guide, stay within the middle range of emotional upset (temperature rating between 4 and 7).

## Adverse Events in Schools

Because of the nature of schools and the constant interaction amongst students, teachers and parents, high workload demands and the public accountability of teachers, special educators and administrators for improved test scores, there are inevitable examples of adverse events ("things") that all too frequently occur in the daily lives of educators that can give rise to varying degrees of anger, anxiety and, or, feeling down. These are listed in Tables 1 through 3.

Events that give rise to anger include actions of others you perceive to be unjust, unfair, inconsiderate, disrespectful or unprofessional. Anger can also be precipitated when you perceive that there are too many things to do and not enough time to do them.

Events that give rise to anxiety are those current or future events that might occur that indicate that you are not being as successful in an area of your work (achievement, discipline) as you would like to be or events that indicate that people (students, administrators, colleagues, parents) might be critical of you.

Events leading to you feeling down include past events that reveal you have not been successful in meeting your goals in areas of professional accomplishment (student lack of achievement, meeting students' needs, out of control class) or when you have been criticized by someone whose opinion you respect and value for some aspect of your work.

## Things that Lead to Anger ...

**Adverse Events Associated with Students (unfairness, inconsideration, disrespect):** Students who refuse to follow directions in class and playground, interrupt teachers, waste time, lie (e.g., forge parent's signature), cheat, steal, fight, talk back, do not do homework, tattletale, bully, throw objects, swear, show disrespect to each other, daydream, do not understand schoolwork, do not listen, are not organised and take a lot of time to get materials ready, have poor study habits

**Adverse Events Associated with Other Teachers/Staff, Administration or Parents (unfairness, inconsideration, disrespect):** disruptions outside of class, not being treated professionally by other teachers, differences in the manner in which teachers relate to and teach other students, equipment not being returned, unfair time tabling, principal makes decisions without discussing issues with those impacted by decisions, lack of communication, lack of respect from other teachers for what you do, teachers not following through on doing what they say, lack of administrative support, preferences in teaching loads, unfair share of "duty", having "worst" students, delay by administration in ordering needed material, secretary hides supplies, lack of cooperation, gossip and rumours being spread among staff, parents who support student's bad behaviour, parents accusing teacher without knowing all the facts, parents who question grades of their child

## Things that Lead to Anxiety ...

**Adverse Events Associated with Students: when you see or anticipate (lack of success/criticism) ...** not being able to control the behaviours of the students in your class, restlessness in students, not being liked by students, students being angry and "turned off", students' reactions to being given poor grades, being asked a question you cannot answer, being unable to adapt to meet the individual needs of students, being unable to motivate students, arguing over test answers or grades, cheating by students, students not performing well on tests and not meeting goals set for them, not holding high enough expectations of students, not being respected by students, students "twisting" situations when reporting an incident to parents, students not showing up for class, students hurting each other, students declining in behaviour or academic performance from previous standards, students not having learned benchmarks for age/grade, not being able to teach because of time involved in managing severe behaviours (e.g., autism), low academic performance of students

**Adverse Events Associated with Other Teachers/Staff, Administration or Parents: when you see or anticipate (lack of success/criticism) ...** walking into class unprepared, school principal or supervisor has critical judgments to communicate to you about your discipline or instructional effectiveness, negative encounters with parents who are critical of you, incompatible relationship with an administrator or supervisor, aides not fulfilling obligations, finding time for creative teaching, having too much work to do at home, being blamed by parents, responsibilities for extra curricular activities, excessive noise and disruptions outside the classroom

## Things that Lead to Feeling Down ...

**Adverse Events Associated with Students (lack of success/criticism):** students continuing to misbehave, not knowing how to make students who suck their thumb and cry feel better, lack of success of a child in special education you have responsibility for, lack of success in meeting the needs of students in special education, watching and not being able to help students who manifest ongoing emotional problems (e.g., separation anxiety), students not showing up for an activity, setbacks after progress with a student, being compared by students to other successful teachers, a "sea" of blank student faces, lack of student enthusiasm, not being successful in individualising instruction, personal comments by a student about teacher ("This is boring."), poor exam results made public, not being promoted, someone else being selected to go to a conference, another teacher or program receiving greater support

**Adverse Events Associated with Other Teachers/Staff, Administration or Parents (lack of success/criticism)...** other teachers who try to discipline students in your class, being treated as outcasts as special education teachers, criticism/lack of parental support, public criticism thought by teacher to be correct, exclusion from social groups after school, being ignored

**“Things Are Neither Good nor Bad But Thinking Makes Them So.” -Shakespeare**

We now understand that the greatest influence over the extent to which you are emotionally calm and in control when faced with adverse situations is your thinking rather than the situation itself. Take for example a teacher who

is faced with a student who curses. You can see from the accompanying diagrams that one large factor that determines how upset you become in the face of cursing is the way you think about the student’s behaviour.

