

# Building Resiliency in Young People and Families/Whānau



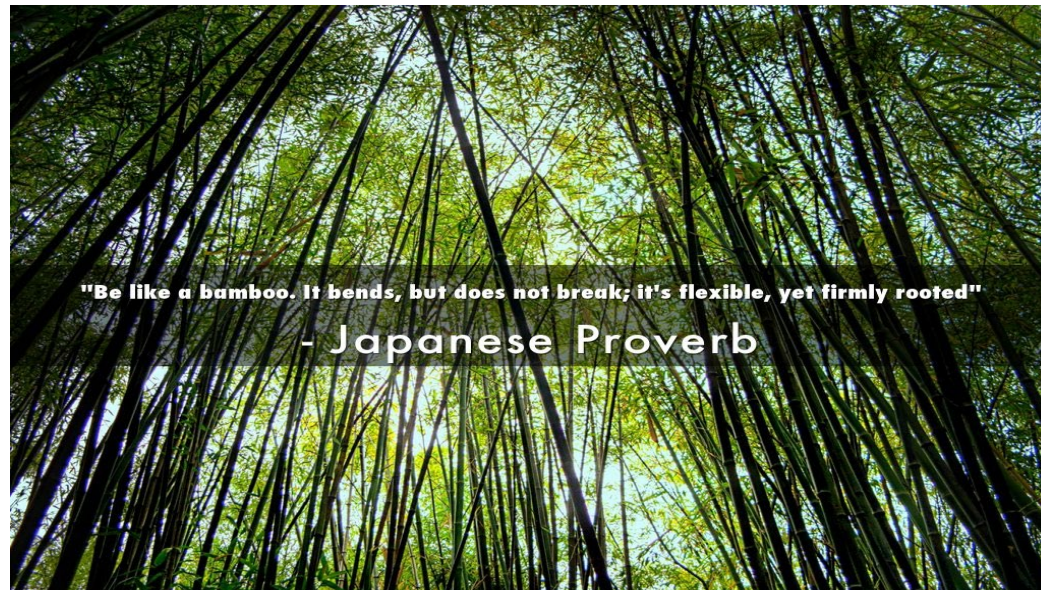
Nelson

18 May 2021

Dr. Chris Bowden  
Faculty of Education,  
Victoria University of Wellington  
[chris.bowden@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:chris.bowden@vuw.ac.nz)

# What is Resiliency?

- The capacity of an individual to withstand, effectively cope with and rebound from challenging situations, stressors and adversity and experience growth.
- Individual resiliency is linked to family/whānau resiliency. It takes a well functioning family/whānau system, not just individuals, to cope with stress and adversity.



# Family/Whānau Resiliency

The capacity of the family/whānau, as a functional system, to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges – emerging strengthened and more resourceful to meet future challenges (Walsh, 2016)

- All families/whānau have:
  - Strengths and resources.
  - Vulnerabilities and issues.
  - Unique ways of functioning, coping and adapting.

# Resiliency is Influenced by Traits and Processes

- Resilient individuals and families/whānau have **certain traits, resources/assets and protective factors.**
- Resilient individuals and families/whānau **engage in certain processes** that enable them to positively adapt to significant adversity and even grow from serious life challenges.
  - e.g., family members may rally as a team, communicate, problem-solve, mobilize family and community resources, and support positive coping in members.

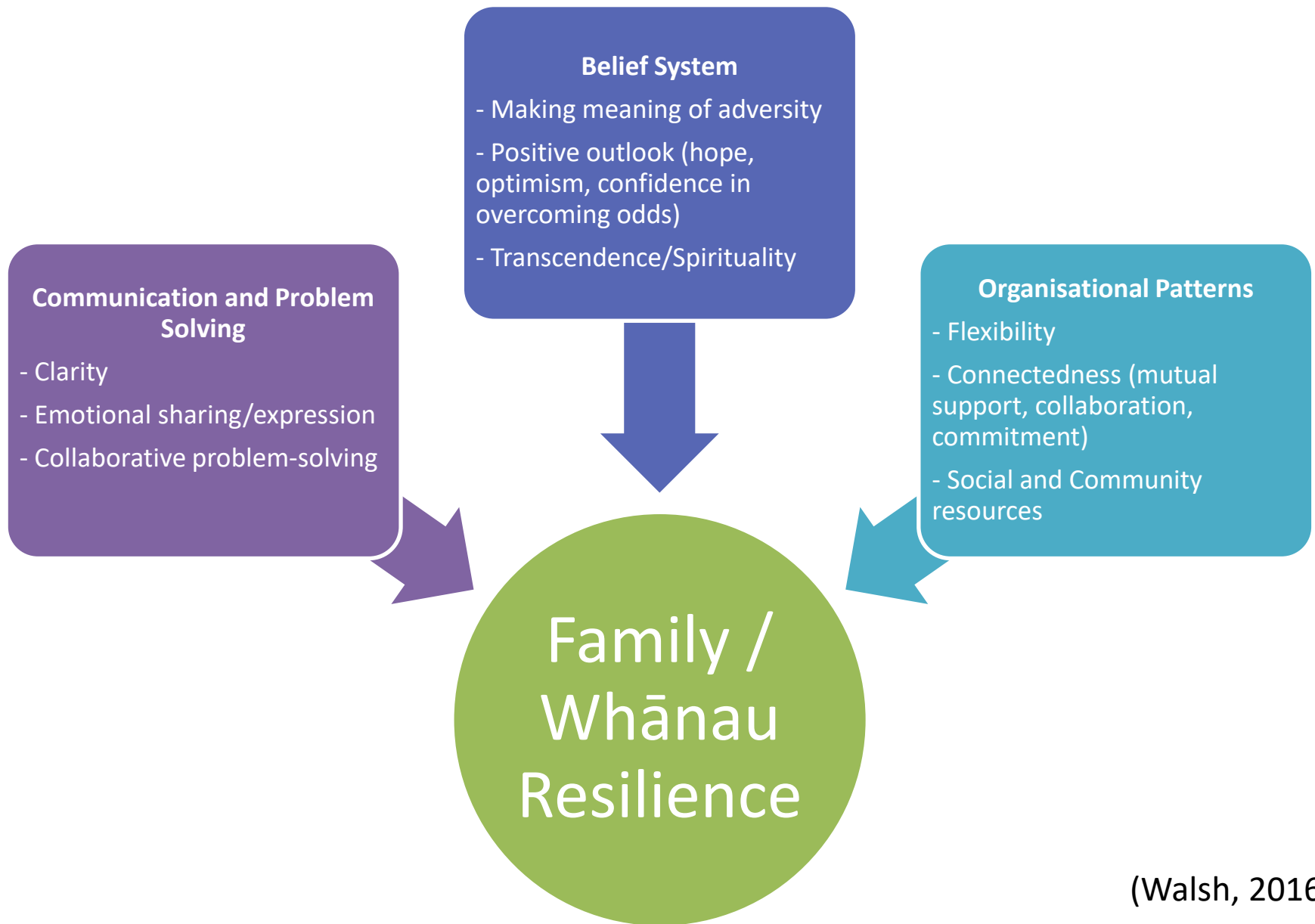
# Challenges and Stressors

- Climate disruption
- Trauma
- Loss/bereavement/grief
- Unemployment
- Incarceration
- Financial strains
- Child behaviour issues
- Relocation
- Remarriage/reparenting
- Serious illness
- Relational stress/conflict
- Family breakup
- Mental health issues

