

Raising Resilient Adolescents: Approaches from Positive Psychology

St. Patrick's Grammar School



FIONA FORMAN
B.ED., M.SC. APPLIED POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

22-9-22



Welcome!

- ▶ Thank you so much for the opportunity to present this evening!



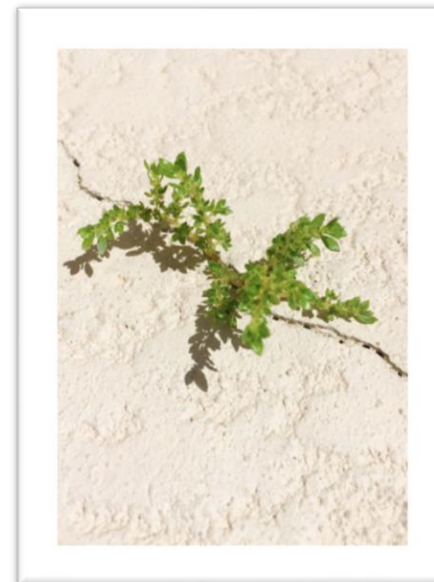
- ▶ Absolutely delighted to connect with St. Patrick's again
- ▶ Resilience is a priority now more than ever in this challenging time
- ▶ We will be using the chat function afterwards & the slides will be available

Welcome!

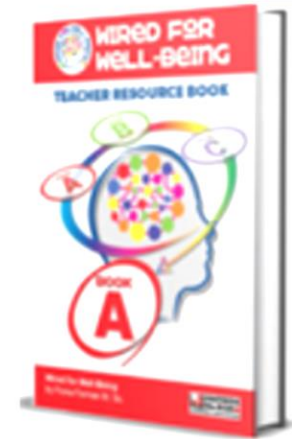
Resilience is one of the greatest gifts you can give your child!

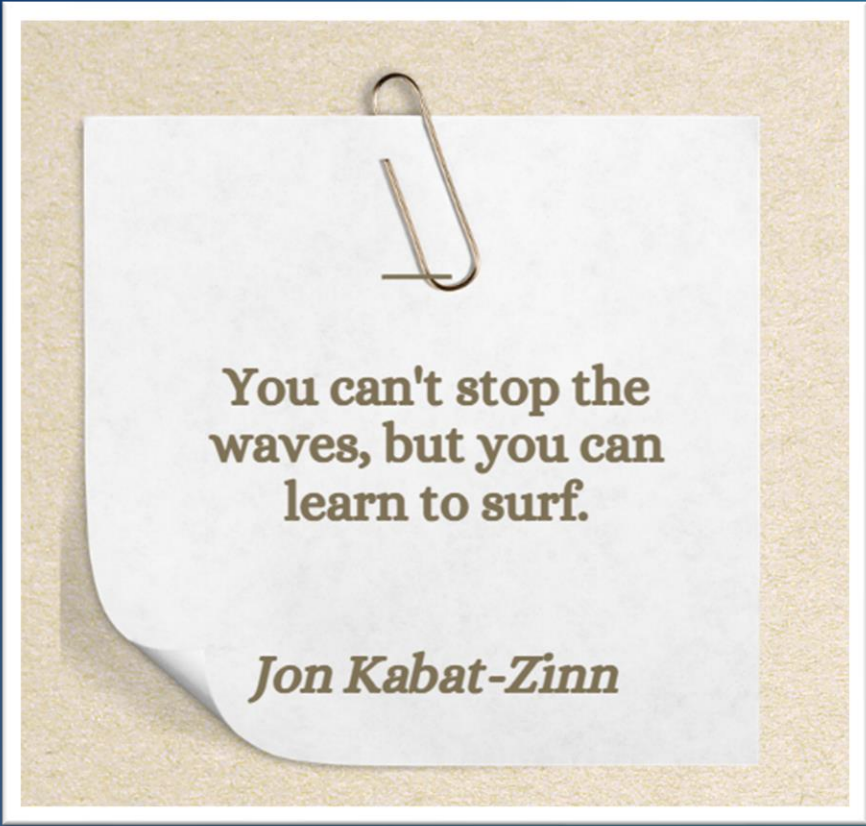
With the added stresses of recent times, it is more important than ever.

Good news – these stresses and challenges can actually build their resilience!



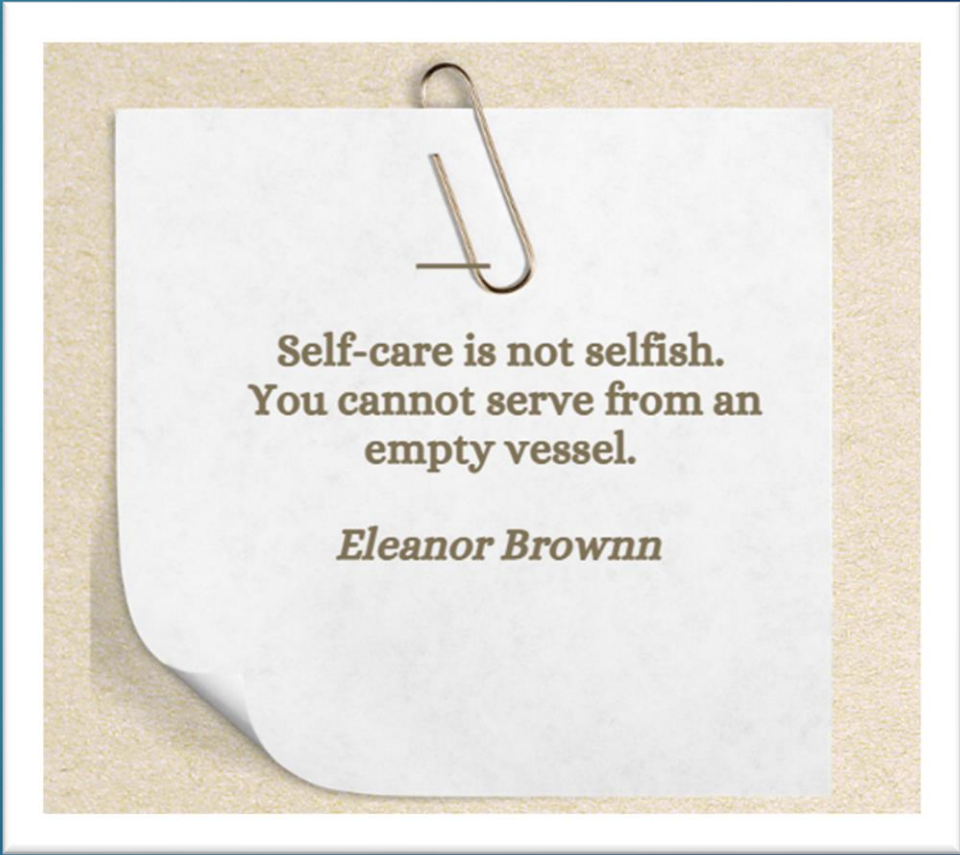
Personal Introduction





You can't stop the
waves, but you can
learn to surf.

Jon Kabat-Zinn



Self-care is not selfish.
You cannot serve from an
empty vessel.