**Examples of Different Emotional Reactions to the Same Situation**

Anger				
Happening		Thinking	Feeling	Behaviour
student curses	Teacher A	Students should always be respectful. This is awful and terrible. I can't stand it. This student is a real _____.	extreme anger anger out of control	yells puts student down irrational penalty
	Teacher B	I prefer students to be respectful. I can deal with it. I don't like this behaviour. This student is fallible and is making a mistake.	annoyed in control	talks respectfully to student logical consequence

Down				
Happening		Thinking	Feeling	Behaviour
student curses	Teacher A	I should have been successful with this student. Others will judge me badly. This is awful. I can't stand it. I am hopeless	extremely down	withdrawal
	Teacher B	I prefer to be successful and have my work approved of by others. When I am not, it's bad, but not the end of the world. I can cope. I'll try to figure out if there is anything I can do.	disappointed	constructive action

**Don't Go Blowing Things Out of Proportion**

Please take a minute to read through an example of a teacher and a principal who are experiencing extremely high emotional stress. Please consider whether or not the way they view and think about some troubling events reveal an “It’s not as bad as you think it is” mindset.

Mary James is a grade 7 teacher who is viewed by many as an excellent teacher. She seems to enjoy teaching adolescents and has many ways to make the curriculum come alive. Currently, Mary is not enjoying her teaching and is

experiencing Monday-morning-itis. The problem is that several of her students, all boys, are taking advantage of her good nature. When she asks one of them to stop talking or another to stop throwing paper in class, she is greeted by opposition or delaying tactics. From a teacher who had strong positive relationships with her students, she is changing over to one whom, because she is yelling, lecturing and scolding is becoming viewed by some of her more difficult students as the enemy. Mary’s mindset towards the students seems to be making matters worse and causing her severe

emotional stress: “Their behaviour is terrible and awful. It is not tolerable to have to put up with it! They deserve to be treated as they treat me!”

Brian Fordham, school principal of Shady Lakes School has begun noticing that he is becoming more intolerant of one of his classroom teachers, Mary James. The issue surrounds the way Mary is handling one of her more challenging students, Jonathon Singer. Jonathon is routinely sent by Mary to his office for any number of major and minor offences –the last one being having drawn a face on his maths work sheet. While Mary does a great job with her “good” students, she feels that when students behave badly, there is nothing she can really do. As Principal, Brian’s responsibility is to help support Mary in learning new ways to better manage her students, but finds his frustration and occasional anger about Mary’s approach to difficult-to-teach students hard to take. His mindset is leading to unprofessionally high levels of stress: “She really should be able to teach all students and handle the difficult ones in firm and positive ways. It is really awful and unbearable to constantly have to deal with her. She should probably consider leaving teaching.”

Over the past few decades, I have written about an aspect of our thinking that contributes a great deal to our emotional stress and poor emotional resilience. This tendency is referred to as *catastrophising*. Simply stated, catastrophising means the tendency to blow the badness of events out of proportion.

What we have learned is that when people of all ages become extremely emotionally upset, they do so because they are thinking to themselves that what has happened or is about to happen is not only bad, but is the worst thing that could happen. We use particular words and phrases when we catastrophise such as: “This is terrible.” “This is horrible.” “This is really the worst thing.” We use these words and phrases not only when referring to events that are catastrophic such as war, terrorism, natural disasters but to events that are bad but not catastrophic such as when we make mistakes, fail or when people are thinking critically of what we have done or said.

Consider the Emotional Thermometer. It can be used to measure the intensity of how strongly someone feels. Now, when something happens to us that we perceive to be bad such as making a mistake or being rejected, it is normal to feel in the middle of the Emotional Thermometer. We might feel somewhat or medium down, or worried or angry. However, when we catastrophise, that is, blow the event out of proportion, our emotional temperature moves way up the thermometer and we feel very down, panicked or furious.

The key to staying relatively calm or in the middle of the Emotional Thermometer when we are faced with something that is bad but not awful, terrible and catastrophic is keeping the badness of the event in perspective. Our thinking at these times will sound something like: “While this is bad. It’s not that bad. It could be a lot worse.”