- The **timing and amount of stressors/challenges** can have a significant impact on individuals and families/whānau.
- Stressors can accumulate, pile up and overwhelm, heightening vulnerability.
- **Past experiences of coping** (success and failure) also shape current responses.
- Adversity can also be an opportunity for families/whānau to become stronger, together.

# A Systems Perspective

- **One-off serious crises** and **persistent life challenges** have an impact on the whole family/whānau system.
- Stressors and challenges change over time, so do family's processes and adaptation.
- Individual and family/whānau resilience can be nurtured, supported and reinforced by other families/whānau, schools, workplaces and other social systems.



(Walsh, 2016)

# Key Processes in Family Resilience

## Belief Systems

### Making Meaning of Adversity

- Relational view of resilience (we can support one another).
- Normalise, contextualise distress (stress, distress and suffering is normal part of being human).
- Sense of coherence (we can make sense of crises as manageable challenges).
- Facilitative appraisal (with some hard work we can pull through and future will be better, let's make the best of this situation).

### Positive Outlook

- Hope, optimism (confidence in overcoming challenge “we got this”).
- Encouragement (affirm family members strengths and focus on potential).
- Active initiative and perseverance (we can do this).
- Master the possible (accept what can be changed and tolerate what can't change)

### Transcendence and Spirituality

- Larger values, purpose (e.g., unity, courage, strength, integrity)
- Spirituality, faith and community, connection to nature
- Inspiration (see possibilities, aspirations, social action)
- Transformation (learning new things, change, noticing growth)



# Key Processes in Family Resilience

## Organisational Processes

### Flexibility

- Rebound, adapt to change and new challenges.
- Reorganise, restabilise, continuity, dependability, predictable routines.
- Changing the rules and consequences together.
- Strong authoritative leadership (nurture, guide and protect others).
- Varied family forms (cooperative parenting, shared caregiving, teams).
- Couple/coparent relationship (mutual respect, equal partners).

### Connectedness

- Mutual support, teamwork and commitment to work together as a cohesive team (we can do this together).
- Respect individual needs, differences in coping.
- Seek reconnection and repair grievances.
- Doing things together as a family/whānau (e.g., family night, dinners, movie night).

### Mobilise Social and Economic Resources

- Recruit extended whānau, social and community support, models and mentors.
- Build financial security, navigate stressful work/family challenges.
- Transactions with larger systems (access school, health, welfare, structural supports).

# Key Processes in Family Resilience

## Communication / Problem-Solving Processes

### Clarity

- Clear, consistent messages, information to all family members.
- Clarify ambiguous situations and being truthful with everyone.
- Reward honesty, accept feelings, listen to each other carefully.

### Open Emotional Sharing

- Share painful feelings (sadness, anger, fear, disappointment, remorse)
- Model emotional awareness and regulation (can express without being overwhelmed).
- Positive interactions (showing love, appreciation, gratitude, humour, fun, respite).
- Celebrate family successes, self-reliance and interdependence.

### Collaborative Problem-Solving

- Creative brainstorming, resourcefulness.
- Analyse and solve problems one step at a time.
- Shared decision-making and negotiation.
- Focusing on goals, concrete steps.
- Build on success, learn from setbacks.
- Proactive stance (be prepared, planning, prevent issues).

# Resilient Young People Reach In and Out

- When times are tough or stressful - resilient people:
  - **reach in** and use their inner strengths and assets, and
  - **reach out, tap into family/whānau** and use their **social supports** and outer resources/assets.
- Resiliency develops over time – and it takes investment, encouragement and modeling.



# What Helps Build Resiliency in Youth?

## The 8 Cs

### Reaching Out Skills

1. **Connections** – secure stable supportive relationships, strong cultural identity and sense of belonging.
2. **Communicating** – knowing how to reach out for help.

### Reaching In Skills

3. **Control** - emotional awareness and regulation/control.
4. **Coping** - a growth mindset and healthy habits of mind.
5. **Competence** – problem-solving, decision-making and coping.
6. **Confidence** – healthy and realistic optimism and self-belief.
7. **Character** – a strong sense of right and wrong, grit and perseverance.
8. **Contribution** – a sense of purpose and responsibility.

# Reaching Out: 1. Connections

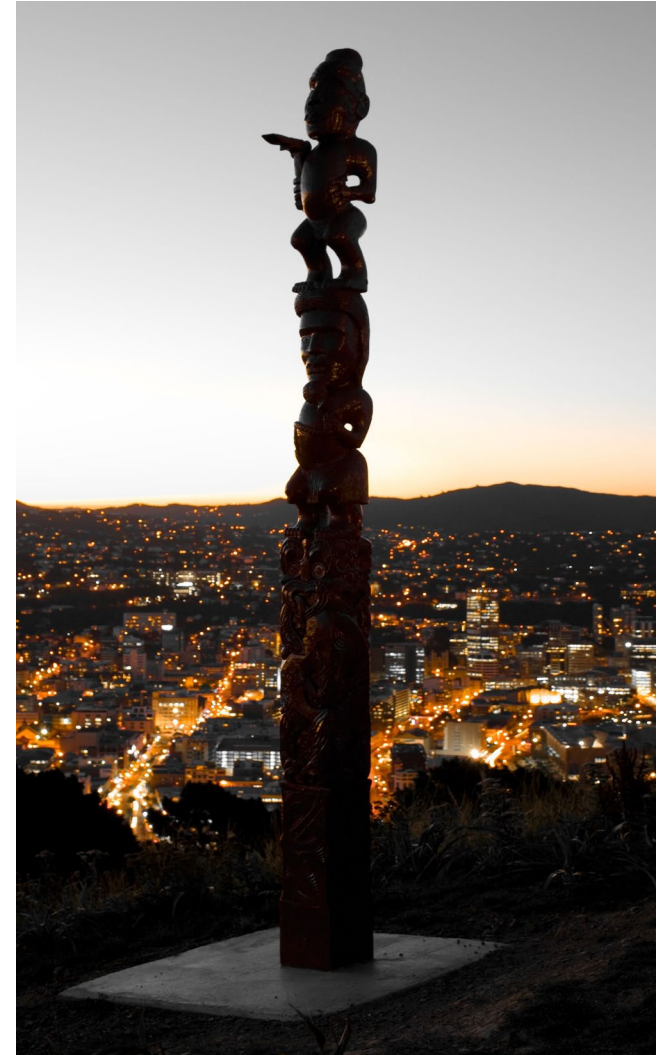
- Develop strong relationships with youth, spend time with them.
- Encourage youth to build and maintain a strong network of peers and trusted adults to reach out to when things get tough.
- Help youth practice and develop social skills and self-confidence.
- Support youth to develop a sense of fairness, inclusion, respect and justice – this will help them get along with others.