Eleanor Brown

OPENING QUOTES

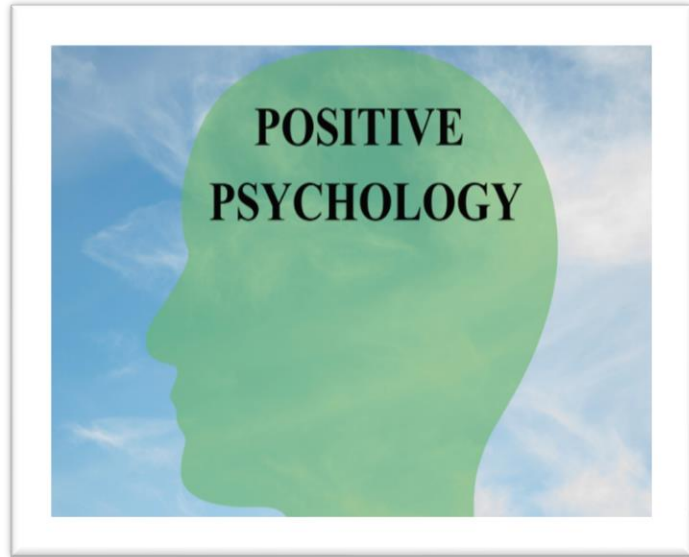
Session Overview

Overview of Positive Psychology,
Neuroscience & Wired for Well-Being

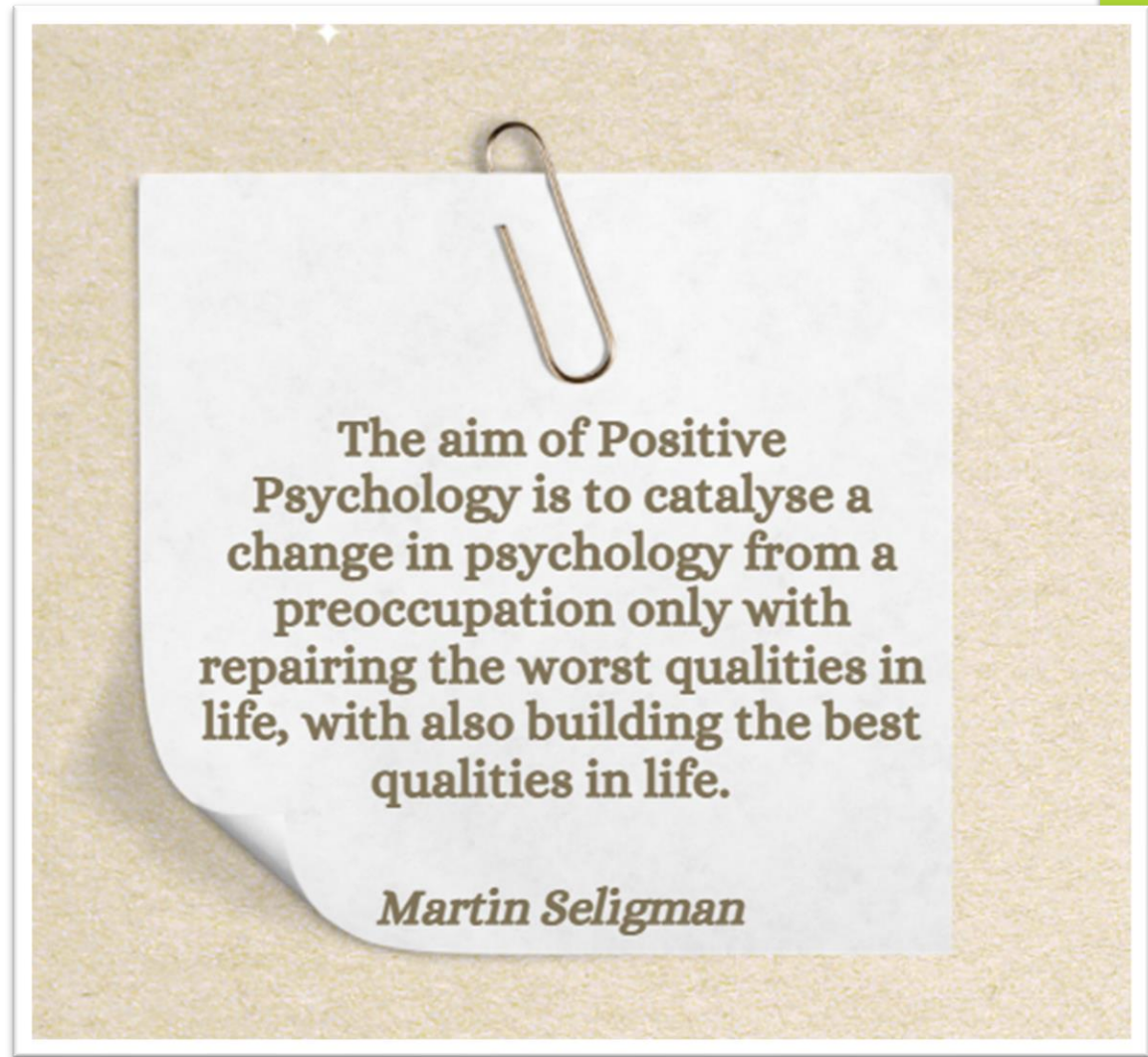
Current challenges facing our teens

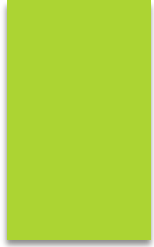
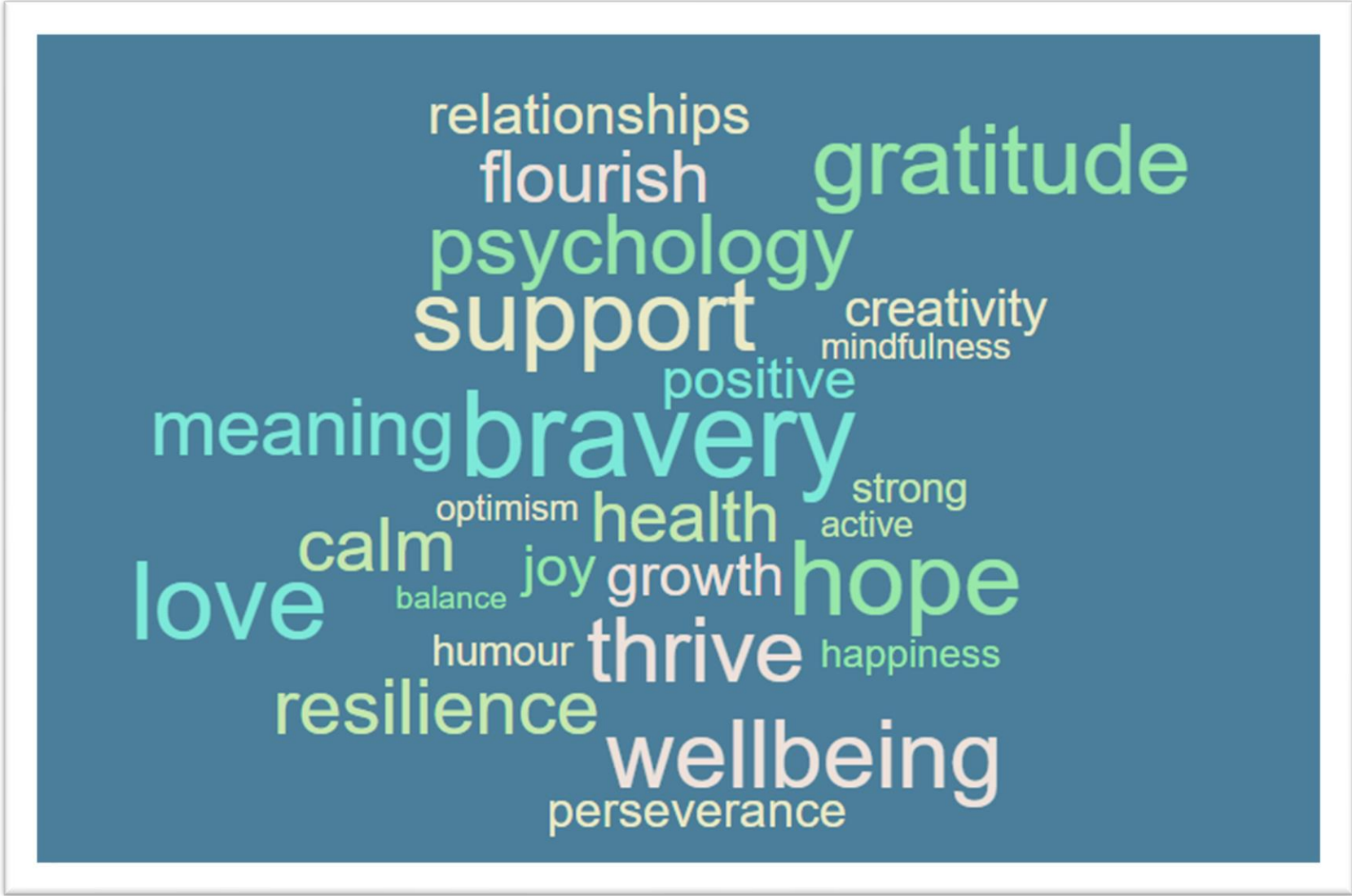
Resilience – what & why?

