

# ENHANCING RESILIENCY IN GIFTED CHILDREN DURING DIFFICULT TIMES: IT TAKES A VILLAGE AND MORE!

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## WHAT IS THIS PRESENTATION ABOUT?

Basically I want to talk to you about the concept of resilience and how it relates to gifted children which is very topical in the current pandemic situation we are experiencing.

When Melinda first suggested that I focus on resilience for this presentation I felt a bit unsure about my level of expertise on the topic, but I have actually conducted some research in the area, which I will talk about and I have also parented children who have definitely weathered some difficult situations and managed to do very well for themselves, so they have certainly shown resiliency.

But first I want to tell you a bit about myself and why I have such an interest in and passion for gifted children and gifted education and why I think that it takes a village and more to help these children become their best selves.

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## A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME AND WHY THE INTEREST IN GIFTEDNESS

- Grew up in Melbourne
- Studied Eco/Law then teaching in Melbourne before moving to Gippsland
- First became aware of giftedness through a student I taught (Mel) in Melbourne, then through my own children (was dabbling in awareness building experiences at this stage)
- Began to formally 'study' giftedness in 1990s, before moving into 'researching' giftedness through my MEd (examining Gippsland teachers' perceptions of providing for gifted students) which I completed in 2000; and then my PhD (examining the impact of ability grouping on motivational and academic outcomes) which I completed in 2006. Since then I have conducted a lot of research on the topic.
- During this time, while working as an academic in Gippsland, initially at Monash and then at Federation University, my research had clearly demonstrated the importance of teachers understanding giftedness, so I managed to get an elective on gifted education introduced into our undergraduate initial teacher education programs (ITE) (always one of the most popular electives!). I also provided a lot of PD in regional schools to assist practicing teachers.
- I also went to conferences, joined national and international associations including AAEGT, AGATEVic, WCGTC and started publishing my research. I am currently an Associate Editor of the *Australian Journal of Gifted Education* and an elected Australian delegate on the World Council for Gifted & Talented Children.
- In all of this I have worked very closely with and been mentored by my close colleague Dr Leonie Kronborg and a small but dedicated group of people who support 'giftedness'.

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Moving to the country and teaching and parenting in a regional environment fuelled my interest and desire to try to make things a bit easier for really bright rural kids. (This didn't always go to plan though and on more than one occasion I experienced staff walkouts from my PDs and was told to butt out of their educational experience by my own children!)

So what did my own experiences teach me about gifted children and resilience? - I will return to this point at the end of the presentation when hopefully it will make more sense!

But first I want to look at some actual research I was involved in that examined resilience in highly able students.

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## OWN RESEARCH INTO RESILIENCE

Interest in the concept of resilience really began to surface in the late 1990s and early 2000s in relation to the general population. However, it was particularly pertinent in relation to children with academic potential that was seen as not being realised within the school system.

Research on gifted underachievement was emerging and resonating within the field of gifted education, and questions were being asked – why do some very able students not achieve anywhere near what their potential would suggest as possible? Perhaps they were not as resilient as other children or perhaps there were other factors at play?

A study that I conducted with colleagues from Monash University (Kronborg, Plunkett, Gamble & Kaman, 2017) investigated the relationship between **locus of control** and **resilience** in high ability students in a selective environment.

We wanted to know whether highly able students were more resilient and also whether they were more likely to have an internally focused locus of control, as both of these factors were seen to positively impact achievement.

But what does all of that mean?

NB: The literature cited in the next slides has mainly come from the article by Kronborg, Plunkett, Gamble & Kaman (2017).

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## WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is a trait that can be nurtured, developed and strengthened through life experiences and as such resilient children demonstrate a capacity to successfully adapt to life tasks in the face of ...incredibly difficult situations (Hu, 2019).

While the concept of resilience has no single definition, most research supports resilience as the ability to **bounce back and thrive in the face of adversity** (Martin & Marsh, 2008).

- Resilience **is not a fixed attribute** - it can change over time and under different circumstances (Dole, 2000; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Reis et al., 2005).
- Resilience is associated with personal attributes, but it also can be derived from external sources (Oswald et al., 2003; Luthar et al., 2000; Prince-Embury, 2008, 2009).
- **Resilience can be enhanced** through teaching students to believe that intellectual abilities are not fixed but can be developed (Dweck, 2014; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).
- Being resilient means more than possessing effective coping skills. It is transactional - the result of a contextual complex interaction between a person and their environment (Prince-Embury, 2008).