# Cultural Identity & Sense of Belonging

Resilient rangatahi/youth are able to bounce back because they:

- can access support from communities and groups.
- belong to and have connections with sporting clubs, religious or activities groups, mentors who can provide support, advice and guidance.
- know who they are, their whakapapa, their turangawaewae – they have a place to stand and people and a place to belong to and go back to when things get rocky or are uncertain.



# Reaching Out: 2. Communicating Needs

- **Remind youth it is OK to ask for help.**
- **No one is perfect.**
- **Everyone makes mistakes. It is part of how we learn.**
- **Everyone needs help at sometime in their life.**

**It's OK to  
ask for help**

Free text or call 1737 any time

NEED TO TALK?

**1737**

- Teach youth that asking for and accepting help...
  - Takes courage.
  - Means you are being proactive, taking control.
  - Improves your chances of finding solutions, solving the problem and improving your situation.
- Means you can access **advice**, get some **life-coaching**, build your assets, explore possibilities for change, manage stress.

# Widen Your Teen's Support Network

- Help them connect with people who care.
- Bring others into the room.
- Encourage them to keep communication flowing (in good times and when they have bad days)





# Reaching In: 3. Control - Self-regulation

- Resilient people can regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour.
- **Emotional Awareness** is important.



- Help youth talk about or express their feelings (use feeling words like angry, sad, exhausted, hurt, proud, mad, upset, frustrated, worried, confused, anxious, annoyed, disappointed, embarrassed, OK, fine, calm).
- This helps youth recognise emotions in themselves and others.
- Helps youth develop emotional literacy and their ability to discuss how they feel with others and let them know when they are struggling and what with.

# Emotional Regulation

- Regulation involves **self-control - monitoring, evaluating and modifying reactions and responses.**
- Model to youth and encourage them to practice staying calm, defusing emotions, make better decisions and use better judgement, to solve problems.
- **Resilient people know when to take a moment to stop, reflect, reset thoughts – especially when under pressure.**

- Try not to get upset.
- **Try de-escalation, calming** and focusing say out loud – “taking a deep breath helps me calm down”.
- Help them to self-soothe and calm themselves and communicate clearly.



# Ways to Regulate Emotions

1. **Breathe deeply** and try some Mindfulness (visualisation).
2. **Plan ahead** as much as possible – this can eliminate stress.
3. **Exercise choice – what are my options?**  
“I feel angry.... And that is a normal human emotion...and I am going to **CHOOSE** what to do next instead of reacting”
4. **Talk about it** – people can provide different perspectives and solutions. Getting a reality check helps keep negative feelings in check.
5. **Take a break** – take a little time out (e.g., power nap).
6. **Write it down** – make to do lists, or note down worries to talk to others about.
7. **Get moving** - Physical fitness, music, sport, dance, is important helps release endorphins and good for psyche. Progressive muscle relaxation.

# Healthy Ways to Regulate Emotions

## SKILLS TO USE TO REGULATE EMOTIONS

#	(A) CORE SKILLS	(B) DISTRACTION	(C) SELF-SOOTHE
1	DEEP BREATHING	COUNT NUMBERS	TAKE A LONG BATH
2	OBSERVE & DESCRIBE	WATCH TV	DRINK DECAF TEA
3	RADICAL ACCEPTANCE	COLOR/PAINT/DRAW	LIGHT CANDLES
4	MINDFULNESS/AWARENESS	WORK A PUZZLE	LISTEN TO SOOTHING MUSIC
5	HELP SOMEONE ELSE	EXERCISE	POSITIVE SELF-AFFIRMATIONS
6	PROS & CONS LIST	CALL A FRIEND	USE COMFORT BOX
7	PUSH AWAY THOUGHTS	CALL YOUR SPONSOR	TAKE A "VACATION"

# STOPP

- **S – Stop!**  
Just pause for a moment.
- **T – Take a Breath**  
Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out.
- **O – Observe**  
What thoughts are going through your mind right now?  
Where is your focus of attention?  
What are you reacting to?  
What sensations do you notice in your body?
- **P – Pull Back – Put in Some Perspective**  
What's the bigger picture?  
Take the helicopter view;  
What is another way of looking at this situation?  
What would a trusted friend say to me right now?  
Is this thought a fact or an opinion?  
What is a more reasonable explanation?  
How important is this? How important will it be in 6 months' time?
- **P – Practice What Works – Proceed**  
What is the best thing to do right now? For me? For others? For the situation?  
What can I do that fits with my values?  
Do what will be effective and appropriate (Vivyan, 2015).



# It Is What It Is

## Mindfulness

- Help youth acknowledge painful thoughts and feelings but **don't over-identify or ruminate on them.**
- Be aware of, accept and tolerate feelings and experience for what they are - "it is what it is" and "hold them lightly and let them go".



## Quicksand

- Struggling against drags us further down into depths.
- Accept the situation, spread your body weight and move slowly.
- Turn off the struggle switch.