8 Resilience Skills – focus on 3

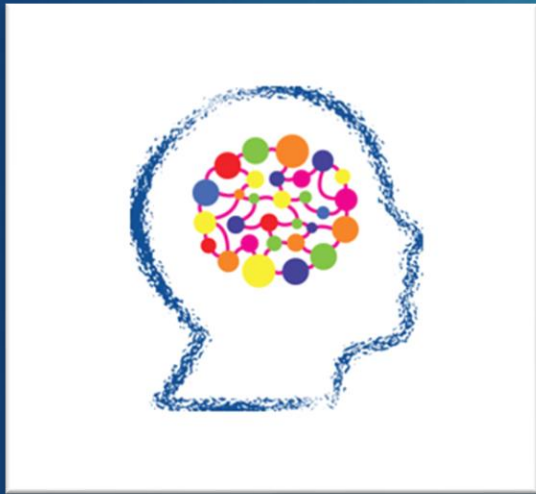


The Science of Well-Being





Neuroscience



Neuroscience:

Study of the brain and nervous system

Neuroplasticity:

The structure of brain is continuously changing throughout life, through our habits, thoughts, emotions and behaviours

Individuals have the capacity to shape this process in a dynamic way – ‘feel-good’ neurotransmitters

Wired for Well-Being

Aims:

To increase students' well-being, resilience and self-efficacy

To empower students to become active participants in nurturing their own well-being

To introduce students to a wide array of evidence-based skills from Positive Psychology and neuroscience



Wired for Well-Being

Skill 1: Understand Your Well-Being

Skill 2: Nurture Neuroplasticity

Skill 3: Savour Your Sleep

Skill 4: Prioritise Positivity

Skill 5: Choose Kindness

Skill 6: Be Your Own Best Friend

Skill 7: Tame Technology



Skill 1: Get Good at Well-Being

Skill 2: Tackle Your Thoughts

Skill 3: Embrace Imperfection

Skill 4: Tame Your Emotions

Skill 5: Know Your Strengths

Skill 6: Connect and Uplift

Skill 7: Reboot Your Resilience

Skill 1: Excel at Well-Being

Skill 2: Cultivate Optimism

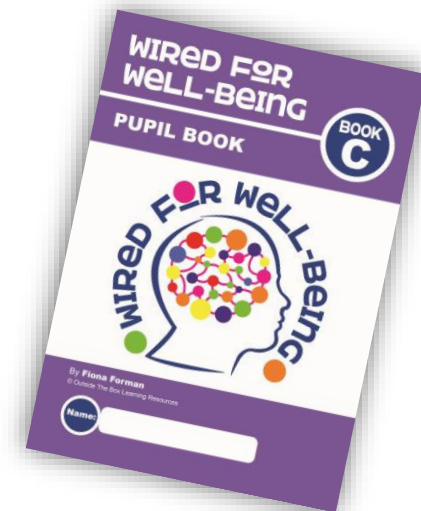
Skill 3: Get Good at Stress

Skill 4: Make Your Goals Work for You

Skill 5: Evolve with Intent

Skill 6: Stop and Drop

Skill 7: Believe You Make a Difference



1 SKILL 1 GET GOOD AT WELL-BEING

Skill 1: Get Good at Well-Being: Your child learns about what well-being and neuroplasticity means. They learn about a variety of mood-boosting activities and the neurotransmitters- serotonin, endorphins, dopamine and oxytocin - released by each of them. For homework, they carry out at least 2 mood-boosters each day and monitor the effect on their well-being.

Support your child by talking to them about their mood-boosting activities and encouraging them to do at least one of them every day!



2 SKILL 2 TACKLE YOUR THOUGHTS

Skill 2: Tackle Your Thoughts: Your child learns about some common thinking traps including catastrophizing and perfectionism. They learn about the importance of challenging these type of thoughts. They learn how the Recognise and Reframe method of dealing with thinking traps. For homework, they are encouraged to use a series of questions to support this method.

Support your child by encouraging them to use the *Recognise and Reframe* method and by using it yourself too.



3 SKILL 3 EMBRACE IMPERFECTION

Skill 3: Embrace Imperfection: Your child learns the importance of challenging the unattainable images of perfection that popular culture bombards us with, as well as questioning unrealistic expectations and pressures. They are reminded that nobody is perfect and to embrace the concept of being 'good enough' rather than perfect or amazing. For homework, they are encouraged to use helpful self-talk phrases.

Support your child by discussing this topic with them and helping them to use helpful self-talk to remind them that they are always good enough.



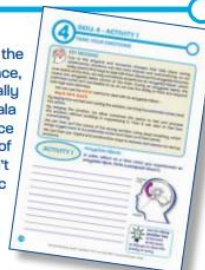
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4 SKILL 4 TAME YOUR EMOTIONS

Skill 4: Tame Your Emotions: Your child learns that due to the physical and hormonal changes that take place during adolescence, emotions can feel more intense and overwhelming, so we really need to find ways to deal with them. Because the amygdala becomes over-active at this time, we may sometimes experience an 'amygdala hijack', which means the amygdala takes control of the brain. During an amygdala hijack, the prefrontal cortex isn't accessible, so we lose the ability to think and respond with logic and calmness.

Children learn the *S.O.S.* method to deal with an amygdala hijack - *Say it. OK it. Surf it.*

Support your child by talking about constructive ways to regulate intense emotions and by supporting them as they do this.



5 SKILL 5 KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

Skill 5: Know Your Strengths: Your child learns about the *24 Character Strengths* of Positive Psychology, which are those great parts of our personalities that help us to feel strong, positive, connected and resilient. We all have a unique combination and research shows that when we are aware of and use our *5 Signature Strengths*, we can feel more self-confident, less stressed and happier. Studies also show that being aware of Character Strengths during adolescence can help teens to deal with challenges and become more resilient.