## How to Use the Howbadzzat? “Catastrophe” Scale

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The Howbadzzat? Catastrophe Scale poster can help you to not to blow bad things out of proportion and of the importance of keeping things in perspective. The Howbadzzat? Catastrophe scale developed for use with for all people including children and young people presents to a scale for measuring how bad things are. Extremely high ratings (90-100) which can be considered as catastrophes, the “worst” things in the world, are represented by an erupting volcano, a meteor hits the earth, being eaten by a shark and being physically assaulted. Things that are “very bad” include a very serious car accident, being arrested and thrown in jail. Things that are “bad” include being at the dentist, your computer crashes, falling off your bike and receiving a bad mark in school. Finally, things that fall into the “a bit bad” include being stung by a little mosquito, having a pimple, your ice cream falls on the ground or a dog eats your hotdog.

Where you place an event on the Catastrophe Scale determines how strong your emotions are on the Emotional Thermometer.

There is little question that Mary James is faced with hassles associated with poor student classroom behaviour that make teaching Science tough. And Brian Fordham’s demands of leadership are increased when Mary James continuously sends to him students to be reprimanded.

## The Battle between Positive and Negative Habits of the Mind

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We now know that we are all born with two ways of thinking; 1. positive or rational, and 2. negative or irrational. The degree to which we become emotionally upset when adverse events happen is governed largely by whether we are viewing and interpreting the event through a rational or irrational lens. The accompanying table will provide you with an opportunity to determine whether you hold any of the major irrational, negative Habits of the Mind that lead to poor emotional resilience.

However, the question is whether or not they are blowing events at work and home out of proportion. Yes, both are confronted with events that we would all agree are “bad”. However, it appears that both are exaggerating how bad things really are.

Once Mary and Brian place these events on the “Catastrophe Scale” in proper perspective, their emotional reactions become more manageable and they are more fully able to use their considerable talents to solve their practical problems. By incorporating the “Catastrophe Scale” into their mindset about life’s difficulties and recognising that most things in life are hassles but not horrors, their emotional life will be more settled and they will experience heightened social and emotional well-being. And the additional payoff is that when children and young people witness adults in their lives not over-reacting emotionally to their challenging behaviour, they will be learning a powerful lesson for how they can react to their own issues they may encounter.

So remember, when you notice your emotional thermometer heading towards fever range, think to yourself: “Howbadzzat?” And if the answer is “It’s not as bad as I think it is,” you will have served yourself up a powerful elixir that will help you stay calm in the face of adversity.

The impact of the different irrational, negative Habits of the Mind on your emotional responses when faced with adversity is represented below.