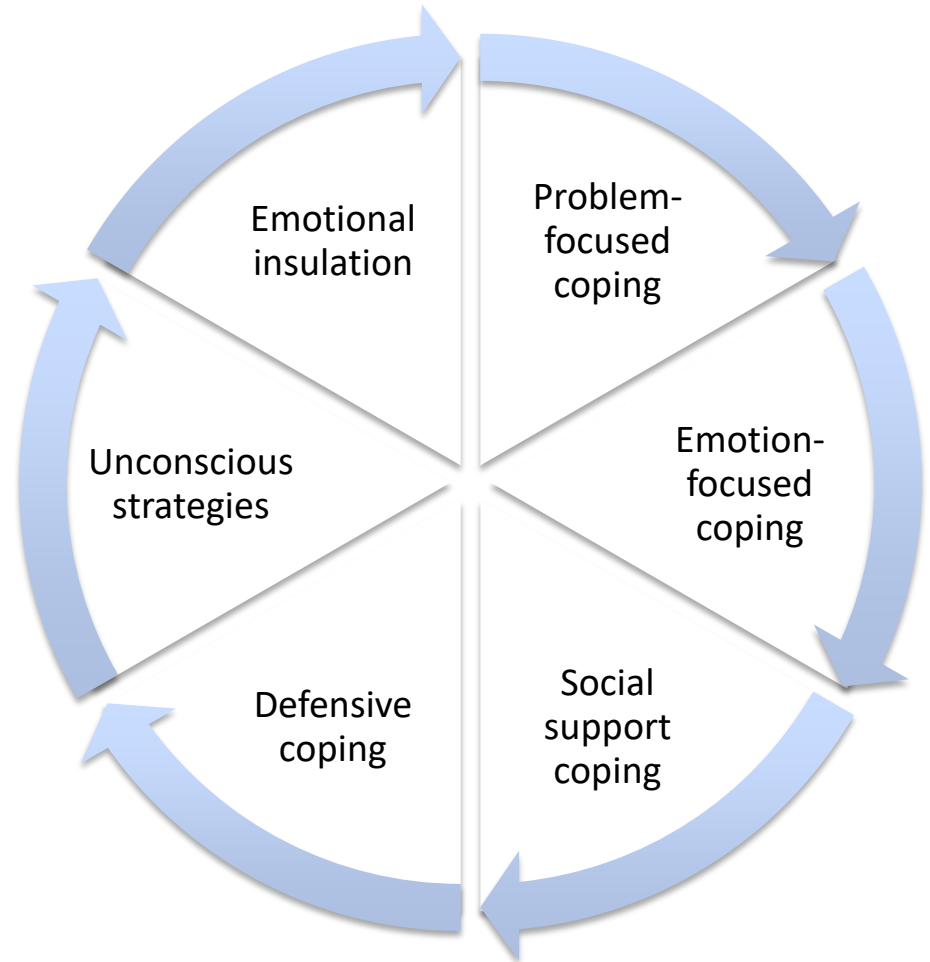


THE STRUGGLE SWITCH  
THE MORE WE STRUGGLE THE WORSE IT GETS

# Reaching In: 4. Coping Skills

What type of coping do youth use?

- **Emotion-focused coping** (changing how they feel).
- **Problem-focused coping** (changing the situation).
- **Approach** – tackle the problem and cope with it.
- **Avoidance** – tackle the problem later or deny that it exists.



# Promote Healthy Coping Strategies

<b>Productive</b>	<b>Non-productive</b>
<b>Focus on the positive</b>	Focus on the negative
<b>Accept one's best effort</b>	Self-blame
<b>Spend time with friends</b>	Withdraw, keep to one's self
<b>Get some social support</b>	Fail to talk about it and not seek help
<b>Seek help</b>	Accept helplessness
<b>Work harder</b>	Don't do anything to solve the problem
<b>Relax</b>	Ignore the issue & how they feel
<b>Keep fit – exercise</b>	Act out, lash out
<b>Keep a sense of humour</b>	Worry



# Coping with Stress – 3 Steps

## Realise when stress is causing problems

- Make a connection between feeling tired or ill and pressures you are faced with.
- Look out for physical warnings – tenseness, headaches etc

## Identify the causes

- Try to identify the cause.
- Sort reasons for stress into 3 categories:
  1. things that have a practical solution.
  2. things that will improve with time.
  3. things you can't do anything about.
- Release the worry about the last two.

## Review your lifestyle

- Could you be taking on too much?
- Are there things you could do that could be delegated or delayed?
- Can others help?
- Can you prioritize and re-organize things (get some quick wins)?
- Can you take a quick break?

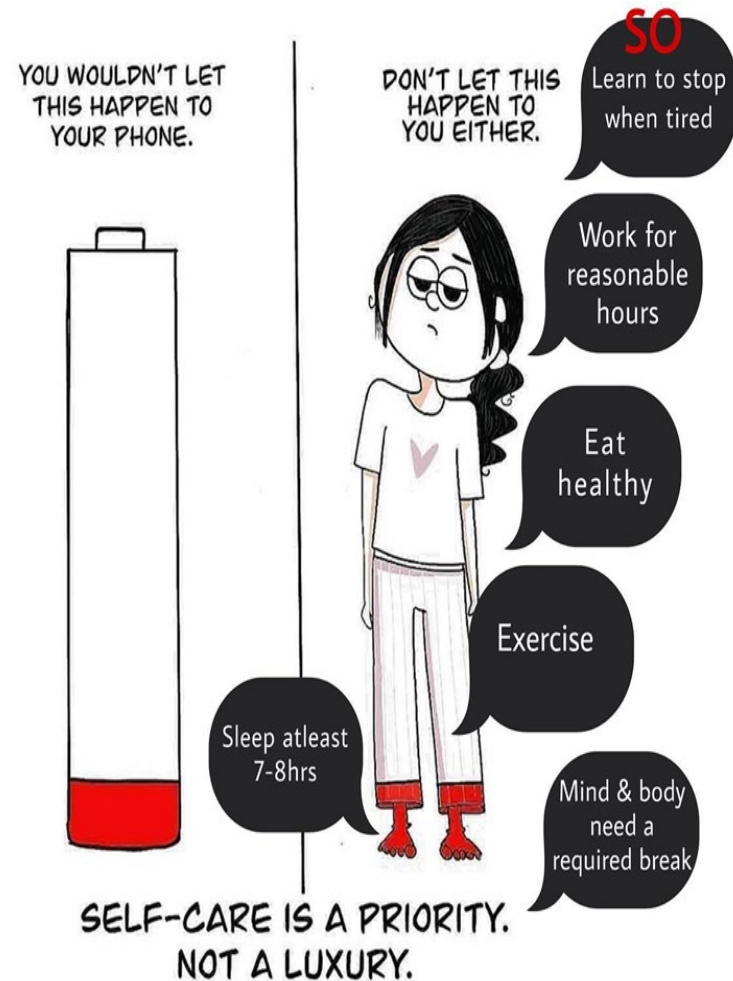
# Stress Management

- Help youth find ways to gain control over the situation (change the way they respond, do what they can do).
- Redefine the “threat” as a “challenge” – see it as an opportunity.
- **Help them focus on the next best step:** help them prioritise, focus on one task at a time, look at their progress as well as their achievements.
- Break bigger and harder stuff down into manageable chunks.
- **Encourage them to build a support team and communicate with their support crew** (reach out, call a friend/family member/coach, accept help, advice and coaching).