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Resilience is **multidimensional** and may be expressed in different ways (Prince-Embury & Steer, 2010; Reis et al., 2005).

- Three overarching factors appear to be identifiable in all definitions and research on resilience (Garmezy, 1991) –
  - the individual,
  - the family, and
  - environmental/external support from persons or institutions.

This is where the idea of the village and more in the title for this presentation comes from

- Family support plays a major role in resilience. In particular, family warmth, structure, cohesion, and emotional support help to provide a sense of relatedness which impacts positively on resilience (Condly, 2006; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Morales, 2008; Prince-Embury, 2008).
- Families, whether parents or significant others, provide a buffer as well as encouragement for adolescents, which also contributes positively to an individual's resilience.
- From an individual perspective, resilience can be perceived as involving good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development (Masten, 2001).

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## HOW IS RESILIENCE MEASURED?

There are a lot of different ways of measuring resilience in children and adolescents.

One measure that my colleagues and I have used is the **Resiliency Scales for Adolescents** (RSCA) (Prince-Embury, 2007). It is theoretically based and psychometrically sound and profiles personal strengths as well as vulnerabilities.

- This 64 item scale consists of three subscales: **Sense of Mastery**, **Sense of Relatedness**, and **Emotional Reactivity**.
  - Sense of Mastery items assess optimism, self-efficacy and adaptability
  - Sense of Relatedness items assess trust, support, comfort and tolerance
  - Emotional Reactivity items assess sensitivity, recovery and impairment.

Basically an assessment of resilience will tap into what children/adolescents recognize as their unique capabilities, what is going well in their life, and how they feel about being able to deal with challenging issues as they arise.

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## RESILIENCE AND ABILITY – WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

Resilience is a requisite for school, where challenges abound (Yeager & Dweck, 2012) and this has certainly proved the case in 2020 with COVID-19.

- Studies have found that the highly able students display *positive adjustment* and that characteristics such as *sensitivity, intensity, and drive* can increase resiliency (Peterson, 2006), although with profoundly gifted students, this relationship is not as well understood.
- Research supports *above average intelligence as a key protective factor* in resilience (Condly, 2006; Dole, 2000; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Prince-Embury, 2008) assisting with dealing with stressors (Morales, 2010; Peterson, 2006).
- Above average intelligence can help children and adolescents *understand what is happening to them and enhance their ability to make choices*, which in turn can help students to *self-regulate their intensity and sensitivity*.

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Emotional reactivity may be viewed as contributing to an individual's arousal or threshold of tolerance to intense stimulation, which can occur prior to adverse circumstances and can be a causal influence of reactivity on resilience.

A student's relative reactivity can have a physiological basis, such as genetic predisposition or temperament, which can impact resilience (Prince-Embury, 2008).

Neihart's (2002) review of the research on risk and resilience in gifted children noted that characteristics associated with giftedness can mitigate the negative effects of adversity: *problem-solving abilities, a sense of humour, moral regard, and involvement with a talent or hobby*.

Werner (2000) found that resilience is often accompanied by *good social skills*, i.e., social relatedness and the ability to thrive in social contexts. High levels of drive and energy also increase coping capacity.

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Other personal attributes that differentiate resilient children and youth from their peers, such as *adaptability, flexibility, autonomy, a strong future orientation, positive self-concept, ability to communicate well* (social maturity), an *internal locus of control*, and *planfulness*, are often found in gifted individuals (Condly, 2006; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; McMahon, 2007; Morales, 2010; Prince-Embury & Steer, 2010; Reis et al., 2005; Werner, 2000).

The *school environment* can also be a protective factor of resilience for students, with school–community partnerships important for the development of positive relationships or a sense of relatedness for students between school, home, and community, which in turn has been found to increase students' chances of achievement and success in school (McMahon, 2007).

Participation in school beyond the classroom and positive regard for the school community also contribute to academic resilience, with one positively influencing the other. Through participating in a school community, students build their self-esteem, sense of accomplishment, and connection with peers and school in meaningful ways.

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## A STUDY OF RESILIENCE

In the study conducted with my colleagues and published in 2017, we investigated the perceptions of a group of students at a co-ed selective school in terms of how resilient they felt within that environment and also whether other factors might be linked with resilience.

