

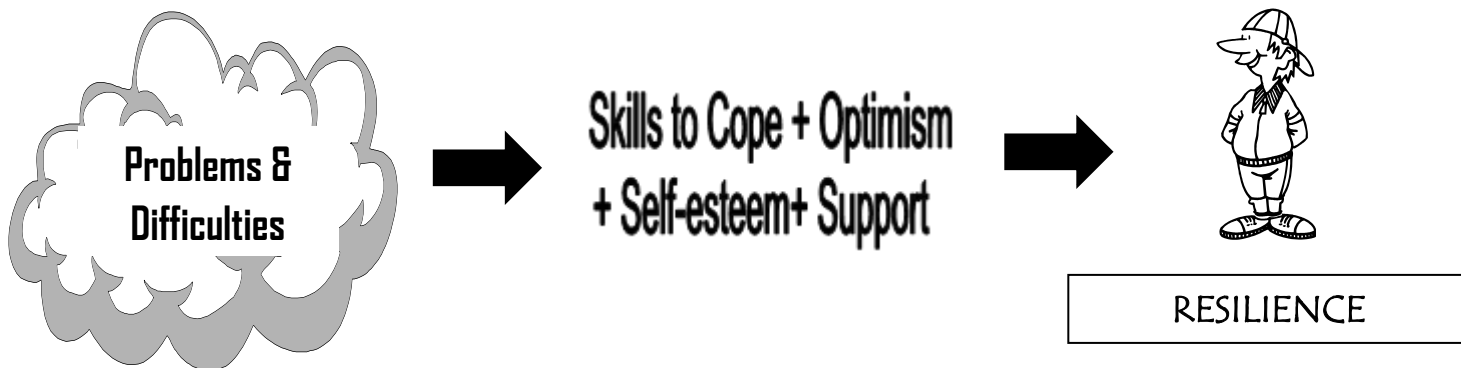
## Family Pack - Resilience, Self-esteem, and Optimistic Thinking

Resilience is our ability to cope with changes, challenges and difficult times.

### Building resilience in your teenager

There are many changes for students when moving to secondary school. They may encounter problems relating to pressure from peers, changing relationships with parents, increasing responsibilities, the demands of study and coming to terms with their body changes and sexuality.

Most students cope well with these changes, but some don't cope as well. They may experience emotional problems, such as anxiety, depression, loneliness and stress. While we can't stop the changes or avoid the challenges involved in the transition, we can provide our teenagers with the skills and support to deal with them.



### Skills to Cope

Resilient people have confidence in themselves. When in difficult situations, they think about what could go wrong and prepare ahead of time. They have ways to cope with stress, they feel good about themselves and how they cope with life. Resilient people are good problem solvers, can think through situations and decide on the best action.

### Support

Resilient people have at least one caring adult and other good role models in their lives. They get support and ideas about how to cope with adversity from these role models.

## Building Self-esteem

Resilient teenagers feel good about themselves and how they cope with life. They take responsibility for their actions and think positively about themselves. Self-esteem grows out of dealing with both success and failure, and from learning to face challenges rather than avoiding them. Teenagers can survive and grow.

Self-esteem is the way we feel about ourselves. We compare how we see ourselves in all areas of our life with what is important to us.

- Healthy self-esteem is about accepting yourself as you are and feeling comfortable with yourself.
- Low self-esteem is about wishing you were different or wishing you were someone else.

### Top tips to help your teenagers develop their self-esteem

- Help your teenagers think about their abilities and what they are capable of in a realistic way, e.g. "You throw really well for someone your age."
- Encourage your teenagers to 'have-a-go' at new activities.
- Encourage your teenagers to value a wide range of abilities.
- Help your teenagers to find solutions to problems rather than giving them the answers. Ask questions like "What could you do?" or "What do you think?"
- Set aside time to listen to your teenagers and show them that you value what they have to say.
- Help them to be more independent, e.g. caring for their own belongings, making their own bed, managing their pocket money or feeding the pets.
- Encourage your teenager's attempts to change.
- Support your teenagers when they work hard.
- Encourage in your teenagers a respect for others who excel in different areas.
- Encourage your teenagers to rely on their own values.
- Encourage your teenagers to think about images they see in magazines, TV and movies and evaluate the level of truth of these images.
- Encourage teenagers to establish realistic and achievable personal goals.

## Optimistic Thinking and Self-Talk

One of the hardest parts of being a parent is when your teenager isn't happy. But teenagers are not born pessimistic. Research shows a large part of this attitude is learned along the way. Parents can help their kids become more optimistic and this can dramatically increase the likelihood of your son or daughter's long-term happiness.

When used together with social skills and problem-solving skills, optimistic thinking helps teenagers face the challenges of growing up and going to secondary school.

A lot of people think their feelings come from the problems they face. They think the problem causes their feelings. However, it is not just the things that happen to us, such as getting yelled at, that makes us feel bad. It is what we say to ourselves (self-talk) in the situation that is the most important step.

Help your teenagers to challenge their negative thoughts by suggesting that they:

- Ask themselves "Is this true of me?", or am I making it seem more than it is, e.g. "I am not that hopeless."
- Think of things that prove this is not necessarily true, e.g. "I passed my last test and I did well last term."

Parents can show teenagers how to challenge their negative thoughts by talking through their own problems out loud and role modelling how to find more helpful and positive thoughts for a situation.



## Top tips to help your teenagers to challenge their negative thoughts

- 1. Eliminate all the negatives you can.** Cut out the sources that might be making your teenager's pessimism worse – Be aware of what you can control.
  - Stop talking about the bad stuff on the front page of the paper; listen to your own negative talk and curb it; monitor the negative musical lyrics your kid is hearing.
- 2. Look for the positive.** Consciously stress a more optimistic outlook in your home so your teenager sees the good parts of life instead of just the downside.
  - Start nightly 'good news reports': each family member can report something good that happened to them that day.
  - Share optimistic stories of individuals who suffered enormous obstacles but didn't cave into pessimistic thinking.
- 3. Confront pessimistic thinking.**
  - Point out their negative thoughts. Create a code—such as pulling on your ear or touching your elbow—that only you and your teenager are aware of. The code means they've made a negative comment.
  - Count negative thoughts. Help your teenager count their pessimistic comments for a set time period: "For the next few minutes listen how many times you say negative things."
- 4. Balance pessimistic talk.** Provide a more balanced view.
  - Your teenager blows her math test exclaiming that she's stupid. "You're good in history and art. Meanwhile, let's figure out how to improve your maths."
- 5. Deal with mistakes optimistically.**
  - Stress that it's okay to make mistakes, they are a fact of life. Give kids permission to fail so they can take risks.
  - Admit your mistakes. It helps teenagers to recognise that making mistakes happens to everyone.
  - Call it another name. Optimists call mistakes by other names: glitch, blooper, etc.
- 6. Encourage positive speculation.** Help your teenagers think through possible outcomes of any situation. They'll be more likely to have a realistic view of the situation before making any decision and less likely to utter a negative one.
  - Ask a "what if?" kind of question to help your teenager think about what might happen.
  - List pros and cons of any choice to help your teenager weigh the positive and negative outcomes.
  - Name the worst thing that could happen if they followed through so they can keep a realistic perspective on the situation.
- 7. Acknowledge a positive attitude.** Be on alert for times your teenager is optimistic.
  - If you're not looking for the behaviour, you may well miss those moments when your teenager is trying a new positive approach.

**The world really is a wonderful and hopeful place. We just need to take the time and point out all the positives parts to our teenagers. After all, this is their world, and the habits they learn now will last them a lifetime.**