### Self-Downing

You are prone to high levels of being down

### Need for Approval

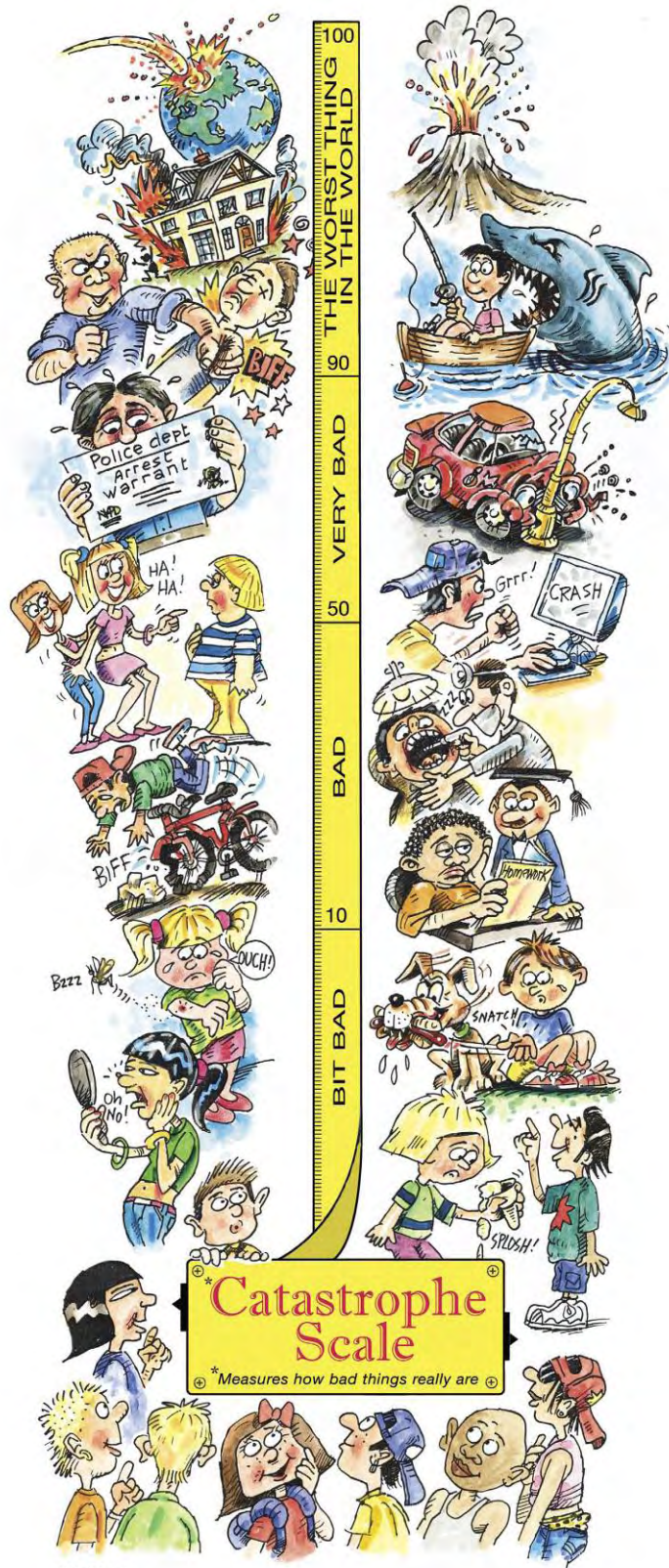
You are prone to high levels of social anxiety

### Need for Achievement (Perfectionism)

You are prone to high levels of performance anxiety

# HOWBADZZAT?

It's not as bad  
as you think it is!



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### **I Can't Do It!**

You are prone to getting down and feeling hopeless and helpless

### **I Can't Be Bothered**

You are prone to high levels of anger when faced with unpleasant tasks; you tend to procrastinate

### **Intolerance of Others**

You are prone to anger with people you perceive as doing the wrong thing

Keep in mind that all of us to greater or lesser extents harbour negative, Habits of the Mind. Fortunately, by becoming aware of those that you hold, you have an opportunity to make a swap within your mind and replace the negative Habits of the Mind with the positive Habits of the Mind described in the Check Up from Your Neck Up Survey below.

## **Your Check Up from the Neck Up Survey**

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**Instructions:** Place a check mark in the box that indicates which type of thinking is most characteristic of you when faced with adversity.

<input type="checkbox"/> Self-Downing  vs. <input type="checkbox"/> Accepting Myself	When things go badly and I make mistakes or people are critical of me, I tend to put myself down and think of myself as a failure or a loser.  When things go badly and I make mistakes or people are critical of me, I accept myself and do not put myself down at these times.
<input type="checkbox"/> Need for Approval  vs. <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Approval Seeking	I seem to be someone who is overly concerned with what others think of me, and I think it is terrible to be criticised or thought badly of.  While I like to be approved of, I don't need the approval of others.
<input type="checkbox"/> Need for Achievement (Perfectionism)  vs. <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible Risk Taking	I seem to be someone who needs to be highly successful. It is horrible for me to make mistakes.  While I like to be successful, I don't need to be all the time. I try new things even though there is a high likelihood that I might not be successful at first.
<input type="checkbox"/> I Can't Do It  vs. <input type="checkbox"/> I Can Do It	I am a pessimist believing things will turn out for the worse.  I generally believe I will be successful and things will turn out for the best.
<input type="checkbox"/> I Can't Be Bothered  vs. <input type="checkbox"/> Working Tough	I really can't stand it when I have too much work to do and not enough time to do it. Things shouldn't be so hard and unpleasant.  While I prefer that things go comfortably and easily, I accept that in order to achieve pleasant results in the long term, I sometimes have to do unpleasant things in the short term.
<input type="checkbox"/> Intolerance of Others  or <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerance of Others	People should always act fairly, considerately, and respectfully. I can't stand it when they do not. People who act unfairly are "louses" who deserve to be punished.  People are fallible and sometimes make mistakes. While I strongly prefer others to act fairly and considerately, I can stand it when they do not. I try hard not to condemn them for their actions.