Altogether 125 Year 10 students participated in the research. Ability was not measured as students were considered to have demonstrated high ability due to gaining admittance into the selective school. A number of instruments were used to measure resilience and locus of control at two time points during a school year.

The Resiliency Scales for Adolescents (RSCA) included 64 items within three subscales covering Mastery, Relatedness and Emotional Reactivity to measure the level of resiliency. The Adult Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Control Scale (ANSIE) was used to assess locus of control through 20 items. A number of other factors were also measured in the survey but we haven't published any of those findings yet.

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## SO WHAT DID WE FIND?

Basically, we found that the relationship between ability and resilience is very complex. Generally, the students' scores in relation to resilience were solid.

However, the study also demonstrated that resilience is also linked to the way in which students think about how much control they have over their situation. This is termed **locus of control**, which actually has a lot of synergy with growth mindset, a concept developed by Carol Dweck (1999).

According to Nowicki and Strickland (1973) locus of control has been found to impact student behavior due to the focus that is placed on self (internal) or environment (external).

In our study, the internally focused students displayed a greater Sense of Mastery, lower levels of Emotional Reactivity, and a higher Sense of Relatedness compared to the externally focused students. In other words, they were demonstrating a higher level of resilience than the students who had an external focus in terms of the degree of control they feel they have over their achievements.

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Locus of control theory focuses on where individuals place the choice, responsibility, and control of what they achieve. An internal locus of control relates to the belief that personal outcomes are contingent on personal effort and action, whereas an external locus refers to a belief that outcomes are determined not by personal effort but rather external forces such as luck or other people or social context).

The idea of differences in resilience being linked to locus of control is one of interest to both parents and educators. If an internal focus is associated with higher levels of resilience, then it makes sense to try to help children become more internally focused. While LoC is seen as a personality trait and, as such, relatively stable, this does not mean it is not malleable (Aaker, 1999), and this point in terms of mindset has definitely been pushed by Dweck.

As such, students can develop resilience while pursuing individual goals, as they learn to cope with a range of setbacks, stresses, and self-doubt (Dweck, 1999), and experience social comparison and competition, when moving into a high-ability grouping experience (Dai & Rinn, 2008). Ironically, some negative experiences can become opportunities for individuals' growth rather than being seen as solely negative.

The development of psychological health can depend on whether students' implicit beliefs about their personal qualities are considered malleable or whether students believe that they cannot do anything to change the situation when academically challenged or stressed (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

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## SO WHAT CAN WE DO THEN TO SUPPORT OUR CHILDREN TO BECOME MORE RESILIENT?

Hu (2019) suggests that through building resilience as a process of individuation, across time, context, and culture, gifted children can develop proper coping techniques that allow them to effectively ...navigate around or through crises (p. 47).

Kim (2015) argues that "Students need to be knowledgeable regarding their strengths and weaknesses and understand the current environment in order to be able to set goals to overcome current adversities" (p. 20).

According to Kim (2015), "Ongoing parental understanding and support is perhaps the most important protective factor" in building resilience (p. 20)

The underlying message is that resilience is malleable and can be enhanced through the efforts of children/adolescents themselves but that this needs to be supported by parents, teachers, peers and the community.

I want to present a few ideas that have been developed particularly in response to COVID-19, some specifically related to gifted children while others are more general but hopefully they will give you some ideas of how you might be able to provide support to the children you parent or teach.

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## SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

Denise Fleith (WCGTC member and psychologist from Brazil) has produced a five minute video clip on Helping gifted children cope with the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjJLKpEliEA>

In it she suggests that it is important to LISTEN to your children and provide opportunities for them to do research or just draw, write poetry, develop a game or a book about how to cope during COVID-19. The use of bibliotherapy or cinematherapy was recommended so that children/adolescents could read or watch movies/documentaries about how people cope and learn from challenging experiences.

This idea was also highlighted in an article by Tom Cowie in The Age newspaper on Sept 10 which reported on children developing newsletters to deliver in their neighborhoods to keep others happy and informed. One nine year old named Frankie produced a newspaper called **The Cheerup Weekly** which included facts, jokes, interviews with friends, experiments and puzzles. She delivered 70 copies of her first edition around the Bellarine Peninsula (on rollerskates!).


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## ☺ The Cheer Up Weekly ☺

SMILE! EVERY TUESDAY IN YOUR LETTERBOX SMILE!  
By Frankie Jeanne Davis

### Welcome



Hi,

My name is Frankie and this is The Cheer Up Weekly. Every week I will be delivering this paper to you to help you get through lockdown. It will include jokes, funny stories, interviews, games, puzzles and much more.

