

## **Resilience – What is it?**

**Emotional resilience** refers to one's ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises. More resilient children have "bounce-backability" and adapt to adversity without lasting difficulties; less resilient people have a harder time with stress and life changes, both major and minor. Those with a higher degree of emotional resilience can handle the stresses that come with daily life more effectively and calmly. They are also able to manage crises more easily. We can help children develop this trait of emotional resilience, and we should wherever we can, not just for their school life but their adult life beyond.

**Academic resilience** means students achieving good educational outcomes despite adversity. For schools, promoting it involves strategic planning and detailed practice involving the whole school community to help vulnerable young people do better than their circumstances might have predicted. Having academic resilience means students can regulate their emotions when something is hard, maintain motivation when faced with obstacles and actively seeking help and support from teachers and peers.

## **How can outdoor learning promote resilient learners?**

Outdoor learning is an incredibly effective way to build resilience in individuals of all ages, from young children to adults. It does so through a combination of physical, psychological, and social mechanisms that are often less available in traditional indoor settings. Engaging in outdoor learning and play is critical for promoting emotional resilience in children. Challenges and activities, even playing cooperative games allow children to experience triumphs and failures in a supportive environment. They learn to navigate challenges, which helps them build confidence and the ability to cope with setbacks. This playful learning contributes to improved problem-solving skills and encourages children to express their feelings in healthy ways.

Spending time outside, all year round, is an amazingly effective and simple way to build resilience. By being outdoors regularly, no matter what the weather, we are able to experience a range of sensations and learn how to adapt to unfavourable conditions and new experiences. Touching creepy crawlies for some children is a hard no, but observing them, holding them in a pot and looking closely might be a challenge they can handle. Pushing those boundaries one step at a time might mean that eventually they can proudly show you a fist full of worms.

Outdoor learning also offers many opportunities to learn from mistakes and try, try, and try again. Encouraging learners to embrace failure and not give up at the first hurdle is such an important life lesson and a fantastic way to build resilience. The ability for children to learn from their mistakes is a vital component of the learning journey and that it is important to try and encourage young people not to be too discouraged or knocked back when something doesn't work out first-time round. We have an example in our bushcraft sessions with using fire strikers, where the tutors try not to succeed in lighting the tinder the first go, letting the children see it might take a few goes helps them manage their expectations and see that they can initially fail and later succeed.

The opportunity to try new things is also a key strength of outdoor learning in resilience. Particularly for neurodiverse young people, being able to reach out of their comfort zones to enter an unknown environment, can be really overwhelming. But we believe that when given support and encouragement, this is a brilliant way to build resilience when a young person feels safe enough and trusts the people around them to try something new. Not knowing what to expect from an experience can be really unsettling and sometimes, really scary, but within a supportive environment, it's great if

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the young people we work with are able to work through those uncomfortable emotions to try something new. The satisfaction on their faces when they've had a positive new experience is just amazing and often emboldens them for the next time they face something unknown.

### How it works in practice:

Outcome	How it works	Link to resilience
<b>Exposure to Controlled Challenge and Risk-Taking</b>	Nature is inherently unpredictable and often presents mild challenges – uneven terrain, changing weather, unexpected obstacles (like a fallen log). Outdoor learning activities deliberately incorporate these elements, encouraging participants to step outside their comfort zones in a safe, supported environment.	Successfully navigating these challenges, even small ones, builds a sense of <b>self-efficacy</b> ("I can do this!"). It teaches individuals to assess risks, make decisions, adapt plans, and learn from mistakes. This repeated cycle of facing a challenge, striving to overcome it, and succeeding (or learning from failure) directly strengthens their ability to "bounce back" from adversity.
<b>Developing Problem-Solving and Adaptability</b>	In outdoor settings, problems are often real-time and tangible. Whether it's figuring out how to cross a muddy patch, building a shelter from natural materials, or identifying an unknown plant, the environment demands active problem-solving. There's no textbook answer; solutions must be discovered.	This fosters <b>resourcefulness</b> and <b>creative thinking</b> . When initial attempts fail, individuals learn to persevere, experiment with different approaches, and adjust their strategies. This adaptability is a cornerstone of resilience, enabling them to cope with unexpected difficulties in all aspects of life.
<b>Enhanced physical and mental health.</b>	Outdoor learning naturally involves more physical activity, which boosts physical health, energy levels, and mood-regulating endorphins. Furthermore, exposure to nature itself has profound restorative effects on the mind. It reduces stress hormones (like cortisol), lowers blood pressure and heart rate, and replenishes directed attention.	When the body and mind are healthier and less stressed, individuals have a greater capacity to deal with emotional and cognitive demands. A calm regulated nervous system is better equipped to process setbacks and respond constructively rather than react impulsively. The improved attention from "soft fascination" in nature also means they can focus more effectively on solutions during challenges.
<b>Boosting Self-Esteem and Confidence</b>	Outdoor settings often provide different avenues for success than traditional academics. A child who struggles in math might excel at fire-starting or knot-tying. Mastering a new practical skill, completing a hike, or successfully identifying a bird can provide a powerful sense of accomplishment.	This builds <b>self-belief</b> and <b>competence</b> . When individuals recognize their own capabilities, they become more willing to take on new challenges and believe in their ability to overcome obstacles. This confidence transfers to other areas of life, making them more resilient in the face of academic, social, or personal difficulties.
<b>Fostering Social and Emotional Connection</b>	Many outdoor learning activities are collaborative, requiring teamwork, communication, and mutual support. Whether it's navigating as a group, building a team shelter, or helping a peer over an obstacle, individuals learn to rely on and trust others. Nature also provides a shared experience that can deepen bonds.	Strong social connections and the ability to seek and offer support are critical components of resilience. Knowing you're not alone and that others can help strengthens one's capacity to endure adversity. It also helps develop empathy and understanding of diverse strengths within a group.
<b>Developing a Sense of Perspective</b>	Being in nature, especially vast landscapes, can help individuals gain perspective on their own challenges. The sheer scale and enduring nature of the environment can make personal problems seem less overwhelming.	This ability to "zoom out" and see the bigger picture can prevent individuals from becoming consumed by immediate difficulties, fostering a sense of <b>hope</b> and <b>optimism</b> . It helps them understand that challenges are temporary and part of a larger context.