



Resilience in Children

Angela Stewart
Primary School Counsellor

Creating Positive Safe Schools

- ✓ *National Safe Schools Framework*
- ✓ *Pastoral Care Framework*
- ✓ *KidsMatter Framework*

What is mental health?

"Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO)

"There is no health without mental health."



WHO (2007)



Resilience

The ability to cope or bounce back from adversity.

The capacity to adapt to difficult situations and consequently learn from these experiences.

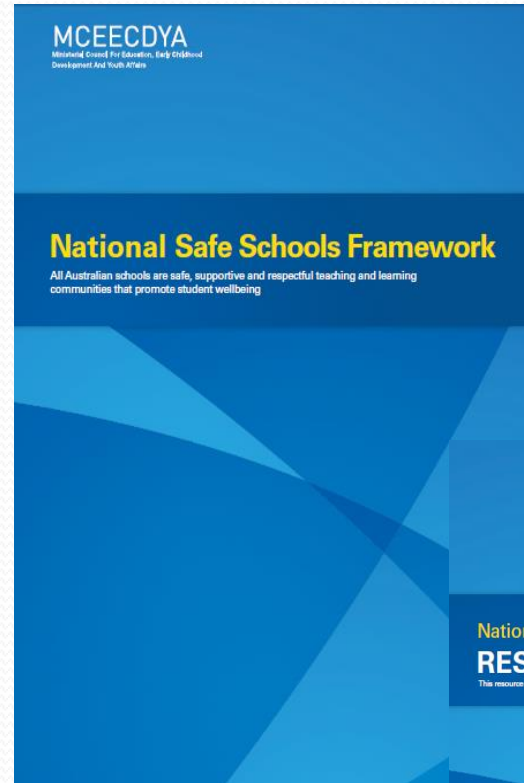
Wellbeing

“Student safety and wellbeing are enhanced when students feel connected to their school, have positive and respectful relationships with their peers and teachers, feel confident about their social and emotional skills and satisfied with their learning experiences at school.”

National Safe Schools Framework

Vision

- *All Australian schools are safe, supportive and respectful teaching and learning communities that promote student wellbeing.*



Pastoral Care Framework

Pastoral care refers to action taken within a school to promote and enhance personal, social, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Optimal wellbeing is characterised by positive feelings and attitude, positive relationships with others, resilience and satisfaction with self and experiences and engagement in learning.

Kids Matter

Australian Primary Schools
Mental Health Initiative

Education and health together



Australian Government

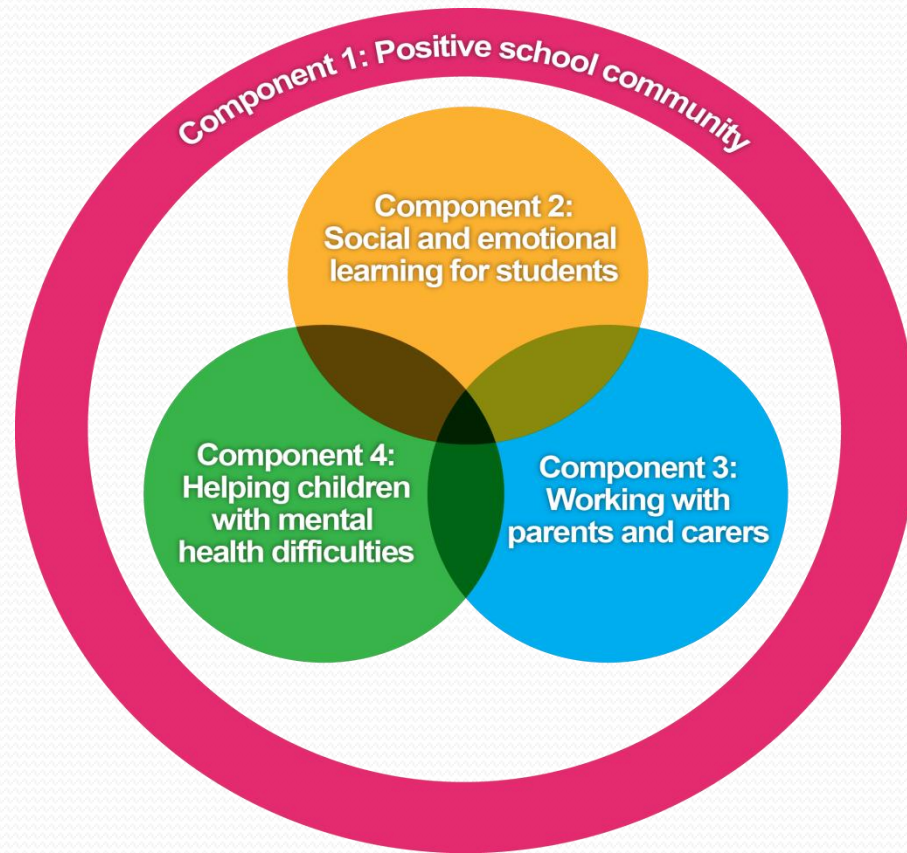
Department of Health and Ageing



Principals
Australia
Institute
Learning. Leading.