I hope you like it!

Letters to the editor can be sent to jaynetuttle@gmail.com

#### 5 Jokes That Will Make Adults Laugh

**A chicken stops in the middle of the road and a car stops next to it. A man steps out of the car and says "Bond. James Bond." And then the chicken says, "Ken. Chic Ken."**

**What's the best thing about Switzerland?**  
I don't know but the flag is a big plus.

**Did you hear about the mathematician who is afraid of negative numbers?**  
He will stop at nothing to avoid them.

**Why do we tell actors to break a leg?**  
Because every play has a cast.

**Why don't scientists trust atoms?**  
Because they make up everything.

#### 5 Facts That You've Got to Read

Humans are the only animals that blush.

You lose up to 30% of your taste buds during a flight.

Your nostrils work one at a time.


Only two mammals like spicy food: humans and Tree Shrew.

Rabbits can't puke!

#### Extra Fact

Did you know all of our words that end in 'ion' are French?

1 The Cheer Up Weekly - bring a smile to your face every Tuesday



**Name:** Maria

**How are you going in lockdown?**  
I keep busy in the house. Sometimes I work in the garden, other times I putter around doing nothing in particular.

**Do you have a pet to play with?**  
No not now but when my children were young we had dogs, rabbits, budgerigars and a small tortoise.

**What have you been doing during Covid?**  
Walks along the beach, walks with my grandchildren.

**What are you most looking forward to when this is over?**  
Catching up with friends, having a coffee and chat, going out for lunch.

**What's something positive that has happened during this time?**  
Living in Point Lonsdale, away from crowds, I think we are very lucky. And looking at the beautiful Jasmine growing on my neighbour's fence.

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**Name:** Tilly F.  
**Age:** 9

**Do you have a pet to play with?**  
Lola (my dog).

**What are you most looking forward to when this is over?**  
Seeing all my friends.

**How are you going in lockdown?**  
Okay, I guess.

**What have you been doing during Covid?**  
Hanging with my family and going on a walk.

**What's something positive that has happened during this time?**  
Father's Day.

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### The Really Cool Science Experiment of the Week You Should Try at Home

#### Colourful Erupting Volcano

**You Will Need:** Bicarb Soda, vinegar, dish soap, food colouring, water and a jar.

Mix together the Bicarb Soda, dish soap, food colouring and water in the jar. Then quickly add the vinegar and step away. This should make it fizz.

If it doesn't work, remind yourself "this is an experiment".



3 The Cheer Up Weekly - bring a smile to your face every Tuesday

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The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) in the USA has produced an info sheet on supporting gifted children during COVID-19, which has some useful tips. It is available for download at:

[https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Publication%20PHP/NAGC\\_TIP-Sheet\\_COVID-19\\_With%20Strategies%20by%20Development%20Level\\_April%202020.pdf](https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Publication%20PHP/NAGC_TIP-Sheet_COVID-19_With%20Strategies%20by%20Development%20Level_April%202020.pdf)

It states that "gifted children may experience intense emotions or anxiety, especially if they react intensely or are considered twice-exceptional under normal circumstances. Most families are at home-perhaps huddled around their TVs or smartphones-so there is little escape for those with a predisposition for asynchrony, emotional intensity, or anxiety".

"While gifted children may cognitively process information about COVID-19, it's important to remember that, for some, other areas of development-such as their emotional or social skills-may not be as mature. They may exhibit intense feelings when fearing for their own family, or when realizing others have difficulty getting food, may be sick, and/or can't get tested. Emotions and sensitivities can quickly spiral to worst-case scenarios. However, families with gifted children and teens can manage intensities and anxieties in a healthy way, and channel energies to support positivity in themselves and in the community".

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Suggestions in the NAGC information sheet include:

- Setting a calm reassuring tone
- Discussing COVID-19
- Utilising techniques to manage anxiety, including:
  - avoiding minimizing concerns,
  - using cognitive thinking strategies (identifying the thought, challenging the thought, modifying the thought and replacing the thought (Peters, 2013),
  - Focusing on what your child can control,
  - Incorporating mindfulness and breathing exercises,
  - Finding ways to make a difference (e.g. newsletters)

The information sheet also has a useful outline of how parents (but many of these are also applicable to teachers) can respond to particular behaviours in developmentally appropriate ways. These are included on the following two slides.