# What to Do to Build Your Emotional Resilience at Work (and Home)

## Step 1 – Take Stock

To begin with, let's focus on those events that occur at work that lead you to get extremely angry, anxious or to feel very down. You can use the Emotional Thermometer to rate the intensity of your emotions.

In the table on page 3, I have listed events that commonly occur at work that can trigger intense feelings of anger, anxiety and feeling very down. These events make it harder to stay calm. Take a few minutes to review the events on the lists and underline those events that seem to be your pressure points.

The feeling of extreme anger requires special mention. More often than not, we feel perfectly justified in feeling very angry and, at times, retaliating because we have been treated unfairly and inconsiderately or we perceive injustice. The point to be made about feeling

very angry is that extreme anger normally does not help us function effectively in the situation that triggers our anger and, in many instances, extreme anger causes us to say and do things that we later regret.

So when you take stock of your anger, take stock of your behaviour and the consequences of your behaviour on others and on the situation. I believe that a moderate level of anger (4 – 6 on the Emotional Thermometer) is appropriate for situations that occur with people at school as it motivates you to take steps to change the person's behaviour or correct the injustice. However, any higher and we lose control or ourselves and the situation.

So, an important resilient thing to do is to be aware of how upset you are and deciding to stay calm.

## Step 2 – Take Control

Once you recognise those situations where you are not staying calm or are not calming down quickly enough and bouncing back, you can then decide to take control of yourself and the situation.

### Rational Mindset to Take Control

Depending on the nature of the adversity and your emotions, different rational ways of thinking can help you to manage your emotions so that you stay calm, calm down, control your behaviour and bounce back.

**Dealing with All Stressful Events.** There are two robust, rational ways to think about most negative events that add greatly to your emotional resilience.

- "It's Not as Bad as You Think It Is" thinking (Don't blow things out of proportion.)

### Positive/Rational Thoughts to Help Reduce Your Anger

- While it is preferable to be treated fairly, kindly and considerately, there is no law of the universe that says I *must be*.
- People who act unfairly, inconsiderately, or unkindly may deserve to be penalised, but never to be totally condemned as rotten no-goodniks who deserve to be eternally damned.
- Anger does not help in the long run; it is only temporarily effective at best.
- Anger towards others frequently prevents me from getting what I want.
- While it is undesirable to fail to get what I want, it is seldom awful or intolerable.
- I can cope successfully with unfair people even though I strongly wish they would act better.
- I wish others would treat me fairly – but they never *have to*.
- I do not *need* other people to act well – I only prefer it.
- People act the way they do because that's the way they act. Tough!
- I can live and be happy – though not as happy – with my significant other's fallibility.
- My supervisor is fallible and will not always act fairly or competently. Tough – that's the way fallible human beings work!
- I *can* put up with this negative and hostile person, though it would be better if he/she acted better.

- “I Can Stand It” thinking (You can stand things you don’t like.)

Ever hear yourself thinking: “This is awful, I can’t stand it!” You might apply this thinking about the behaviour of a student, fellow colleague, school administrator, parents or the way the school operates. When your brain tells your body something is awful and you cannot stand it, your emotions go galloping to the top of your Emotional Thermometer. To strengthen your resilience in the face of adverse events, you will need to remind yourself that things are not as bad as you think they are –they could be a lot worse. Review the section on the Howbadzzat? Catastrophe Scale presented earlier in the article. You should also remind yourself that you have stood and will continue to stand things that are bad –the evidence is that these events won’t kill you, you won’t faint.

### Dealing with Setbacks including

**Criticism.** We have now learned that one type of negative thinking that undermines people’s resilience is when they put themselves down and take things very personally. This negative way of thinking is called “Self-Downing”. In order to rebound from criticism and setbacks, you will want to use a more rational way to think about yourself; namely:

- “Accepting Myself” thinking (Never rate yourself as being hopeless or a loser when bad things happen to you.)

To help overcome the tendency we all sometimes have to put ourselves down, complete the top half of the circle on the next page by filling in the appropriate spaces with pluses (+’s) for the things you do well at work and with minuses (-’s) for the things you do not do so well. Then, complete the bottom half of the circle by writing in the things you do well in the rest of your life as well as the things you like about yourself (+’s). In the (-’s), write in things

### Positive/Rational Thoughts to Help You Stop Feeling Anxious

- Just because things are not succeeding today does not mean I’m a “no-hoper” or that I will not succeed in the future.
- While it is very desirable to achieve well and be recognised by others, I do not *need* achievement or recognition to survive and be happy.
- Mistakes and rejections are inevitable. I will work hard at accepting myself while hating my mistakes and setbacks.
- My performance at work – perfect or otherwise – does not determine my worth as a person.
- Things are rarely as bad, awful, or catastrophic as I imagine them to be.
- What’s the worst thing that can happen? It’s not the end of the world if I’m not successful or if someone thinks badly of me.
- Breathe in, breathe out. Be cool.