Australian Primary Schools
Mental Health Initiative



What the research tells us...

- 1 in 7 children have a mental health difficulty
- 1 in 5 experience anxiety
- 1 in 5 adults experience depression
- Parents positive engagement in school improves students mental health
- Parents and teachers working together create the best outcome for students
- Children who are connected and happy at school learn better
- Students social and emotional skills are important indicators of life success

What can you do to support these frameworks?

- Be engaged in school life
- Talk positively about school to your children
- Work with the school and teachers in creating the best outcomes
- Have your child positively ready for school every day

Consider....

Why does it seem today there are more instances of anxiety?



“Get Outside”

<http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=AoH57Z1r8M0>

Anxiety Today

- High Community Expectation of Success (reluctance to accept average)
- Little life experience of hardship (overprotective parenting)
- Poor distress tolerance(I always need to be happy)
- Pressure to fit in with peers

What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is something we all experience from time to time
- It is a normal natural response
- It is normal to feel anxious or fearful about a variety of things during development
- **9 months – toddler :** fear of strangers, separation, monsters
- **Toddler-middle childhood :** fear of animals, doctors, the dark, monsters, storms, separation, getting lost
- **Adolescence :** fear of social situations, peer issues, dating, exams, being embarrassed, rejection

Anxiety Disorders are:

- Excessive worry, fear or avoidance that goes well beyond normal protective anxiety, and normal developmental fears
- The most common psychological problem in children & adolescents. Approximately 1 in 10 meet clinical criteria.

How do I know if my child needs assistance?

- ***Interference*** – Is anxiety stopping my child from doing usual things? Is it stopping our family from doing things?
- ***Age appropriateness*** - Is the anxiety no longer age appropriate?
- ***Level of Distress***
- ***Length of time*** – Has the anxiety been a regular unresolved feature for an extended period of time?

What causes anxiety in children?

- **Genetics** – personality or way of relating to people. Tend to be more emotionally sensitive.
- **Life Experience** – children are affected by what happens in life. Sensitivity or a tendency to anxiety will mean greater effect of these experiences.
- **Modeling** – parents are most important teachers
- **Parent Reaction** – the way parents react to their child's worries can play a role in the development of anxiety