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## Supporting Gifted Children During COVID-19 & Other Crises

### By Developmental Stage

During times of crisis, such as dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, children of **all ages** need lots of love and attention from their parents. Parents can also support their children by keeping as many familiar routines as possible, creating new routines where necessary for structure and comfort, and helping children talk about their feelings.

Parents should refer to these tables to assist in identifying behaviors, a typical child's reactions to crisis, and age-appropriate strategies. Keep in mind that many gifted children exhibit **asynchrony**, meaning they may be developmentally farther ahead or, in some situations, lagging behind their age mates. This chart was compiled based on an average child's behavior and/or reactions. Parents should adapt based on their own gifted child's development.

	Child's Behavior	Child's Reaction to Crisis	How Parent Can Help
Pre-School Ages 3-5	Begins to be own person	Afraid of being left alone	Structure provides predictability
	Likes to pretend & play grown up	May have a setback eating, sleeping, or toilet training	Provide appropriate notice of new & changing routines
	Curious about the world	May revert to clinging or baby talk	Make playtime fun, spend time having fun, & be creative (e.g., indoor scavenger hunts, "pretend" vacations, etc.)
	Begins to explore while staying close to parent	May become aggressive or give in easily to appease others and decrease conflict	
	Child's Behavior	Child's Reaction to Crisis	How Parent Can Help
Early School Ages 6-8	Begins to do for self	Often cries or withdraws	Help your child to identify & label feelings
	Starts to understand feelings	Wants to please & tries to be a good helper	Provide appropriate notice of new routines, clarify rules, & appreciate your child's efforts
	Begins to develop friendships	May act out for lack of words to express complex emotions	Spend 1-1 time to reassure of their worth & competence (ability to do things)
	Can handle some responsibility	May regress in self-help skills	Facilitate family playtime, exercise (yoga, indoor dance parties, walks), & mindfulness
	Begins independent exploration		
Older School Ages 9-12	Asks more questions		
	Able to learn new ideas	May:	Provide a consistent schedule with clear rules & predictability
	Begins to have logical thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• feel powerless</li><li>• feel anger about the situation</li><li>• complain about headaches/stomachaches</li><li>• have trouble with schoolwork or classmates</li><li>• worry about others' health &amp; safety</li><li>• have sleeping &amp; eating disturbances</li><li>• do research about COVID-19 &amp; pandemics</li></ul>	Help your child talk about feelings & normalize those feelings
	Begins to understand fairness & see other perspectives		Arrange for video chats with friends & loved ones
	Begins to understand differences between right & wrong		Encourage journaling & bibliotherapy (reading fiction/non-fiction books about resilient individuals who have overcome hardship, challenge, & crisis)

Framework courtesy of Edward R. Amend, Psy.D.

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## Supporting Gifted Children During COVID-19 & Other Crises By Developmental Stage

(Continued)

	Child's Behavior	Child's Reaction to Crisis	How Parent Can Help
<b>Adolescents Ages 13-18</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins to want independence</li> <li>• Spends greater amount of time with friends</li> <li>• Looks to family for support</li> <li>• Begins to focus on future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have trouble with schoolwork or classmates</li> <li>• withdraw &amp; become depressed</li> <li>• become angry or hurt &amp; pursue unhealthy behaviors</li> <li>• grieve over loss of school time, social events—fear of missing out</li> <li>• worry about others' health &amp; safety</li> <li>• have sleep &amp; eating disturbances</li> <li>• fret over inability to help</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help teen talk about feelings &amp; listen to complaints</li> <li>• Respect teen's feelings &amp; be honest about yours</li> <li>• Do not burden a teen with your anxieties</li> <li>• Encourage video chat with peers</li> <li>• Create schedules &amp; expectations with their input</li> <li>• Be sure to check in with their mental health</li> <li>• Encourage them to find ways to problem-solve community needs (while practicing CDC guidelines)</li> </ul>
<b>Post-HS/College Ages 19+</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks independence</li> <li>• Questions how things are done</li> <li>• Feels invincible</li> <li>• Feels helpless due to unexpected change in circumstances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quick to become angry or emotional</li> <li>• Big reactions to small stressors</li> <li>• Increased emotional response</li> <li>• May challenge authority &amp; make unhealthy choices</li> <li>• Fear of missing out</li> <li>• Worries about others' health &amp; safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathize with the challenges</li> <li>• Raise concerns about poor choices &amp; discuss healthy alternatives in a gentle way</li> <li>• Reinforce CDC guidelines and help them process their feelings of missing out vs. the "right thing to do" in times of crisis for the greater good</li> <li>• Encourage them to be a leader and serve as a positive example for younger family members and/or friends</li> <li>• Help them stay connected with others through video chats or social media</li> </ul>

Framework courtesy of Edward R. Amend, Psy.D.