### Positive/Rational Thoughts to Help You Stop Feeling Down

- I accept who I am, even though I may not like some of my traits and behaviours.
- There are many things about me that I like and do well (enumerate them).
- I have done many things at work successfully in the past, I will succeed in the future.
- I am intelligent and talented enough to learn what I have to do and how to do it in order to accomplish my goals.
- My performance at work – perfect or otherwise – does not determine my worth as a person.
- I am confident that everything will turn out okay given that I have my goals, know what to do, and work hard.
- I prefer people to like me, but I can live without their approval.
- Mistakes and setbacks are inevitable. I will accept myself while disliking my mistakes and setbacks.

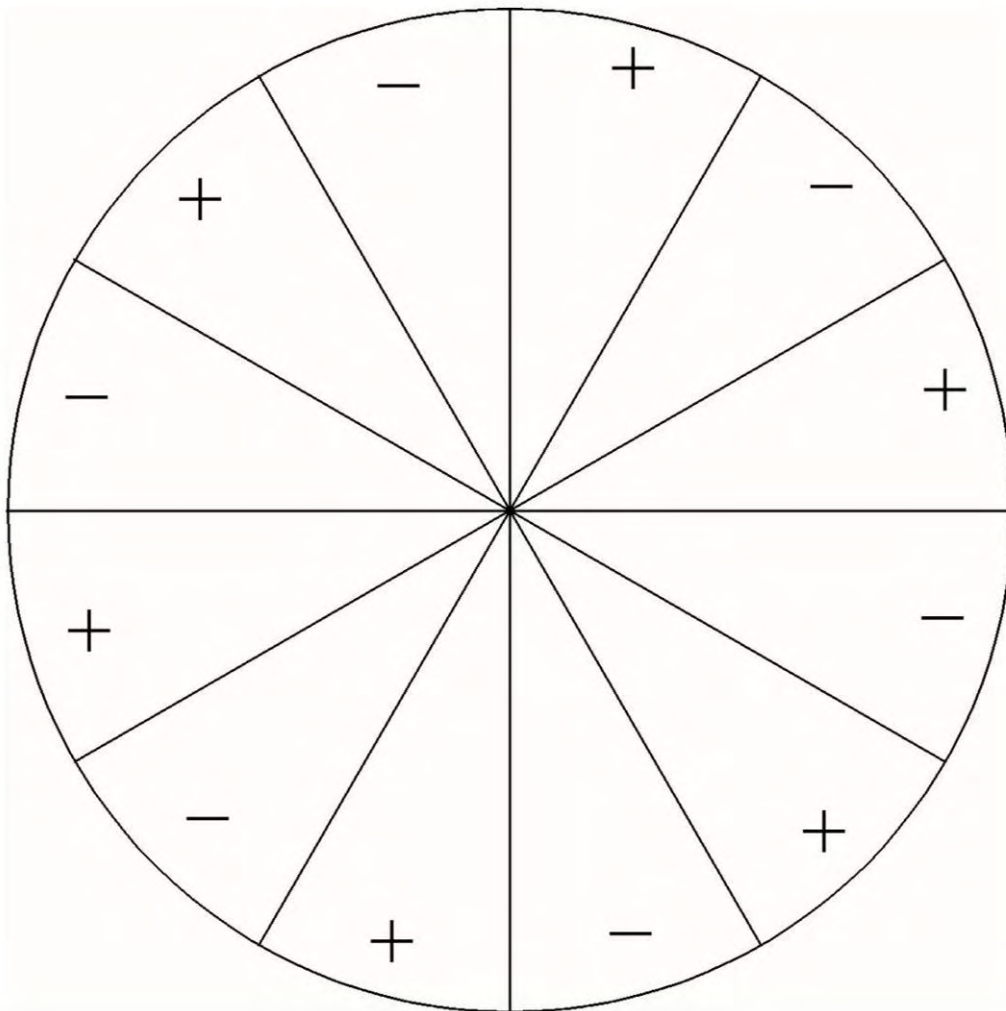
you do not do well or you do not like about yourself.

