

Build resilience and problem solving skills



Behaviour support and student management are key aspects of teaching. Teachers and other school professionals are constantly required to respond to challenging, difficult or emotionally 'needy' students on a day-to-day basis. The following strategies can be used as part of general teacher practice or more formally through the establishment of individual learning plans, behaviour support plans, student management plans or whole school management plans.

You can also [watch our tutorial on writing Behaviour Support Plans](#) or [read our guidelines for writing a BSP](#) created with the Victorian DEECD for their Bullystoppers resources.

Teacher strategy
1. Teach problem solving skills.
Purpose. To empower students to solve their own problems
Action. Talk about problems in terms of challenges that can be solved. Teach the student to break a problem down into smaller parts, and then brainstorm solutions for each part. Assist the student to make a step-by-step action plan to solve the challenge presented by the problem. Often drawings can help.

Teacher strategy
2. Teach students that <i>what they think determines how they feel.</i>
Purpose. To assist the student to think clearly about a situation, and to act in a calm manner. This helps the student to build some control over situations in which they feel powerless, for example when another student calls them names.
Action. Brainstorm a list of things the student can think and do to solve a problem. <i>To read more see the blog post, 'Resilience what you think determines the way you feel.'</i>

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Student strategy
3. Request a school 'community service' activity as a consequence for misbehaviour.
Purpose. Turn misbehaviour into a positive outcome for the school or other students by channelling negative behaviour into a structured, productive task. Community service at school helps to build positive school student connections.
Action. If the student was to graffiti school property, the consequence may be to clean off the graffiti and then for the student to request a school 'community service' activity to assist with simple maintenance in the school yard, such as picking up papers or weeding the garden for three half lunch times. The Student Representative Council might offer suggestions. Other tasks might include: sweeping a small section of court yard before assembly, helping the PE teacher rearrange sports equipment, showing a younger student how to play a playground game.

Teacher strategy
4. Spend a few minutes each day teaching social communication with the class.
Purpose. To assist the development of age appropriate social skills. Social communication activities for 5 minutes a few times per week with the whole class can be more effective than a separate program.
Action. Use a quick exercise from a social skills program each day, such as <i>Bounce back</i> or <i>Friendly Schools and Families</i> or pose a question such as 'What could you do if your best friend doesn't want to play with you today?' Have students discuss in pairs or small groups and report back to the class.

Teacher strategy
5. Teach short simple relaxation or calming techniques.
Purpose. To teach students how to calm themselves.
Action. Teach specific strategies such as taking three deep breaths, counting backwards slowly from 10, slowly thinking or softly saying 'relax, relax, relax' or getting a sip of water from the outside taps, before returning to a designated 'calm area' of the classroom or home room. The <i>Smiling Mind</i> website offers free short online relaxation audios for all ages. Relaxation scripts are also available to <i>Psych4schools members</i> .

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Teacher strategy

6. Teach the student 'productive coping' strategies.

Purpose. To help the student adopt positive proactive ways of coping with stress by aiming to solve problems. Productive coping includes pro social behaviour such as focus on solving the problem by working harder, putting things in perspective, using humour, and exercising. Less productive strategies include ignoring the problem, withdrawing, worrying, yelling, and using alcohol or drugs are all self-defeating behaviours that don't assist in building personal resilience.

Action. Implement a skills based approach, where one productive coping activity is discussed weekly. Ideas can be found in teacher programs such as *Developing Everyday Coping Skills in the Early Years*, *Think positively! A course for developing coping skills in adolescents*, *Mindmatters'* or free *Resilience 2: Coping* resources. Have students discuss in pairs or in small groups and report back to the class.

Student strategy

7. Build perseverance by using a rating scale for 4 or 5 weeks.

Purpose. Promote independence and perseverance through monitoring self-improvement.

Action. The student can pool ideas with others and develop criteria for what helps to build perseverance; such as effort, skill, using effective thinking strategies, and concentration which are integral to promoting excellence in individual achievement. The student can use this as a guide for measuring persistence; for self-assessment on a specific project or for partner feedback during group work for a 4 or 5-week period.

Using this strategy for a morning session may help the student to generalize perseverance throughout the day.

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