Support your child by discussing the strengths and helping to identify their top 5 strengths. Notice and praise your child when they display these strengths and remind them that they can use them whenever they need to.

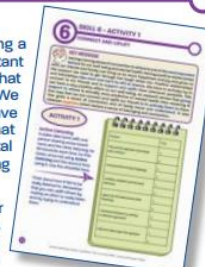


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6 SKILL 6 CONNECT AND UPLIFT

Skill 6: Connect and Uplift: Your child is reminded that having a strong sense of connection to others is one of the most important factors for our well-being and mental health. They learn that positive relationships take work and can't be left to chance. We have to actively try to connect to and uplift others. This can have a very positive effect on our well-being, as research shows that giving support to others is actually more predictive of mental health than receiving it. They learn how to use active listening to build positive relationships.

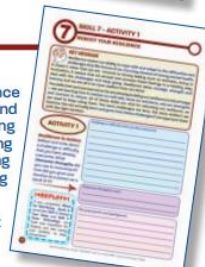
Support your child this week by helping them to tune into their self-talk and noticing if they're being very hard on themselves. Remind them that their best is good enough and that no-one is perfect. Take time to really listen to your child and empathise with them.



7 SKILL 7 REBOOT YOUR RESILIENCE

Skill 7: Reboot Your Resilience: Your child learns that resilience means our ability to cope with and adapt to the difficulties and challenges that life throws at us. It is a key element of strong mental health. It doesn't mean that we are immune to strong feeling such as sadness, worry or frustration, it means accepting and processing these feelings in a healthy way and dealing with the challenges.

Support your child by discussing the behaviours of resilient people with them and using them yourself too.



8 SKILL 8 BECOME WIRED FOR WELL-BEING!

Skill 8: Become Wired for Well-Being: Your child reviews the all of the skills and reflects on the ones they found most useful. For homework, they are encouraged to use all of their skills and keep track of the effect on their mood and well-being.

Support your child by discussing the skills they have learned with them and encouraging them to keep using the ones they find particularly effective.



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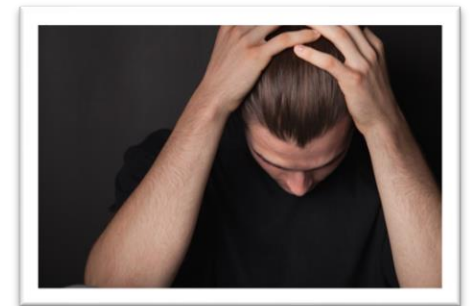
Why?

Recent Challenges

Adolescence – already a time of change and challenge

Challenges - *social distancing, lockdown, less opportunities to socialise, coping with threat & uncertainty* posed by the pandemic resulted in increased levels of

- ▶ restlessness
- ▶ anxiety
- ▶ irritability
- ▶ separation anxiety
- ▶ inattention



[Idoiaga et al., 2020](#); [Jiao et al., 2020](#); [Orgiles et al., 2020](#); [Pisano & Galimi, 2020](#)

Why?

Helping young people to deal with the challenges associated with the pandemic can lead to

'personal growth and development, which in turn reinforces a sense of competence and acts as a protective factor for coping with stressors in the future.'

Jones, K., Mallon, S., & Schnitzler, K. (2021). A Scoping Review of the Psychological and Emotional Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and Young People. Illness, Crisis & Loss, 10541373211047191.

We can't fix everything for our kids!

Don't underestimate the power of listening and nurturing, your time and attention – comforting, encouraging, supporting, validating.....

“

Listen.
People start to heal the
moment they feel heard.

CHERYL RICHARDSON

“ Maintaining communication with parents strongly influences adolescents' emotional well-being.

"Spending the time just talking" with adolescents was shown as one of the strongest predictor for high life satisfaction.

”

OECD 2017a; Morgan et al. 2007

Colleen McLaughlin



“

The more often a child experiences nurturing in times of distress, the more easily they grow to nurture themselves and others in times of distress.

LELIA SCHOTT

Current Challenges

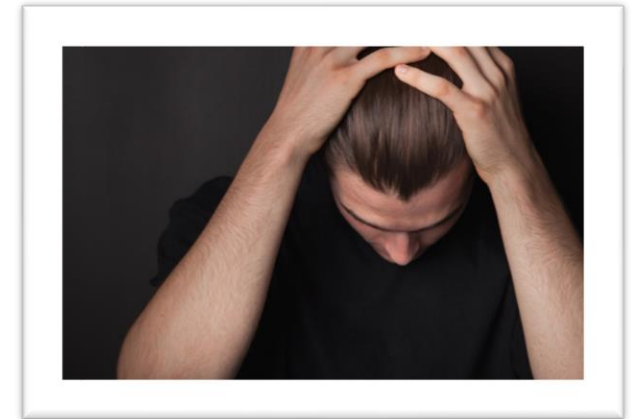
Unfortunately, statistics show that our young people were already struggling in terms of their well-being & resilience

Worrying statistics:

By age 13 years, 1 in 3 young people in Ireland is likely to have experienced some type of mental health difficulty.

By the age of 24 years, that rate will have increased to over 1 in 2.

Cannon, Coughlan, Clarke, Harley, & Kelleher, 2013



Why?

No general consensus

A number of factors and recent changes to children's lives – any thoughts?

Genetic predisposition

Adverse life circumstances

Trauma

Current Challenges

Social media (leading to unfavourable social comparison)

2/3 of children said they wished it didn't exist

56% - on the edge of addiction

(Digital Awareness UK, 2017)

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/oct/05/growing-social-media-backlash-among-young-people-survey-shows>

Unrealistic images of perfection in the media – fear of being ‘ordinary’

Increased pressures and choices for young people

Technology/ digital age – over exposure to disturbing news, no down time, over-stimulation

Current Challenges

Self-esteem movement:

- ▶ **Linked to decreased resilience in children, as the emphasis on avoidance of negative feelings such as disappointment, means that children don't learn how to *cope with them in a safe way*.**
- ▶ **Authentic self-esteem is not 'bestowed' on children, it is built through experience and dealing with challenges**

Seligman, 2007; Storr, 2017

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-sack-md/children-self-esteem_b_1822809.htm

Current Challenges

- ▶ Encouraging news!
- ▶ Promoting young people's well-being in order to enhance their emotional and social competence is an important measure in the prevention of such difficulties
- ▶ Giving them a sense of belief in their own ability to cope with challenges is a key factor