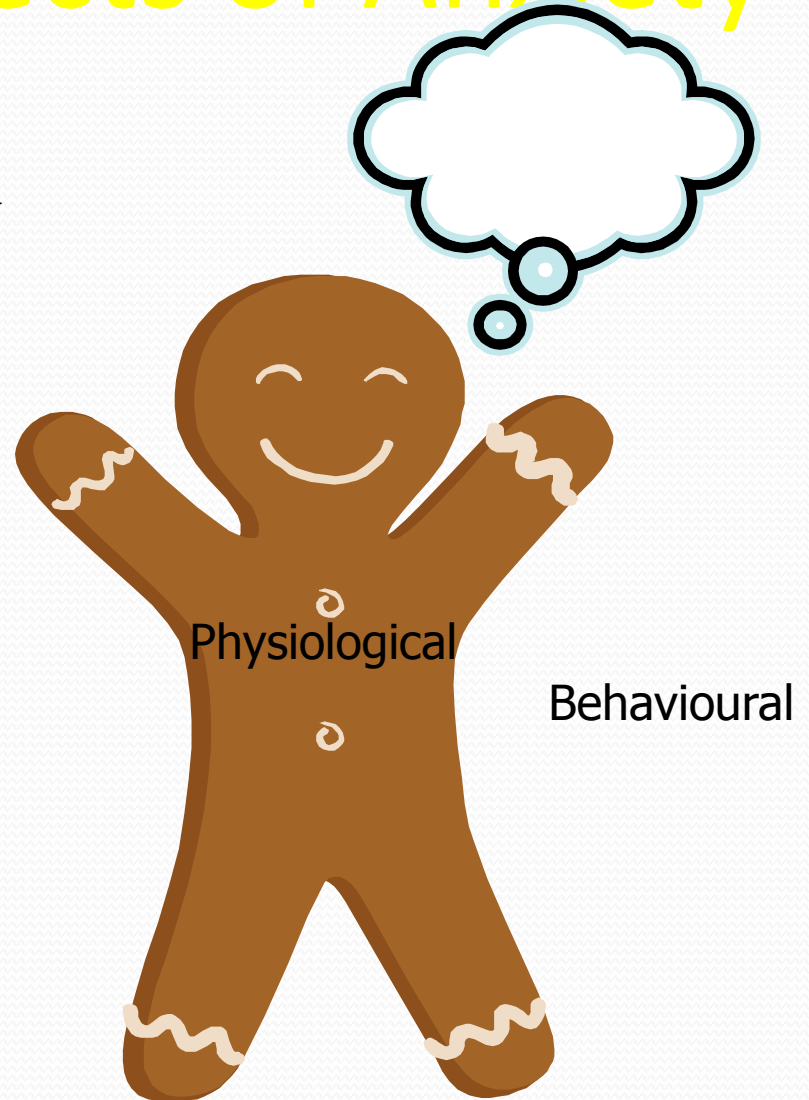
Possible contributing factors

- Tiredness
- Illness
- Family changes and stress
- Change in caregiver/day care
- Temperament factors
- Parental anxiety
- Overly harsh or overly indulgent parenting and
none of the above

sometimes it's just a stage!!!!

Three Main Aspects of Anxiety

- **Physiological** – e.g. increased heart rate, tense muscles, dizziness
- **Cognitive** – fears, worried thoughts, self criticism, underestimation of ability to cope
- **Behavioural** – avoidance of activities, social withdrawal, non-compliance, anger



Signals of Anxiety in Children

- Poor anger mgt./tantrums
- Irritability
- What if?
- Decline in attention, concentration, and/or organisation
- Underperforming
- Frequent physical complaints
- School refusal or resistance
- Perfectionism
- Sleep problems
- Avoidance

How anxiety is reinforced

- Unhelpful self talk or thoughts
- Avoidance or escape behaviour
- Living in environment of high anxiety and low predictability

Most common errors in thinking...

- Overestimation of how likely it is that an unpleasant event will happen
- Overestimation of how bad the consequences will be if the target event does happen

so well as part of a never-ending pattern of failure or disappointment. The truth may well be that the incident was an isolated event, and if you put it into perspective, it probably isn't that bad at all.

LISA IS TOO BUSY TO GO OUT FRIDAY NIGHT

BEN THINKS THIS MEANS NO GIRL WILL EVER GO OUT WITH HIM.

MIND-READING

This is really just bad guessing. This is when you decide in your mind what other people must be thinking, without checking the facts, and then you act on that (quite probably incorrect) assumption. The reality is, you simply cannot know what other people are thinking without them telling you.



BEN GETS AN ANSWER WRONG



HE TELLS HIMSELF THE TEACHER THINKS HE'S AN IDIOT.

FORTUNE-TELLING

Maybe this should be called 'misfortune telling'. It is predicting that things will turn out badly, even if you have absolutely no proof that this will be the case. This thinking error can lead to real problems, because if you think things are going to go wrong, then you may act in a way that allows them to go wrong.



BEN IS GETTING READY FOR A PARTY



HE IS CONVINCED HE WILL MAKE A FOOL OF HIMSELF.

MAGNIFICATION

This is when you make one little mistake, and it becomes so huge in your mind that it spoils everything else in your day. This is also called 'blowing things out of proportion', or 'making mountains out of molehills'.



BEN FORGETS TO BUY EGGS



HE CALLS HIMSELF HISTORY'S GREATEST IDIOT.

MINIMISATION

This is the opposite of magnification, but not in a good way! This is when you downplay anything good that might have happened to you because you are too focused on any aspect of the event that went wrong. It is possible to acknowledge where things might not have been perfect without allowing them to ruin the overall event.



BEN'S BOSS SAYS HE DID A GOOD DAY'S WORK



HE TELLS HIMSELF IT DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING.

CATASTROPHISING

This is a very common thinking error. It is when you make extreme judgments and imagine the very worst outcomes will occur, even if there isn't a scrap of evidence that will. In this way, it's a lot like Catastrophising.



HE IMAGINES THIS WILL RESULT IN LOSING HIS JOB.