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## OTHER RESOURCES

The Davidson Institute has a number of general resources on resilience and gifted children, such as:

Peters, D. (2012): Coping 101: Building Persistence and Resilience in Gifted Children (<https://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/a10772>)

Kerr, B. (2016): Resilience and Gifted Children (<https://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/a10925>)

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has some useful information about talking to children about COVID-19 but this is a USA site; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>

An Australian site with similar information is available at: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>  
AAEGT also provides an information sheet on

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## POSSIBLY WORTH ATTENDING (NOT FOCUSED ON GIFTED CHILDREN SPECIFICALLY)



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So what did my own experiences teach me about resilience in relation to gifted children:

**It takes a village and more! – parents are SOOO important but so are teachers, peers, friends, relatives, and the community.**

- Imposter syndrome is very real and very difficult to overcome (especially for females) but it needs to be dealt with in order to help with resilience.
- Teachers want to do the right thing by gifted students but many simply do NOT know how to (giftedness is not covered in most ITE programs) and sometimes their efforts actually impact negatively on resilience. They need help NOT judgement.
- Time is not the enemy but is a great leveller and accomplishment needs to be looked at longitudinally with these children.
- Providing a solid foundation of belief in the potential of children in the long run rather than focusing on achievements in the short term seems to reap rewards.
- Attribution (focusing on internal factors and effort and not external factors or even achievement) is actually one of the most important factors in helping our children to become resilient and more able to translate potential into positive outcomes. So focusing on effort really needs to be built into our parenting and teaching philosophy. This isn't easy, as Po Bronson explains in an article she published in New York (09/02/2007) titled "**How Not to Talk to your Kids**"

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After reading and researching Dweck's work on growth mindset, Po Bronson (2007) wrote of her own experience of trying to restrict praise of her 5 year old son, to instances of where effort was involved:

"What would it mean, to give up praising our children so often? Well, if I am one example, there are stages of withdrawal, each of them subtle. In the first stage, I fell off the wagon around other parents when they were busy praising their kids. I didn't want Luke to feel left out. I felt like a former alcoholic who continues to drink socially. I became a Social Praiser.

Then I tried to use the specific-type praise that Dweck recommends. I praised Luke, but I attempted to praise his "process." This was easier said than done. What are the processes that go on in a 5-year-old's mind? In my impression, 80 percent of his brain processes lengthy scenarios for his action figures.

But every night he has math homework and is supposed to read a phonics book aloud. Each takes about five minutes if he concentrates, but he's easily distracted. So, I praised him for concentrating without asking to take a break. If he listened to instructions carefully, I praised him for that. After soccer games, I praised him for looking to pass, rather than just saying, "You played great." And if he worked hard to get to the ball, I praised the effort he applied. Just as the research promised, this focused praise helped him see strategies he could apply the next day. It was remarkable how noticeably effective this new form of praise was.

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**Truth be told, while my son was getting along fine under the new praise regime, it was I who was suffering. It turns out that I was the real praise junkie in the family. Praising him for just a particular skill or task felt like I left other parts of him ignored and unappreciated. I recognized that praising him with the universal "You're great—I'm proud of you" was a way I expressed unconditional love.**

Offering praise has become a sort of panacea for the anxieties of modern parenting...we want them to hear...We are in your corner, we are here for you, we believe in you.

In a similar way, we put our children in high-pressure environments, seeking out the best schools we can find, then we use the constant praise to soften the intensity of those environments. We expect so much of them, but we hide our expectations behind constant glowing praise. The duplicity became glaring to me.

Eventually, in my final stage of praise withdrawal, I realized that not telling my son he was smart meant I was leaving it up to him to make his own conclusion about his intelligence. Jumping in with praise is like jumping in too soon with the answer to a homework problem—it robs him of the chance to make the deduction himself.

But what if he makes the wrong conclusion? Can I really leave this up to him, at his age? I'm still an anxious parent."

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Thank you for listening

Any Questions???

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