O' Connell, Boat & Warner, 2009

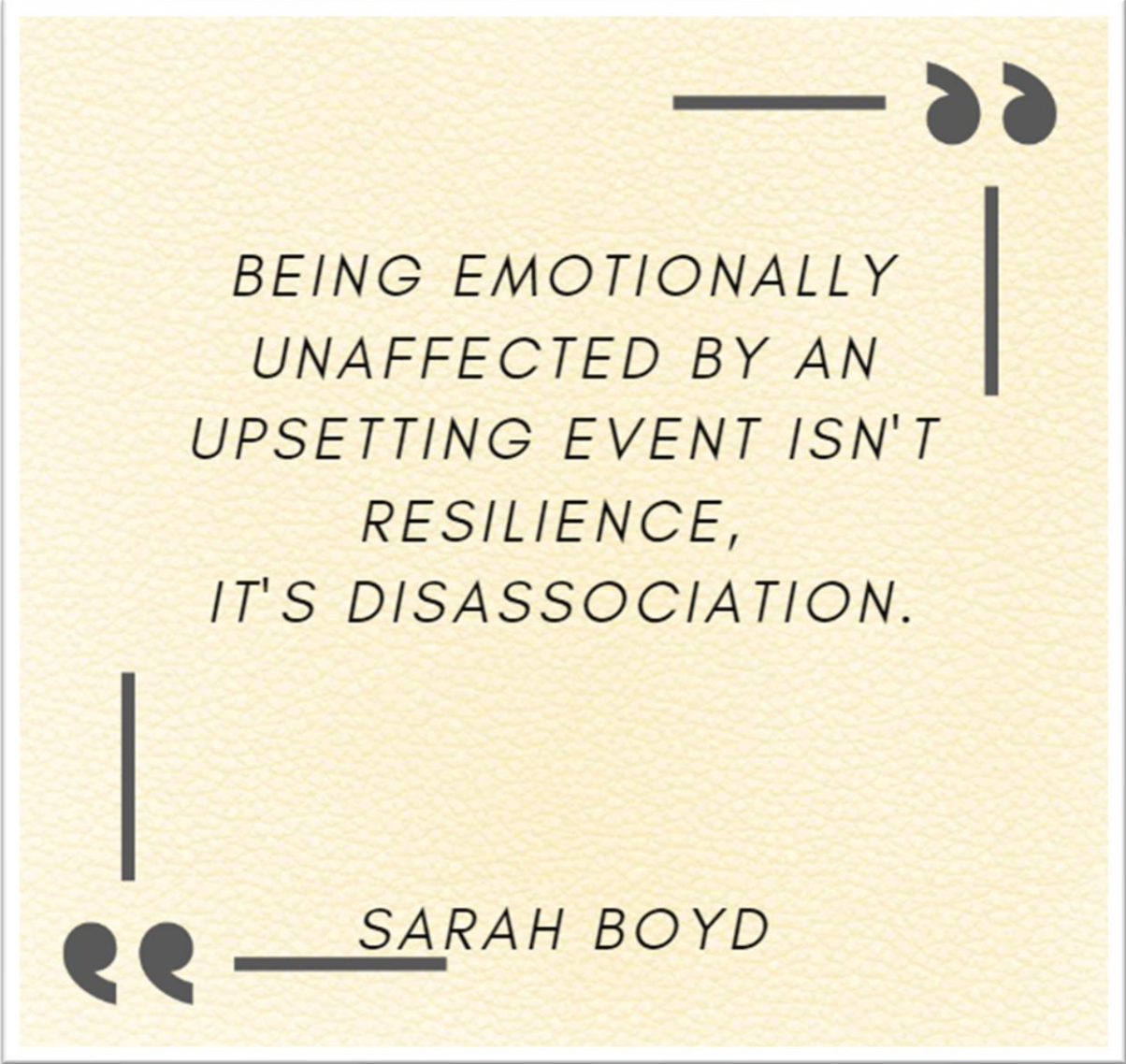


Resilience



- ▶ What comes to mind when you think of the word 'resilience?'
- ▶ 'The capacity for positive outcomes despite challenging or threatening circumstances' (Egeland, 1993)
- ▶ The *belief* in your ability to cope with, and adapt to, difficult and challenging events
- ▶ A process which evolves over time and can involve different steps or stages
- ▶ Not about being *tough* or *immune* to strong emotions such as sadness, grief or disappointment – working through them, expressing them & processing them in a healthy way
- ▶ We are all more resilient than we think
- ▶ Activated and nurtured at times of stress and challenge
- ▶ Opportunity for *Post-Traumatic Growth*

Tait, 2008



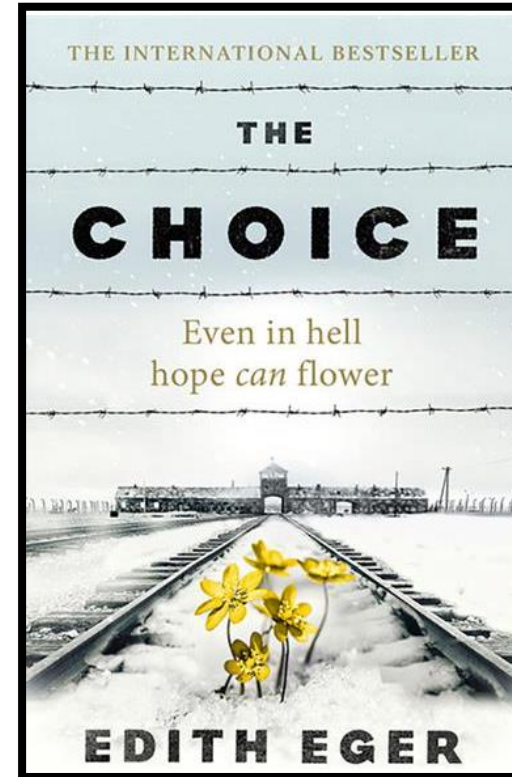
*BEING EMOTIONALLY
UNAFFECTED BY AN
UPSETTING EVENT ISN'T
RESILIENCE,
IT'S DISASSOCIATION.*

SARAH BOYD

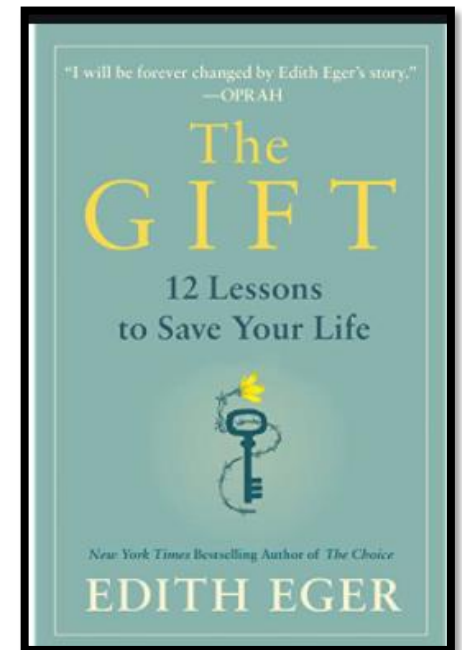
‘The very worst circumstances give you the opportunity to discover the inner resources that help you to survive.’

‘Suffering is universal, but victimhood is optional’

Dr. Edith Eger



25



**‘Don’t just go
through it, grow
through it.’**

“No Mud
No Lotus”



Thich Nhat Hanh

Resilience

- ▶ **Good news!**
- ▶ **Research shows that we can develop resilience through *'ordinary rather than extraordinary processes'***
- ▶ **Resilience as *'ordinary magic'***
- ▶ **The No. 1 factor?**
- ▶ **A caring, nurturing relationship with a parent or caregiver.**
- ▶ ***'One Good Adult'***



'Ordinary Magic', Masten, 2001

“

The parent-child
connection is the most
powerful mental health
intervention known to
mankind.

BESSEL VAN DER VOLK

Ordinary Magic!

To make a difference in someone's life, you do not have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful or perfect. You just have to care.