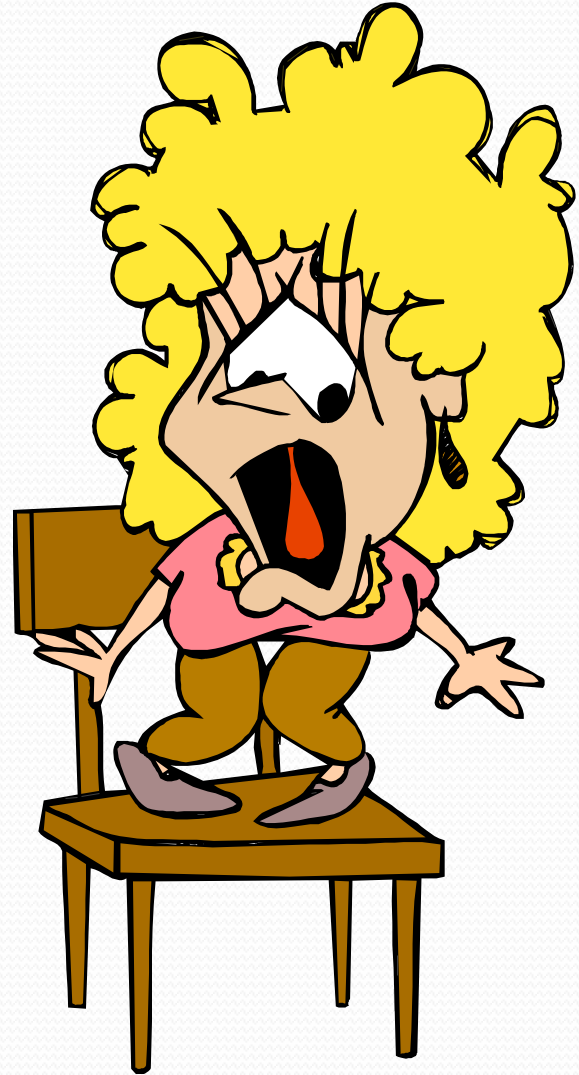
What can parents do to help?

Separation anxiety

- Excessive distress when child separates
- Feelings that something bad will happen to themselves or parent (particularly mother)
- Refuse to be left alone
- Won't do sleep overs
- Difficulty separating at school

Stay Calm Yourself

- Don't let your frustrations or fears take over
- Model appropriate behaviour
- Display confidence in your child's ability to cope with their own concerns and issues

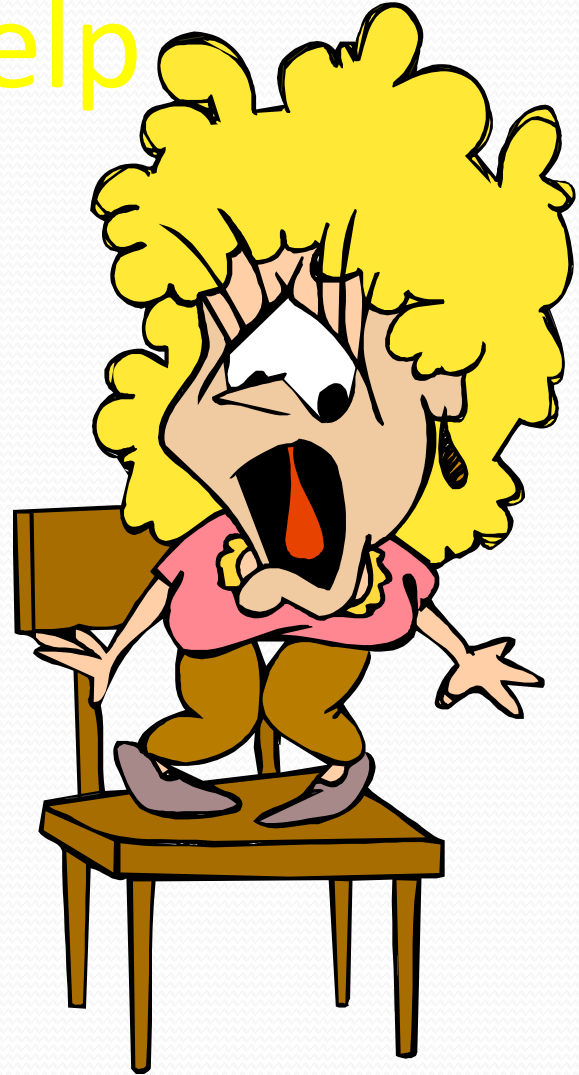


Generalised Anxiety

- Often described as “Worry Worts”
- Tend to worry about broad range of issues
- Tend to exhibit physical symptoms
- Disturbed sleep

How parents can help

- Stay calm yourself
- Relaxation strategies
- Encourage independence & resilience
- Clear and predictable routine
- Reasonable expectations
- Sport
- Encourage activities they are good at.
- Model appropriate behaviour
- Display confidence in your child's ability to cope with their fears