To counter the tendency to put yourself down when things are not going well, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does this bad situation (mistake, failure, rejection, criticism) take away my good qualities?

2. Does it make sense to conclude (and is it true?) that “I am totally hopeless” because of one or more negative things that have happened?

### Work



### Rest of Your Life

#### Dealing with Performance and Social Pressures.

To strengthen emotional resilience in situations where you worry a lot (e.g. speaking up in a meeting, trying a new approach), the following two ways of thinking help combat anxiety.

- “Taking Risks” thinking (It’s OK to make mistakes when trying new things.)
- “Being Independent” thinking (You don’t need people to approve of

everything you say and do. It’s important to say what you think, feel and want.)

Some of us who have the highest standards of professional excellence mistakenly believe that because they strongly prefer to be very successful and to receive recognition from others, they need achievement and approval. Whoops! You see the problem? When we are in situations where we believe we need something

to happen, we tend to worry much more that if we just strongly prefer that something should happen.

If we believe we are incapable of doing anything positive in a situation to improve the situation, we will be vulnerable to feelings of helplessness and hopeless and poor resilience. Instead, adopt the optimistic rather than pessimistic point of view represented in the following way of thinking:

- “I Can Do It!” thinking” (You’re more likely to be successful than to fail when you give it your personal best.)

**Dealing with Hard Yakka.** It is vital that each of us have strong emotional reserves to cope with life’s frustrations. In order to do so, we need to accept that hassles go with the territory and that life wasn’t meant to be easy. The following way of thinking will build your resilience to face life’s hard yakka.

- “Working Tough” thinking (To achieve pleasant results in the long-term, I sometimes have to do unpleasant things in the short-term).

**Dealing with Difficult People (and Organisational Behaviour).** When situations and people trigger strong anger in us, it is because we generally have the irrational expectations that people should always act fairly, considerately and respectfully in the way I treat them. Now, while it is strongly preferable that people do the right thing, to demand that they should all the time flies in the face of reality –that’s not the way people are. People are fallible human being who for different reasons are sometimes more interested in themselves than they are others. The following way of thinking help build you emotional resilience in the face of difficult people and difficult organisations.

- “Being Tolerant of Others” thinking (When people do the wrong thing or when they are different from you in custom or appearance, do not condemn

them as being bad or inferior. Give them the right to be wrong)

### **Practical Things to Do to Take Control**

When your emotions are galloping along and you feel at the end of your tether, in addition to rational ways to think, there are practical things you can do to strengthen your resilience.

### **Relaxation**

When you are faced with pressures or other adverse circumstances and notice you are getting uptight, you can learn to calm down to by learning to relax. There are a variety of relaxation techniques that you can use. For example, the 5-3-5 Relaxation Technique is a popular method. You can teach yourself this method by following the following instructions (you can tape record them).

“To begin with, rapidly exhale all the air from your lungs. Next, slowly to a count of five, inhale...one...two...three...four...five. Hold your breath of air for a slow count of three...one...two...three. Now slowly, very slowly, exhale the air to a slow count of five...one...two...three...four...five. You have just completed one repetition. To continue to relax, breathe in slowly to a count of five, hold for a count of three, and again exhale to a slow count of five.”

### **Find Someone to Talk to**

When things are not going well and you’ve tried everything to remain positive and not blow things out of proportion, sometimes it is good to seek out someone who you trust and who is a good listener. A trusted friend is rarely too busy to not have time. Brainstorm people who you could trust to talk to. Make sure that you have identified a source of support. The worst thing is to keep extreme emotions pent up inside left to explode.

Additional resilient things to do include:

- Find a ‘time out’ area to de-stress
- Find something fun to do to distract oneself

- Exercise to combat fatigue
- Healthy eating to combat fatigue
- Having a good laugh and not taking yourself or the situation so seriously

With emotions calm and resilience established, you are now in a good position to figure out what you can do to make the problem go away.

### **Step 3 – Take Action to Make the Problem Go Away**

Once you are in control of your emotions and behaviour and you are ready to bound back, here are some actions you can take to make the problem go away so that you can be stress-free!