Mandy Hale

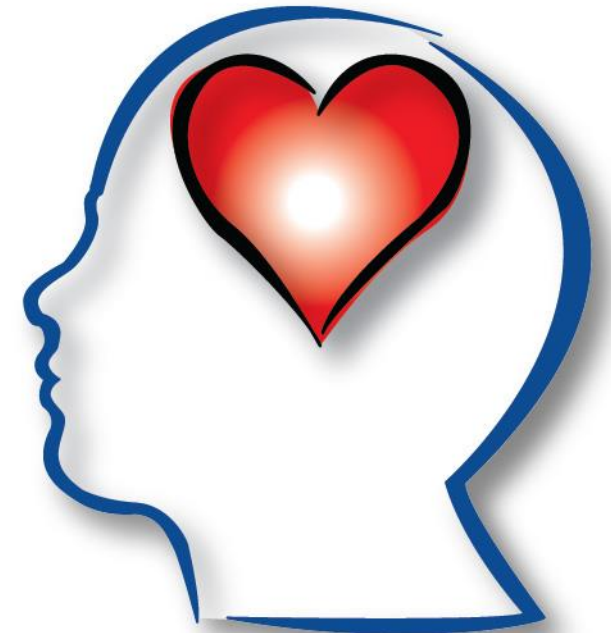


Resilience Skills from Positive Psychology

- ▶ 1. Using self-compassion
- ▶ 2. Upregulating positive Emotions
- ▶ 3. Downregulating negative emotions
- ▶ 4. Cognitive reframing
- ▶ 5. Identifying & using unique character strengths
- ▶ 6. Looking after your physical well-being
- ▶ 7. Giving & receiving social support
- ▶ 8. Using healthy distraction

Self-Compassion

- ▶ **Compassionate self-talk (kind self-talk)**
- ▶ **So important to learn about the power of self-compassion from an early age!**
- ▶ **More important to focus on developing self-compassion rather than self-esteem!**

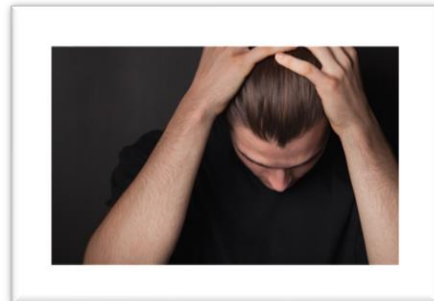


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvTZBUSplr4>

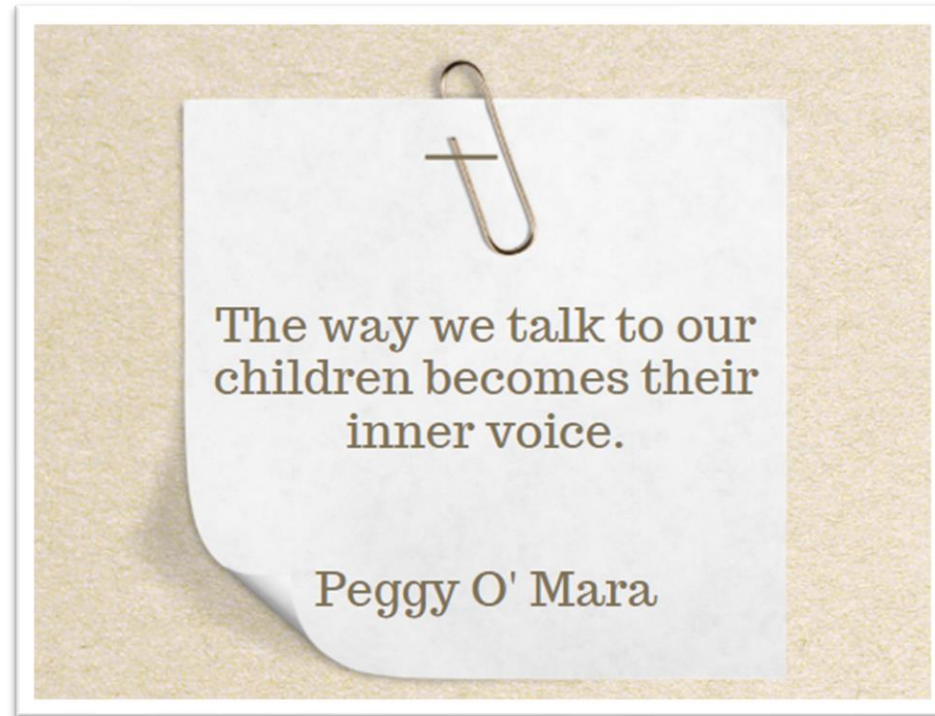
TED Talk – Professor Kristin Neff

Compassionate Self-Talk

- ▶ Teens can be very, very hard on themselves at times.
- ▶ They can be their own worst critics and judge themselves very harshly
- ▶ They may be constantly comparing themselves to others and feeling that they don't quite measure up - starts at an early age, and the pressures and challenges of modern life can make this worse as they get older
- ▶ Constant, critical self-talk like this can lead to low confidence, increased anxiety and low self-worth



Make sure that you are counteracting this every day through your words and messages.....



I don't have to feel special or amazing all the time, I'm fine just the way I am!

I don't have to be so hard on myself.

Everyone feels like this sometimes.

I don't need to compare myself to anyone else.

I've coped with problems before and I can do it again!

I can be strong and brave now even though it's hard, it will be worth it!

It's okay to make mistakes.

My best is good enough!

I can make a good choice now if I give myself time to think clearly.

Everybody is different and that's okay.

It's okay to be disappointed/angry/upset/scared/worried/frustrated. I can be kind to myself and remember these thoughts and feelings won't last forever.

That's not a true or kind thought.

I don't have to be perfect.

Everybody doesn't have to like me.

I'll deal with that situation if and when it happens.

I can do something positive now to help myself feel better.

(DRAFT COPY)

SKILL 6 - ACTIVITY 2

COMPASSIONATE SELF-TALK SELFIE!

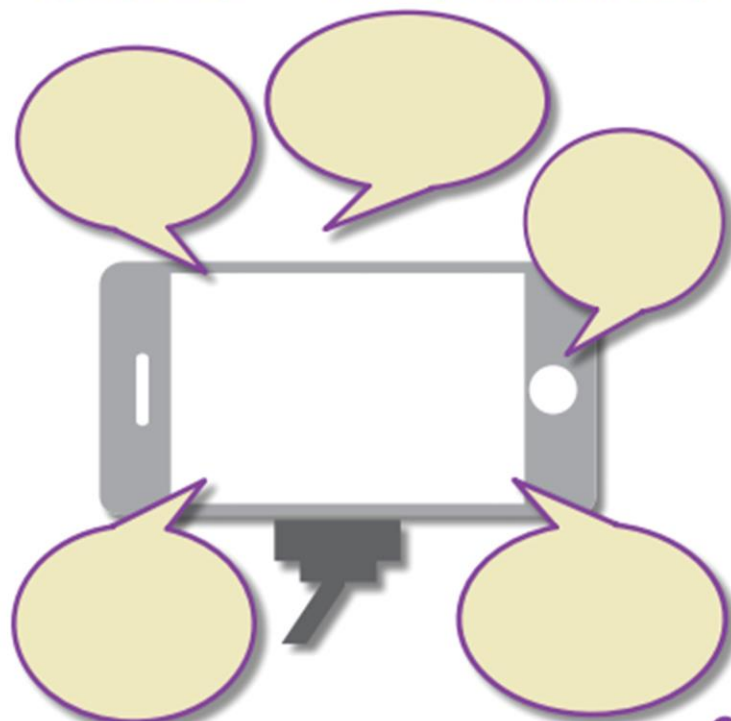
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ACTIVITY 2

Draw a selfie on this mobile phone and surround it with some phrases that your Inner Best Friend Voice would use!