Encourage Brave Behaviour

- Children need to learn to rely on their own judgement
- Paying attention to anxious behaviour increases it - “what happened at school today?”
- Promote bravery and encourage it to happen again



Anxiety in the Classroom

- Overly compliant child
- Habitual avoider
- Rarely asks questions
- Shy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritable
- Easily discouraged

(classroom continued)

- Often tired in class
- Frequent absences from school
- Arrive late to school
- Grades may drop
- May not participate in class activities
- May be slow to start tasks
- Asks questions, constantly checking
- Hyperactivity

What we tend to do

- Deny the feelings
- Rescue
- Moralize
- Punish
- Give advice



Avoid giving too much reassurance



- Children need to learn to rely on their own judgement
- It is not helpful to tell them ‘everything will be fine’ when in reality no one can guarantee that
- Rather than ‘there is nothing to be afraid of’ ask ‘how likely is that?’

How to respond to our kids' negative emotions – acknowledging feelings

- First are they on their baseline?
- Take the time to listen to your child
- Help your child to give the feeling a name
- Let your child know that you wish things had turned out differently.
- Ask your child to come up with some ideas that might help (brainstorm/problem solve)

Helping Children Deal with their Feelings

- I hear you. I care. It is OK to feel however you feel.
- Feelings are just feelings. They're painful but not harmful. You can cope with them. I can cope with your feelings too.
- Your feelings aren't you. Feelings come and go, but you're still the same you.
- Your feelings aren't the boss of you. You can choose. Your feelings aren't the boss of me either.
- Your feelings might be different from mine, and that's OK.

Factors Supporting Resilience

External factors

Trusting adults

Networks of support

Stable family and school environments

Internal Factors

Optimistic

Good problem solving skills

Good social and emotional skills

Developing Resilience

- Nature / Nurture
- Encourage problem solving – (the what ifs...)
- Have fun (screen free time)
- Predictability
- Social and emotional intelligence
- Encourage some independence
- Encourage different friendships

Parent Tips - Independence

- Provide opportunities for 'healthy risk'
- Ensure opportunities to succeed
- Setting reasonable goals/expectations – not too high, not too low (Goldilocks)
- Expect some 'pushing away'

Parent Tips - Friendship

- Encourage participation in range of activities – different people, mixed gender opportunities
- Know where your kids are spending their time - real and online.
- Be careful of criticising their friends and peer group
- Listen

Bullying

- Bullying is when one student (or a group) keeps picking on another student again and again to upset or hurt them. They might hurt them physically, try to socially isolate them or say and do many mean or humiliating things to them.
- Although it's neither respectful nor acceptable if someone behaves in a mean or aggressive way on one occasion, it isn't bullying. A fight or disagreement between students of equal power or status isn't bullying either.



Bullying

- Please don't call kids bullies
- Problem with looking at the negatives
(labelling and victimising)
- Pests and pesty behaviour

Social conflicts...

- Often bullying can occur between old friends – adjusting to change from one on one to group friendships
- Social development, loss and change
- Needs to develop social and emotional skills
- Anxiety response fight or flight

5 Bully-Proofing Tactics

- Walk
- Talk
- Bounce
- Get help
- Shields

'Bully Proofing' Steve Heron (2013)

- **Walk** – confident (body language)
- **Talk** – strong loud voice (body language)
- **Bounce** – use humour, act confident, use compliments and the element of surprise
- **Get Help** – (support not dobbing) mentors, buddies
- **Shields** – good friends, self talk (negatives to positives), manage feelings, be friendly and respectful

Resources

- Bully-proofing Steve Heron
- The Optimistic Child Martin Seligman
- Flourish Martin Seligman
- Helping Your Anxious Child Ron Rapee
- Living With IT Bev Aisbet

- WEB SITES:
www.kidsmatter.edu.au (e – newsletter)
www.emotionalhealthclinic.com.au

Resources (cont'd)

- Websites:
- www.kidsmatter.com.au
- www.kidshealth.org
- www.raisingchildrennetwork.au
- www.brightfutures.org.
- www.WorryWisekids.org
- Brave program www.brave.psy.uq.edu.au
- www.mentalhealth.asn.au
- Kids Help Line 1800551800
- Parent Line 132055

SEEKING FURTHER HELP

- The Child and Family Team
Area Health Service
- School Counsellor
- G.P.
- Private Psychologist
- Macquarie University: Emotional Health Clinic
- Headspace/ YCentral



Thankyou!