#### **Be Confident**

When confronting problems that are challenging and with setbacks, use your best examples of verbal and non-verbal confident behaviour. Make your best effort to:

- Trying a new discipline plan
- Trying new and different things at the risk of failure
- In high pressure situations, express my opinion
- Sharing with parents “issues” and problems I am having with their child
- Speaking with a clear, firm tone of voice when expressing my ideas in a faculty meeting
- Standing up for what I believe when others express a different opinion
- Speaking my mind even if my opinion is unpopular
- Standing up for someone who is being treated unfairly
- Beginning a project that no one else thinks is valuable, but I do
- Taking on a project that you don’t know 100% about and to research it on your own
- Making suggestions to my superior about how to improve programming
- Volunteering to model good practices in meetings
- Asking for (and do not feel intimidated by) constructive criticism
- Trying to do new things based on constructive criticism
- Implementing a new teaching strategy

- Continuing doing something I think is right even when someone disagrees

#### **Confidence (Non-Verbal)**

- Maintaining eye contact
- Standing up straight, tall with good body posture
- Speaking clearly
- Taking opportunities to meet new people
- Dressing confidently

#### **Persist**

When faced with time-consuming, boring tasks, gear up for the extra effort and avoid procrastination. Make your best effort to:

- Finishing all important tasks that have to be done
- Doing the work nobody wants to do but needs to be done
- Finishing unpleasant tasks early in the week

#### **Get Organised**

When faced with time/work load pressures, get yourself organised. Make your best effort to:

- Planning out lesson in advance to fit within time allocated
- Maintaining sufficient school supplies and materials
- Keeping track of important meetings
- Preparing for important meetings
- Setting deadlines to complete tasks
- Having proper equipment I need for lesson ready to go before lesson
- Having a file cabinet with filing system to file papers
- Writing down a list of what needs to get done each day

- Setting realistic goals and times by which they will be met
- Recording important meetings/events on a calendar
- Filling out a daily, hour-by-hour “what to do” chart

### Get Along

When dealing with difficult people and difficult aspects of your organisation, use assertive and conflict resolution skills.

“Assertiveness” can help all people reduce levels of negative emotions by helping to change the circumstances that helped create the emotions in the first place. When you’re assertive, you state clearly and directly your honest feelings and wishes. Rather than raising your voice or mumbling, you use a warm and yet firm tone of voice. You wear a relaxed expression and look directly at the person who is pressuring you or treated you with disrespect.

**Conflict Resolution.** Steps to solving a conflict include:

- Step 1. Define the problem
- Step 2. Determine if you are very angry; calm down first if you feel you are losing your temper
- Step 3. Make a list of different things you can say or do to solve the conflict.

- Step 4. Make a list of the positive and negative things that could happen for each thing you could do or say.
- Step 5. Select the best things to do or so (the one with the most positives and least negatives).
- Step 6. Put the solution into action.
- Step 7. Evaluate whether the solution was successful in solving the problem.
- Step 8. If you were not successful, select another solution until you find one that works.

Make your best effort to:

- Making positive comments about colleagues
- Avoiding gossip
- Providing constructive advice rather than give orders
- Volunteering to work with others on projects
- Offering to help others
- Being a good listener
- Being flexible and not insisting it must be done my way
- Being open to learning new ideas from other people
- Relating positively to a difficult parent teacher, student or administrator

### Strengthening Resilience: Individual Action Plan

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The accompanying “Strengthening Resilience: Individual Action Plan” will help you to apply the Take Stock, Take Control, Take Action three-step approach to strengthening your resilience.

Complete the form and if you wish, discuss with another colleague. Plan to review your action plan on a regular basis.

## Strengthening Resilience: Individual Action Plan

Resilience...being aware of how you feel, maintaining calm...when upset, controlling your negative behaviour (aggressive, passive withdrawal)...when upset, calming down quickly...bounding back to life (work, relationships)...

### STEP 1. TAKE STOCK

1. **Specific situation/event/time when you want to be more resilient.**

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2. **How do you usually handle the situation and yourself?**

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3. **How would you like to handle the situation and yourself?**

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### STEP 2. TAKE CONTROL

4. **Ways to think that help manage your emotions.**

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5. **Things to do to help you manage your emotions.**

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### STEP 3. TAKE ACTION

6. **Things to do to make the problem go away.**

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7. **Name of person to act as your “personal coach.”** \_\_\_\_\_

## In Conclusion

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Resilience is a vital personal capability that determines not only your own social-emotional well-being but also the social-emotional well-being of those around you. To be an excellent educator today requires more than mastery of

your craft. The demands on educators today are great. In order to do your best job possible, emotional resilience is required to survive the rigors of your profession. Without it, you are too vulnerable. With it, you are empowered.