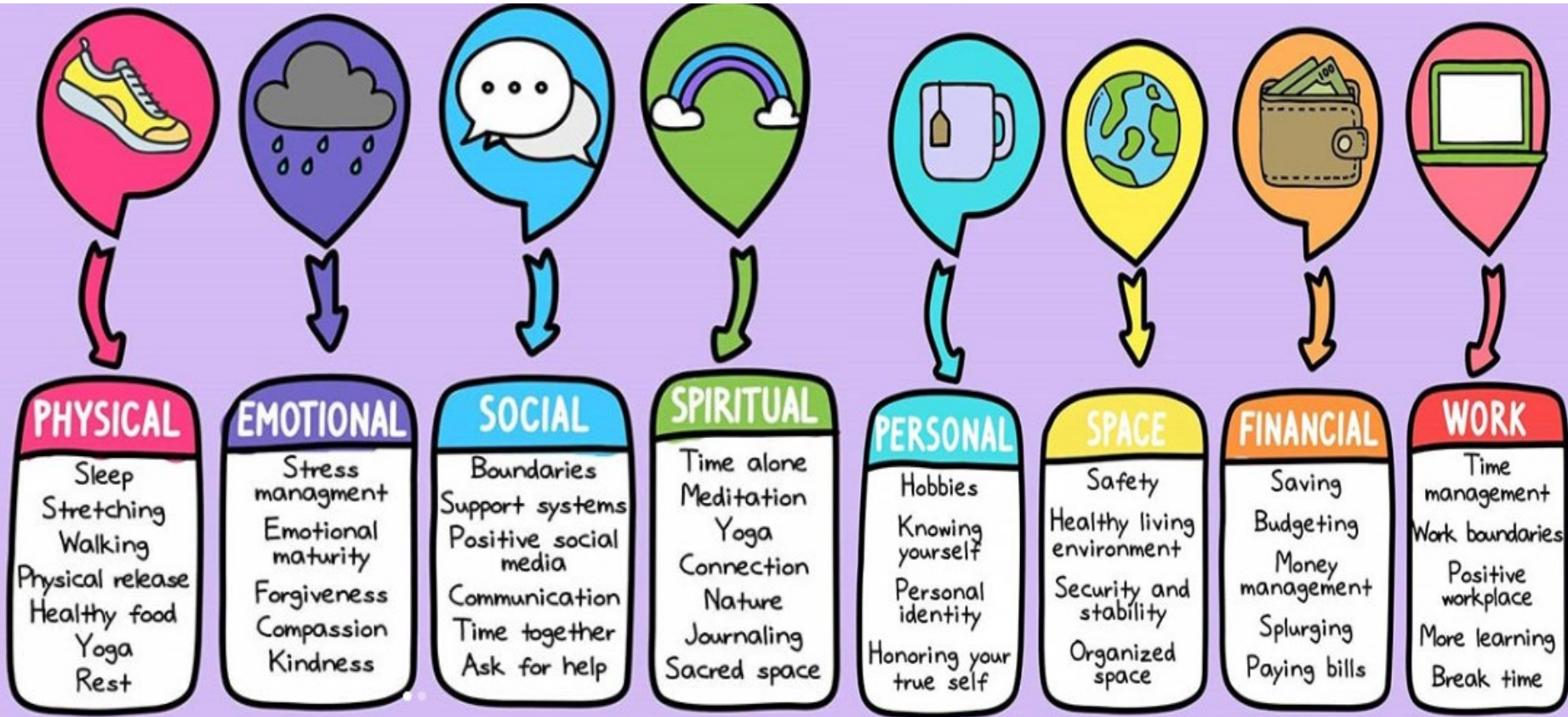


# Self-Care

- Resilient people take care of themselves – so they have sufficient energy, reserves and resources when times are tough.
- Self-care is not about being selfish.
- Self-care requires you to pay attention to your mind, body, spirit – this means you need **quiet time and space to reflect**.
- Requires regular ‘self-checks’.
- Make sure youth have **boundaries** and a **balance** between work, study, play, activity and rest, focusing on self and others.



# Types of Self-Care



<https://mentaleducationhealth.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/selfcare-3-1.png>

<https://healthfulmind.blog/2019/05/04/types-of-self-care/#jp-carousel-389>

# Self-Care and Wellbeing

## Happiness Chemicals and how to hack them



### **DOPAMINE** THE REWARD CHEMICAL

- Completing a task
- Doing self-care activities
- Eating food
- Celebrating little wins



### **OXYTOCIN** THE LOVE HORMONE

- Playing with a dog
- Playing with a baby
- Holding hand
- Hugging your family
- Give compliment



### **SEROTONIN** THE MOOD STABILIZER

- Meditating
- Running
- Sun exposure
- Walk in nature
- Swimming
- Cycling

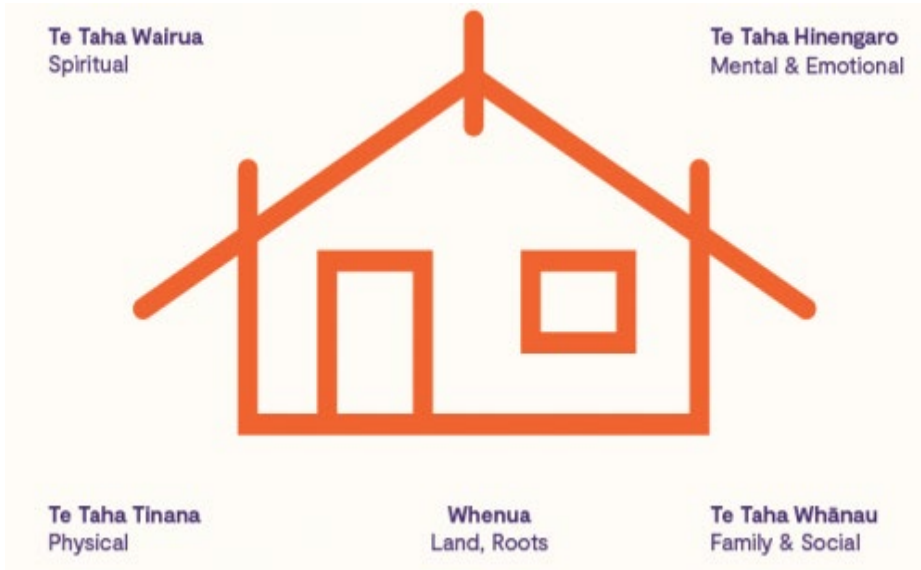


### **ENDORPHIN** THE PAIN KILLER

- Laughter exercise
- Essential oils
- Watch a comedy
- Dark chocolate
- Exercising



# Balance: Te Whare Tapa Whā



<https://mhaw.nz/explore/te-whare-tapa-wha/>

- **Whānau** – How can we recharge with others (people we care about)?
- **Wairua** – What can you rediscover and what everyday things give you hope, strength, connection?
- **Whenua** – How can you get into nature today or reconnect with your ancestors?
- **Tinana** – How can you refuel your body today?
- **Hinengaro** – How can you take a moment to stimulate and refresh your mind today?

