

- Lesson 1 -

Resilience

Goal

- To learn how individuals have the ability to build resilience despite adversity.

Learning Outcomes

1. Understand how to foster and nurture characteristics of resilience.
2. Discuss resilience as a body experience.
3. Identify signs and symptoms consistent with being outside the zone of resilience.

Lesson 1.1 Resilience

Instructor Directions

Read the following summary out loud with youth:

We can't talk about trauma without talking about resilience. Resilience is the ability to overcome challenges of all kinds—trauma, tragedy, personal crises, all of life problems—and bounce back stronger, wiser, and more personally powerful. Resilience is all about how we adapt after stressful or adverse situations. Encountering daily stress can disrupt our sense of self-regulation, emotional balance and personal well-being. These encounters can present challenges as well as opportunities. Fostering resilience provides a way of dealing with daily or reoccurring toxic stress. Some people can handle greater amounts of stress than others. Each individual's zones of resilience may differ depending on internal and external factors such as the level of stress, adult support, and community support. Zone of resilience is about a person's emotional stamina or tolerance during stressful moments and the amount of time it takes regain emotional balance.

Some people deal with stress from reoccurring situations, similar or dissimilar to their own in

different ways. Post-traumatic stress is an exaggerated and prolonged stress response lasting beyond 4-6 weeks, even years later. We all may have different zones of resilience when it comes to certain situations of stress and challenging emotions. You will be able to best determine your own zone of resilience.

Being in your zone of resilience is being balanced and having a calm state of mind, feeling relaxed and in control. In this zone you are able to function most effectively and able to take on any challenge life throws at you. When we are in our zone of resilience, we have the best capacity for flexibility and adaptability in mind, body and spirit. We can make our best decisions when we are in our zone of resilience. In a shallow zone of resilience, a small stressor can bump some people out of their zone. In a deep zone of resilience, a higher range of tolerance enables one to handle more stressors.

The feeling of ‘flying off the handle’ or ‘losing a grip’ can be a good indication of falling out of balance and out of the zone of resilience. We all have been there before. When we encounter a tough challenge or an emotionally charged situation where things become too heavy on the mind, being in our zone of resilience will help us to stay grounded, allowing us to be our very best self and make sound decisions.

Activity 1.1A - Resilience

- What does resilience mean to you?

- Why should resilience matter to you?

- What does living a “resilient life” mean for you?

- How can you foster characteristics of resilience to help you better understand emotional triggers or uncomfortable emotions?

Activity 1.1A Resilience

Invite the students to respond to each question on the worksheet in their journal. Then, invite them to write, pair and discuss or in a group discussion format.


- What does resilience mean to you?
- Why should resilience matter to you?
- What does living a “resilient life” mean for you?
- How can you foster characteristics of resilience to help you better understand emotional triggers or uncomfortable emotions?

Activity 1.1B: Discovering My Zone of Resilience

Discuss the zone of resilience with students. Discuss how emotions can change and that we excel most when we are in our Zone of Resilience, which differ from person to person. Then, ask the students to reflect and write about a personal experience when they overcame an obstacle, circumstance or situation using their characteristics of resilience. Ask the students to evaluate their zone. Have them list strategies that will expand their zone of resilience and things that might shrink their zone. Students should be able to explain their reasoning. Then, invite the students to write, pair and share – or have a group discussion.

Activity 1.1B - Discovering My Zone of Resilience

- Write about a personal experience when you overcame an obstacle, circumstance or situation using your characteristics of resilience.
- Evaluate your zone.
- List strategies that will expand your zone and things that might shrink your zone.



Lesson 1.2 Sensations



Instructor Directions

Read the following summary out loud with youth:

Healing the experience of trauma happens when we learn how to name, notice and explore body sensations, not feelings. Trauma is a body experience. Therefore, we must listen to our body in order to give it what it needs to feel better and achieve regulation. Our bodies communicate with us through sensations. Simply becoming aware of the sensations in our bodies will help to discharge the activation associated with feelings. This process also helps to engage students who have reached the point of exhaustion and collapse because it provides the opportunity to associate the sensation to a feeling.