Examples:

- *I don't have to be perfect.*
- *It's okay to make mistakes.*
- *My best is good enough!*
- *Everybody is different and that's okay.*
- *I don't need to compare myself to anyone else!*
- *I don't always have to be, or feel, amazing.*



Make sure that your
worst enemy is not living
between your two ears.

Laird Hamilton

Upregulating Positive Emotions

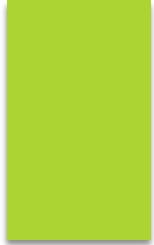
What do we mean when we talk about 'Positivity?'

10 Positive Emotions have been identified and researched through Positive Psychology –

Professor Barbara Fredrickson

Can you name any of them?





Love

Gratitude

Interest

Joy

Pride

Hope

Amusement

Serenity

Awe

Inspiration

Upregulating Positive Emotions

Why?

Research:

Ratio of a least 3: 1 of positive to negative emotions is needed for flourishing – negativity bias of the brain!

Diehl et al., 2011

Prolonged state of negative thoughts & emotions – affects overall health – stress hormones

Positive Emotions bathe our brains in feel-good neurotransmitters – oxytocin & serotonin



The presence of frequent positive emotions may be a stronger predictor of overall well-being and resilience in young people than the experience of stressors.

*McCullough,
Huebner & Laughlin*





1. What activities generate these emotions for you and your family?

3. Remember they buffer us from negativity – necessity not a luxury!

Love

Gratitude

Interest

Joy

Pride

Hope

Amusement

Serenity

Awe

Inspiration

Upregulating Positive Emotions

- ▶ **Gratitude practices**
- ▶ **Celebrate small successes**
- ▶ **Random Acts of Kindness**
- ▶ **Positivity Playlists**
- ▶ **Time in nature**
- ▶ **Spending time on enjoyable hobbies and interests**
- ▶ **Family time – screen free!**
- ▶ **Fun!!!**

Love	Gratitude	Interest	Joy	Pride
Hope	Amusement	Serenity	Awe	Inspiration

Upregulating Positive Emotions

4 SKILL 4 - ACTIVITY 1
PRIORITISE POSITIVITY

KEY MESSAGE
Our brains still have the **Negativity Bias** which we have inherited from our early ancestors. This means that one small negative event can often affect us very strongly and ruin our mood!
We need to retrain our brains to start noticing and savouring all the small positive things that happen every day that we often take for granted. We need at least 3 positives to balance each negative!
When we prioritise positivity, we become more open to the power of positive emotions such as love, joy, pride, interest, awe, inspiration, tranquility, gratitude, hope and amusement!
These emotions release our feel-good neurotransmitters such as **serotonin** and **dopamine**. This helps us to feel happier, healthier, and even more resilient. It also opens up our minds for learning.

ACTIVITY 1
Write down **Three Good Things** you experienced in the last 24 hours.
What positive emotions did you feel each time?
Take some time to savour these small positive events!

3 GOOD THINGS	POSITIVE EMOTION
1.	
2.	
3.	

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Three Good Things

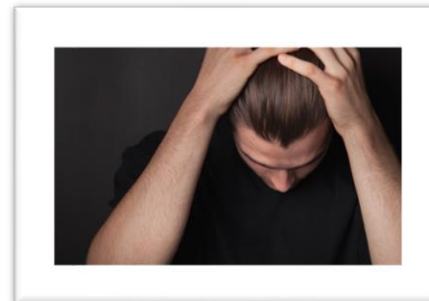
- ▶ **Positive Psychology Intervention ‘Three Good Things’ –**
- ▶ **Write down 3 small positive events of the last 24 hours –**
- ▶ **Retrains the brain and counteracts the negativity bias**
- ▶ **Do it for at least a week!**

“

Pay attention to what you're paying attention to.

Downregulating Negative Emotions

- ▶ Our teens are experiencing a wide range of uncomfortable emotions at present –sadness, disappointment, worry, frustration, anger, fear
- ▶ Our instinct is to protect them, shield them, avoid them
- ▶ Leads to them being unfamiliar with these emotions and unable to tolerate them
- ▶ Instead we need to teach them how to accept and express these difficult emotions – all feelings are ok!
- ▶ The experience of dealing with challenges builds resilience – psychological vaccination!



Emotional Regulation

- ▶ **What can we do?**
- ▶ **Normalise & allow your child to experience, accept and express these emotions safely – with support – helps them to build their resilience skills**
- ▶ **Normalise failure, disappointment etc**
- ▶ **Be mindful of your own emotions – acknowledge, accept and be open to the difficult emotions that you yourself experience when you see your child upset**
- ▶ **Message: *'You can cope with feeling uncomfortable'*.**

Support & Soothe



**Normalise,
allow, accept,
express**



**Don't rush in to
try to 'fix it'**



**Listen,
empathise
soothe &
nurture**

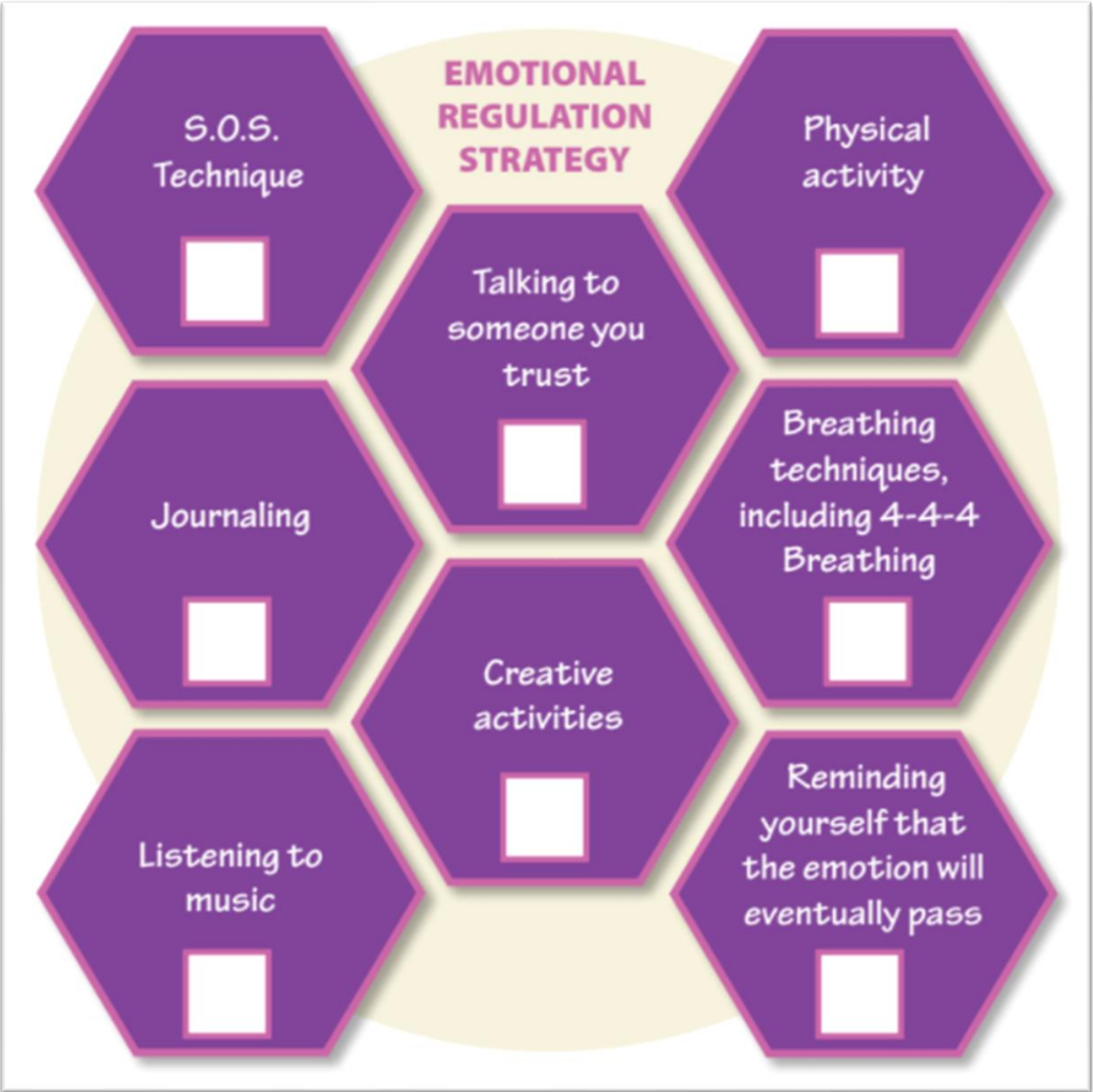
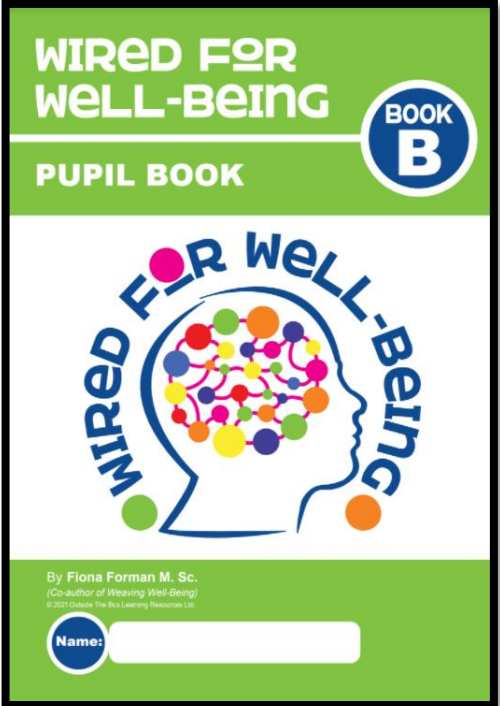