# Self-Compassion and Self-Care

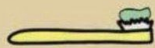
- Encourage youth to be kind, gentle, patient and understanding towards themselves in times of pain or failure or when they fail to meet standards or need to change.
- Remind them to stop being judgmental and self-critical.
- Support them to give up harmful behaviours that hinder their own wellbeing.

BE PROUD OF YOURSELF IF YOU

got out  
of bed



brushed  
your teeth



ate a  
meal



showered  
or bathed



cleaned up  
your room



drank  
water



OR JUST BREATHED TODAY.

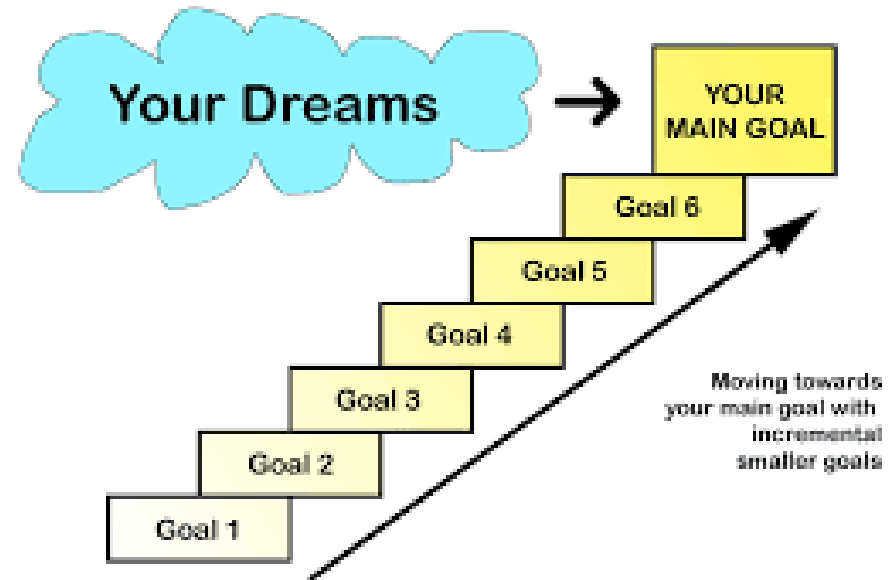
"SIMPLE" ACCOMPLISHMENTS  
DESERVE RECOGNITION.

@gmf.designs



# Foster and Praise a Growth Mindset

- **Provide opportunities** for youth to work through issues rather than avoid dealing with them.
- Focus on **growth and development** – not just achievement.
- **Praise effort** and **perseverance**.
- Focus on **building competency coping** – how can skills used to cope with small stuff be used to cope with big issues?
- Highlight small changes and progress as important. **“You are heading in the right direction”**



I cant win every time, but I can try hard and get better each time.



"Failure is an opportunity to grow"

## GROWTH MINDSET

"I can learn to do anything I want"

"Challenges help me to grow"

"My effort and attitude determine my abilities"

"Feedback is constructive"

"I am inspired by the success of others"

"I like to try new things"

"Failure is the limit of my abilities"

## FIXED MINDSET

"I'm either good at it or I'm not"

"My abilities are unchanging"

"I don't like to be challenged"      "I can either do it, or I can't"

"My potential is predetermined"

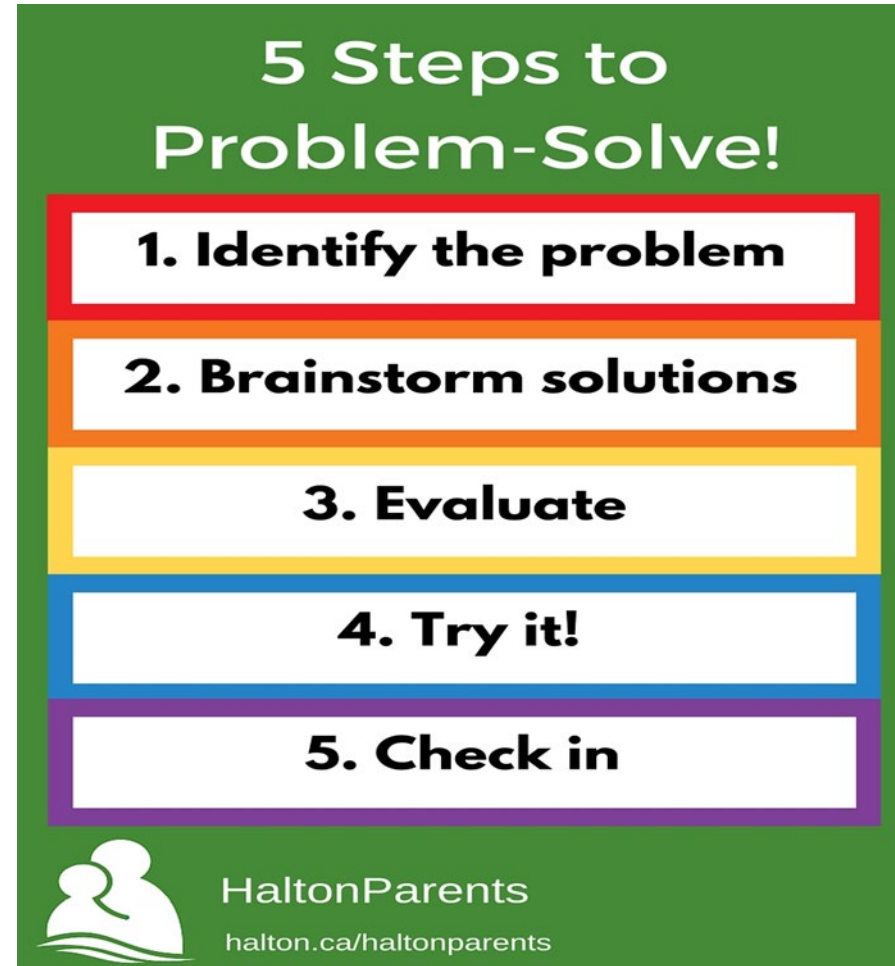
"When I'm frustrated, I give up"

