

Jillian Harrison-Longworth



# fantastic ideas for developing emotional resilience



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# Introduction

The increasing focus on the wellbeing of a child goes hand in hand with the developing role of an Early Years practitioner. In Early Years, we have always put great emphasis on the personal, social and emotional development of the children in our care, but over the last few decades there has been more research in the UK into neuroscience and the importance of early attachments. This has prompted changes in policy and curricular focus for everyone in the educational field.

The impact of both the EPPE Report (1997-2004) and the PACEY Literature Review (Inness, 2015) has helped to consolidate the importance of a focus on children's mental health and wellbeing in the Early Years. Therefore, maintaining personal, social and emotional development as a prime area of learning in EYFS curriculum is key, but is it enough?

Much of my work in schools and Early Years settings has featured the development of emotionally resilient children. Over time, I have become fascinated with the link between emotional resilience and academic outcomes. The umbrella term 'emotional resilience' is increasingly being used to describe a child's personal and emotional response to a variety of situations in educational and home settings. We measure a child's resilience through observation and conversation daily but may also wish to plan in a range of specific activities to see how children respond with emotional resilience to different challenges.

In my experience, many children joining settings today are less able to face challenges both in terms of their learning and their personal skills. Therefore, part of my job has been to develop the positive mindset and wellbeing of such children through small group and one-to-one focused interactions.

Working with young children is a privilege and it takes skill, perception and sound knowledge of early child development. Children may be in

our nursery or reception setting for as little as 12 months, so we need to develop strategies and routines to support their emotional resilience skills from the outset.

Children do not learn to be resilient by osmosis – they need to be taught some skills directly and they need to share a kaleidoscope of experiences both positive and challenging. Children learn to build a positive self-image by observing great adult role models. They develop a deep sense of wellbeing through supportive relationships and foster emotional skills such as kindness and empathy by learning how to articulate feelings and emotional responses effectively.

The activities in this book are divided into five of the key characteristics of emotional resilience: routines, self-esteem, confidence, perseverance and cooperation. Each section has ten practical activities that adults can use to support the development of children's skills and experiences in these areas.

The activities are tried and tested with real children and form a significant part of the whole ethos of our setting. All staff are involved, and parents have used the activities at home too. It is vitally important that children understand that the setting works in partnership with their families and wants the very best for each and every one of them.

Emotionally, young children need to learn how to self-regulate, learn how to self-soothe and most importantly how to self-sustain. The activities in this book will help set the children up to develop and refine these skills throughout their lives.

Inness, I. (2015). *The role of childcare professionals in supporting mental health and wellbeing in young people: a literature review*. Kent, UK: Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY).

Sylva, K. et al. (2004). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*. Nottingham, UK: Department for Education and Skills.





### The structure of the book

The pages are all organised in the same way. Before you start an activity, it's important to read everything on the page. Sometimes you may decide to change the order in which you do the activities or just pick and choose a game from the middle – that is allowed!

**What you need** lists the resources required for the activity. These are likely to be readily available in most settings and homes or can be bought/made easily.

**Top tips** give a brief word of advice that could make all the difference to the successful outcome of the activity, so make sure you read them!

**What to do** tells you step-by-step what you need to do to complete the activity.

**What's in it for the children?** lists some of the benefits the children will gain through the activity and how it will contribute to their learning.

**Taking it forward** helps you consider what else you can do to extend the learning experiences. It gives ideas for additional activities on the same theme, or for developing the activity further.