Validate

Emotional Validation

- Making space for all emotions
- Not judging
- Allowing teens to feel how they feel
- Not rushing in to fix or change emotions
- Self-awareness – managing our own emotions as a starting point
- Develop ‘distress tolerance’





The Power of Belief.....

Show your teen that you believe in their ability to cope.

Remind them of their strengths – their bravery, love, creativity, perseverance, kindness, teamwork...

“

I see your pain, and it's big.
I also see your courage and
it's bigger.
You can do hard things.

GLENNON DOYLE

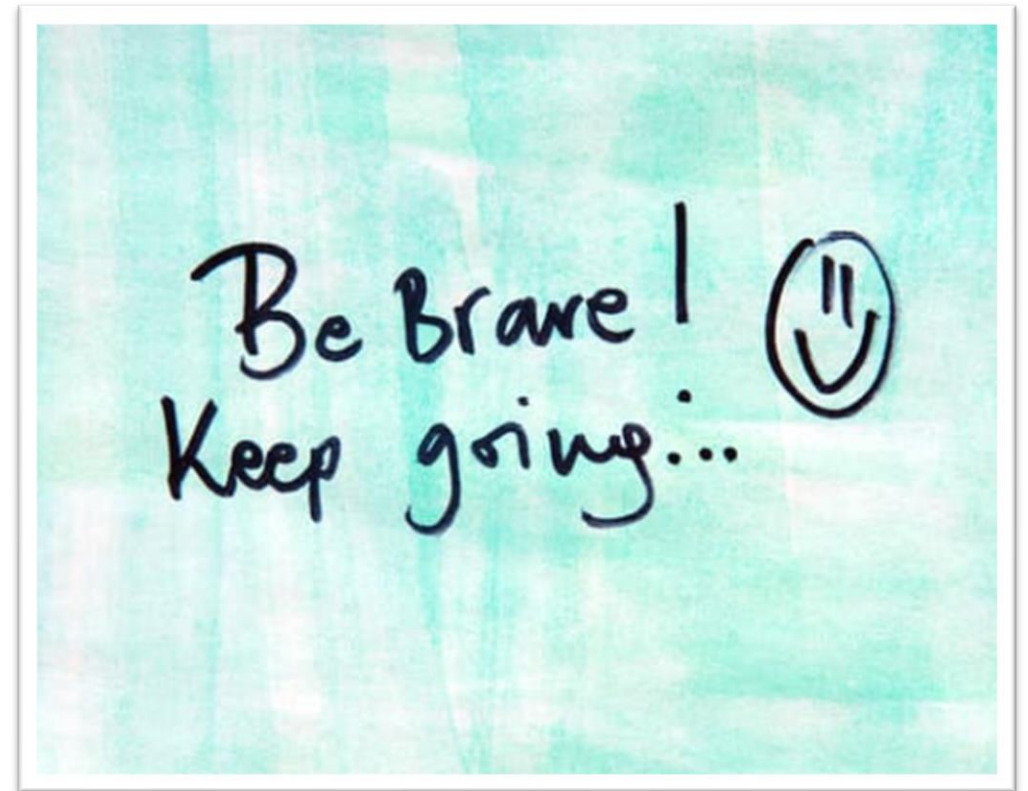
Final messages!

- ▶ Remember that resilience is *ordinary magic* and there are lots of things you can do to enhance it!
- ▶ Spend time nurturing the connection you have with your teen – keep communication channels open!
- ▶ Remember that challenges bring psychological vaccinations! These can prepare them for the inevitable disappointments and challenges of life!

Final Messages!

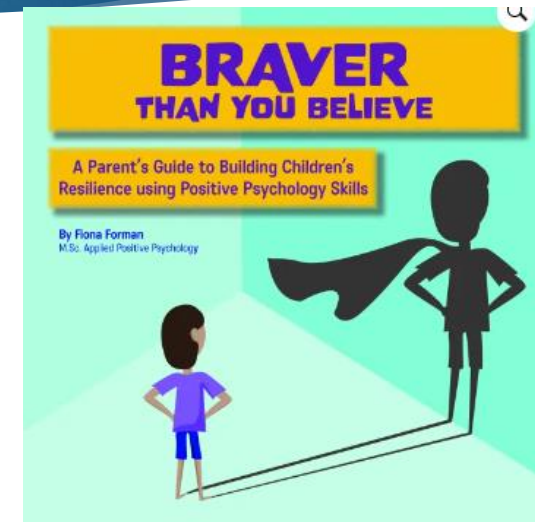
- ▶ **Practise and reinforce resilience skills**
- ▶ **Look after your own well-being and remember to prioritise self-care!**
- ▶ **Take the time to savour and enjoy this time with your teen!**

Promise me you'll always
remember –
You're braver than you
believe,
Stronger than you seem,
Smarter than you think
And loved more than you
know.
A. A. Milne



Thank you & questions!

- ▶ Thanks so much again for this opportunity
- ▶ Thanks so much for joining me!
- ▶ Best of luck with the programme!
- ▶ Contact – fiona.forman@gmail.com
- ▶ Twitter - @FionaWellBeing
- ▶ Instagram –fionaformanwellbeing



<https://www.otb.ie/shop/braver-than-you-believe/>