Sensations are all about how the body communicates signals or information of emotions to the brain. We will be learning that the brain and the body work together to identify emotions. For example, an escalated heartbeat tells the brain that the body is sensing danger or fear nearby. Sometimes, we can't even put into words how we feel, and in those cases, sensations can become very helpful. For example, you may notice that you are experiencing anxiety because your palms are sweaty and you feel some butterflies in your stomach, but you may not be clear on the origin of anxiety. The more we understand the sensations that go on inside our bodies, the quick-

er we can begin to understand, identify and respond to the emotional experience in a way that helps us regulate back into our zone of resilience.

Have you ever had somebody jump out from behind you, when you thought you were alone? Even though you knew it was a prank, your heart rate still started beating faster than normal. The rate of the heartbeat could be an indication of the level of fear that you are experiencing in the moment. Sensations can be tricky because they can make it seem like we are in a similar situation of the past that was scary for us, even though we are in the present in a very different situation. For example, let us examine a Mary who was in a car accident that took place on the corner of Shirley Street; thankfully surviving that accident. But every time Mary goes through that intersection, her body tightens the same way it did the moment her car collided into another car that day. Her body is experiencing those same sensations as if she was reliving the car accident from her past all over again. When we experience trauma, or difficult situations, our bodies will record those sensations and replay them during similar incidents making our bodies think we are re-experiencing the same event, even though it is different. So, when you understand this, you may start to see that some of our reactions today are based on past emotional traumas and experiences our body has held onto. These experiences can store in the body and reveal themselves through sensations.

A ticking clock at school that sounds like the same clock you have at home in your kitchen may remind you of a difficult emotional situation that happened earlier in that room of your home between you and your mother prior to going to school. A tardy bell at school may remind a student of how it made her feel when the teacher confronted her the last time she was late to his class. The look of a disappointed father's face can ignite the same hurtful feelings when the teacher gives the student a similar look of disappointment. All these situations are examples of how the body communicates with the brain and why it is so important to understand the signals that our bodies send our brains.

Can you think of a time when your body spoke or alerted you before your brain? How about a time when you experienced emotional discomfort, but didn't quite know exactly what it was or where it came from? Part of feeling the effects of trauma is making the connection between the body and the brain. It's all about how the two respond together to communicate and provide a total understanding of the whole experience.

Sensory Processing

Sensory processing is the basic human function that refers to the way the nervous system receives and interprets information from the senses and turns them into appropriate responses. Let's take a closer look at our basic five senses and how they process information.



Touch

Through touch we receive information from our tactile system. The touch sense responds to anything that touches the skin (from head to toe). It could be such sensory experiences as slight touch, feeling different textures, itching, vibration, pressure, pain and temperature. For example, if we touch something that is too hot, our body pulls away from it quickly to prevent a burn.



Smell

Through smell our bodies take in signals of information concerning our environment. These signals tell us about our environment to help our brains and bodies determine safety and danger near by. For example, if we smell smoke, we are alerted to make sure nothing is on fire.



Taste

We receive signals of information through our mouth allowing us to experience and differentiate between textures, temperatures, and flavors. For example, if the milk in our cereal tastes sour, we will not finish the rest of it, which will help prevent us from getting sick. Taste is received through sensory organs such as the tongue, taste buds and receptor cells in the mouth.



Sound

We process signals of information through our ears to give meaning to the importance of the sounds we hear to help us respond to our environments. We receive sound information from our ears to determine where the sound came from, how close they are, or if they are familiar to us. For example, if we hear a loud alarm sounding, we will be alerted to exit quickly as a way to avoid potential danger.



Sight

The eyes translate light into image signals for the brain to process. Through sight we have the ability to track, locate, and differentiate things around us. We can sense light, dark, different colors and shapes, words, symbols, facial expressions, gestures, etc. to help us make meaning of our environment. For example, when we see a person who is red in the face and their fists balled up, we might avoid them in the grocery store to protect ourselves.

It is important to understand that our senses interact with internal and external environments to develop feelings, emotions and sensations. When feelings, emotions and sensations interact, we begin to process the information (thinking) and we give meaning to the experience.