"Feedback and criticism are personal"

"I stick to what I know"

# Reaching In: 5. Competence in Analysing and Solving Problems

- When things go wrong or there is a problem help youth stop and think:
- **How might I/we fix this?**
- **What are my options/choices?**
- **What are the costs/benefits/impacts on me and others of each option?**
- **What would happen if...?**
- **What might be a good first step?**
- **Who can I/we ask for help?**
- **What is the best option?**



# Foster a Positive Problem Orientation

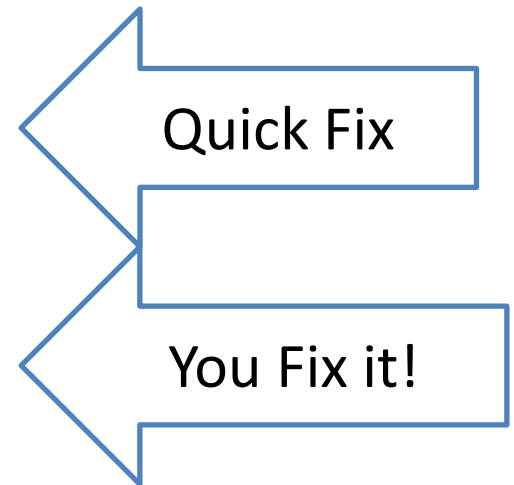
<b>Positive Problem Orientation</b>	<b>Negative Problem Orientation</b>
<b>See problems as challenges.</b>	<b>See problems as threats.</b>
<b>Are optimistic and believe problems are solvable.</b>	<b>Expect problems to be unsolvable.</b>
<b>Have a strong sense of self-efficacy and believe they can cope.</b>	<b>Have doubts about their ability to cope with problems successfully.</b>
<b>Understand successful problem-solving required time and effort.</b>	<b>Put in little time and effort into problem-solving.</b>
<b>See negative emotions as part of problem-solving process that can be helpful in coping with stressful situations.</b>	<b>Become frustrated and upset when faced with problems and negative emotions.</b>

# Why Do Young People Have Problems Solving Problems?

- **Cognitive overload** – they can't think straight when under stress.
- **Inability to regulate emotions** – they are overwhelmed.
- **Biased thinking** based on emotion-related information (e.g., negative thoughts, poor self-efficacy, difficulties switching off negative emotions, poor recall) (e.g., this sucks, these feelings will never go away, I will always be unhappy, I've never coped with anything like this before!)
- **Limited motivation** due to feelings of hopelessness (nothing I do will make a difference, I'm useless!).
- Inflexible, **ineffective problem-solving style** they only have one coping strategy (avoidance, smoking dope, eating, distraction).

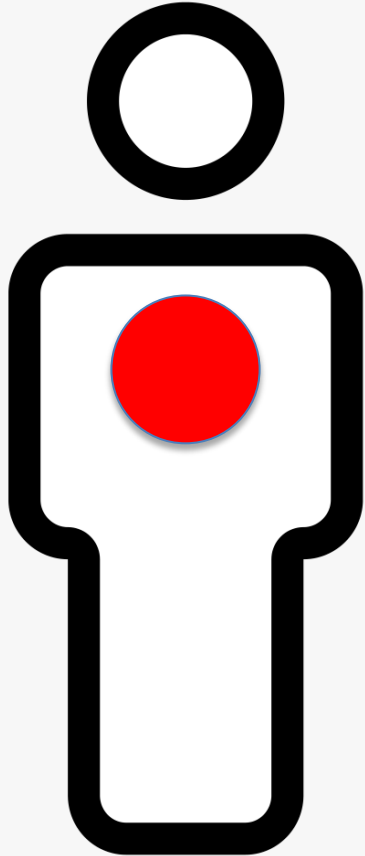
# Effective Problem-Solving

- Resilient people solve problems by taking a:
  - rational,
  - systematic,
  - planned and focused approach.
  
- Youth struggle to solve problems when they:
  - **take a reactive, impulsive,** hurried approach.
  - Avoid problems, procrastinate and depend too much on others.

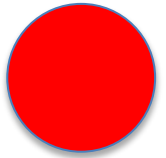
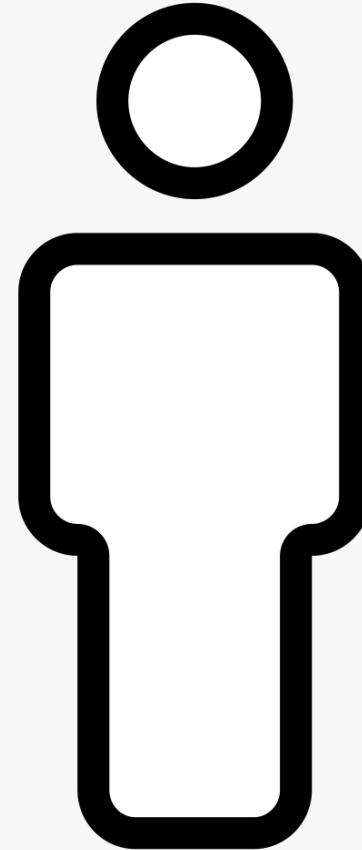


# Help Youth Separate Out the Problem

I am not the problem



I have a problem.  
The problem is the problem.



The  
problem

You/We can start to work on solving the  
problem.

# Focus More on Solutions Than Problems

← PROBLEMS



SOLUTIONS →



# Problem Talk

vs

# Solution Talk



problems



what isn't working



weakness



what isn't wanted



what is wrong



causes of the problem

Yes, but...

If...

Cannot

Problem is...

Why?

Sigh

focus



solutions



what is working



strengths



what is wanted



what is going well



action toward preferred future

Yes, and...

When...

Can

Imagine...

How?

Wow!

language



# Reaching In: 6. Confidence

- Help youth develop confidence in their skills and abilities to:
  - Cope with challenges.
  - **Judge and manage risks.**
  - Set positive goals for the future.
- Model a hopeful attitude.
- Help them find a reason to persevere.
- Believe problems can be met and mastered.

- Help them think – **I can do it! (but it might take a while).**
- They won't develop confidence if you never give them a chance to solve problems or help solve problems and experience progress or success.



# The Power of Positive Self Talk

## Negative

- I can't do this.
- This is too much to handle.
- I hate this.
- I don't know what to do.
- Everyone will laugh at me.
- I can't handle this.
- I never get what I want.



