Building Resilience

What is resilience?
Resilience involves developing effective coping techniques to navigate around or through life challenges such as personal trauma or academic difficulty.

Resilient students:
- Build on strengths of optimism and positive emotions.
- Survive and thrive during adverse times.
- Persevere through obstacles and persist when life is difficult.

How does resilience affect student performance?
- Students may be less easily overwhelmed by stressful situations if they have had the opportunity to take risks and fail or face the consequences of a poor grade.
- Resilient students learn to solve problems, make responsible decisions, and become accountable, responsible, and self-sufficient adults. Developing “grit” facilitates academic, emotional, and personal development.
- Student outcomes improve when a caring and supportive environment is combined with a focus on learning and high expectations for student achievement.

How can faculty help students become more resilient?
- Emphasize effort over ability.
- Encourage students to practice self-compassion when they fail.
- Build positive relationships with students.
- Shift from a problem-based deficit model to a strengths-based asset model and encourage students to learn from failure.

Grading and feedback
Grading and feedback provide an opportunity for faculty to assist with resilience development. When students who have not developed resilience receive negative feedback or a poor grade, they may perceive it as hurtful.

Resilience-Building Activities

Journaling Practice
Encourage students to carry a journal with them and write in it on a daily basis. Example activities include:
- **Gratitude journal**: Each day, journal about three positive experiences.
- **Random act of kindness**: Carry out a small act of kindness each day and write a reflection about the experience.
- **Forgiveness letter**: Write a letter to someone who has done wrong. Journal about how to forgive them, but do not send the letter.

Lecture Topics
- **Emotional regulation skill-building**: meditation, mindfulness, self-soothing, finding meaning in the situation, taking responsibility, building connections.
- **Cognitive reframing** of situations and feedback in empowering ways.
- **Factors that increase resilience**: persistence, motivation, goal orientation, optimism, confidence, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and a well-balanced lifestyle.

“Change a Habit” Paper
- Have students *select a habit* they want to improve or change.
- In 6-8 pages, students write about the habit, their reasons for wanting to change, and their action plan.
- Encourage students to *focus on strengths* they can leverage in their efforts to change.
This can cause challenges for faculty by:

- Creating an expectation that faculty should lower their academic standards and reduce challenges.
- Raising conflict among faculty about how much “hand-holding” they should be doing.
- Pressuring faculty to consent to student expectations to avoid poor evaluations.

These challenges can be remedied by raising students’ awareness of the assumptions they make about grading and feedback. Encourage students to actively catch the assumptions and reword them to more accurately reflect what is being said in the feedback.

Here are five ways you can use feedback to help your students:

1. **Affirm what they did well:**
   Let students know what they did correctly. Make sure you affirm their performance rather than praising them as people.

2. **Correct and direct:** Allow inexperienced students to make mistakes before formally assessing them. Correct mistakes and direct them to resources towards the correct answer.

3. **Point out the process:** Show the student the connection between their result, what they did to get that result, and what they need to do differently. This will help them use your feedback to complete similar tasks in the future.

4. **Coach students** to critique their own efforts, evaluate their own work, and use their own insights to improve it.

5. **Peer review for papers or assignments:** Peer review prior to final assignment submission may help students learn to incorporate feedback, as well as learn to give and receive constructive criticism.

   **Note:** You may want to set peer review constructive criticism guidelines, particularly for undergraduate courses.

**Resources and tools for helping students build resilience:**

- [The Road to Resilience](https://www.apa.org/education/resilience) (American Psychological Association)
- [Resilience: Build Skills to Endure Hardship](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/healthy-mind/healthy-mind-articles/resilience-build-skills-to-endure-hardship) (Mayo Clinic)
- [Resilience in College Students](http://www.positivepsychologycenter.com/resilience-college-students) (Positive Psychology Center, Penn Resilience Center)
- [The Resilience Consortium](https://www.resilienceconsortium.org/) (Ivy+ Learning Services)