## Positive

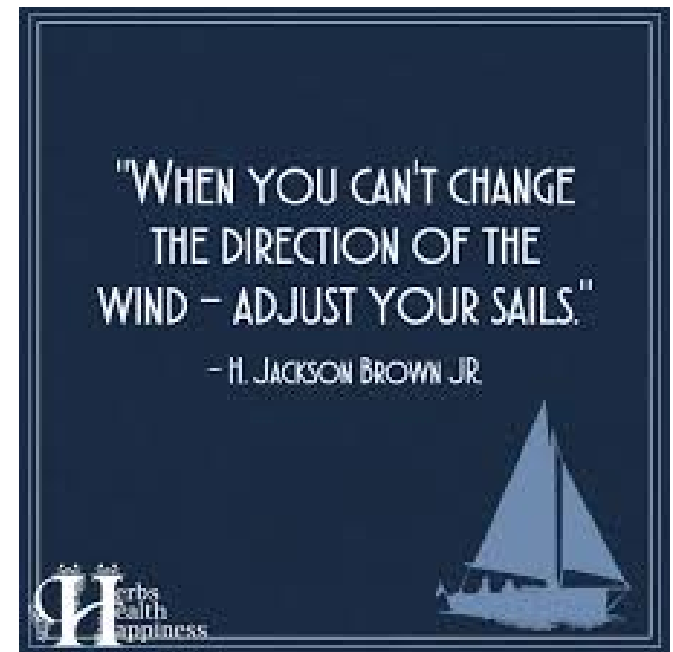
- Take a deep breath and relax.
- I can deal with this.
- I'll do this one step at a time.
- Oh, well....
- Getting angry isn't going to help.
- I can manage this with some help.



# Help Youth Focus on What they Can Control

Things I cannot control	Things I can control
What other people do	What I do – my behaviour and reactions
Other people's attitudes and efforts	My attitude and how much effort I put in
When other people accept or offer help	When I ask for help
What other people say	My words, what I say to myself and others
Other people's beliefs, opinions and thoughts	My beliefs, opinions and thoughts
How other people feel	How I feel
How much other people take care of themselves	My self-care - How much sleep I get, what food I eat, how much time I spend on social media

There are a lot of things that happen in your life that you have no choice over. But the one thing that can never be taken away from you is your ability to choose how to respond (Terry Wise)

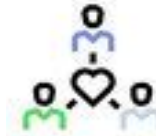


# Reaching In: 7. Character, Grit & Perseverance

Resilient people:

- Have a strong sense of right and wrong.
- Make decisions based on what is right and best for others – not just what is best for them.
- Make decisions that help them achieve their goals.
- Draw on their values and stand tall when they face adversity.
- Show others they care and are ‘there’ for them when they experience adversity.

## Core Values



LOYALTY



PASSION



HONESTY



EFFICIENCY



RELIABILITY



DEPENDABILITY



OPTIMISM



POSITIVITY



COMMITMENT



# Grit is Dedication and Commitment to Goals

G

- **Growth Mindset**

- The belief that their abilities can be developed through dedication and effort

R

- **Resilience**

- The successful adaptational response to adversity
- Ability to bounce back quickly when challenged

I

- **Intensity**

- Exceptionally great concentration, power or force
- Commitment to doing whatever it takes to achieve goals

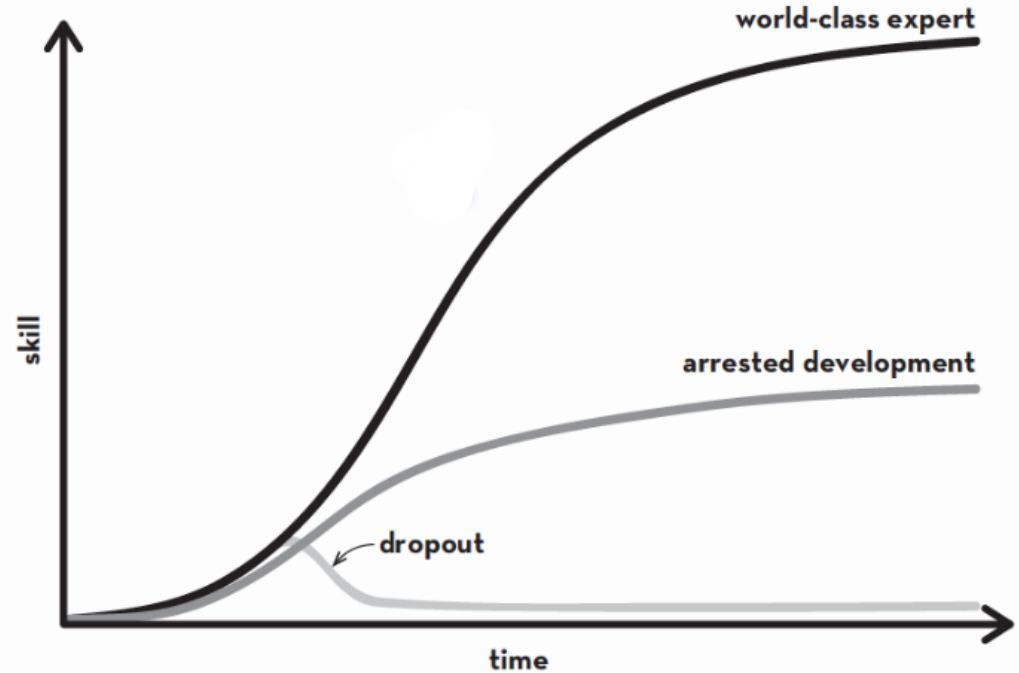
T

- **Tenacity**

- The ability to persist despite repeated setbacks and failure
- Determination to keep moving forward

# Grit = Perseverance, Practice + Passion

- The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his/her/their advantage is stamina.
- Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.
- **What is your teen's goal? reason? purpose that keeps them going?**



# Reaching In: 8. Contribution

Help youth:

- Develop a strong sense of purpose.
- Feel that what they say and do can make a difference.
- Are involved in their community.
- Invest time and energy in doing things that matter.
- What gives their life meaning?



# What Helps Build Resiliency?

## Reaching Out Skills

- **1 Connections** – secure stable supportive relationships, strong cultural identity and sense of belonging.
- **2 Communicating** – knowing how to reach out for and ask for help.

## Reaching In Skills

- **3 Control** - emotional awareness and regulation/control.
- **4 Coping** - a growth mindset and healthy habits of mind.
- **5 Competence** – problem-solving, decision-making and coping and self-care.
- **6 Confidence** – healthy and realistic optimism and self-belief.
- **7 Character** – a strong sense of right and wrong, grit and perseverance.
- **8 Contribution** – a sense of purpose and responsibility.



