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# Resilience – An Introduction

## Introduction

‘Resilience’ is a word that one hears often but which often seems to defy a precise definition. In the context of this text, ‘resilience’ encompasses psychology, sociology and child and adolescent development to describe children and young people who flourish despite what can objectively be described as very difficult circumstances.

It is common to assume that children and young people are more likely to show strong negative reactions if they have been subjected to neglect or abuse during early childhood. It is also assumed that they are more likely to develop problems in subsequent life. However, research shows that not all do (Garnezy et al., 1984; Masten et al., 1990). Some children do not appear to be significantly damaged by their challenging backgrounds, and some even thrive; these children are considered to be resilient.

Although many studies have focused on children and young people growing up with varying degrees of dysfunction and/or deprivation, children in affluent and apparently ideal circumstances can also face challenges to resilience. Indeed, the concept of resilience can also be applied to those who do well despite not being exposed to significant personal difficulties.

The rationale for building resilience in children and young people is that, irrespective of background and or early experience, those who develop appropriate skills and competence will be able to cope constructively with challenges and difficulties that they encounter daily and will develop levels of resilience that could help them as adults. The modern social construction of resilience gives authority to the promise that, with the appropriate skills and capabilities, children and young people will develop into successful adults who will be able to steer a positive life course for themselves, their families, their communities and to the benefit of the state (Rutter, 1984). This is a promise that children and young people can emerge from a stressful childhood or traumatic period with strong personal strength – even made stronger in some cases – by the very difficult circumstances that they have lived through.

The acquisition of resilience in childhood is a promise of a successful future. Fostering qualities of resilience in children throughout childhood has the potential to benefit not only individuals and their families but also entire communities and society at large. In effect, resilience conveys the promise that children and young people can, despite inauspicious beginnings, become positively

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engaging adult citizens rather than suffering the long-term negative effects of adverse life circumstances. Even in lives that are objectively very difficult, the promise of resilience can often be envisioned as a beacon of hope.

Over the last 50 years, there has been extensive research and commentary on the components, characteristics and practice of building resilience. There is now no longer any doubt that the skills of resilience are important to children and adults. However, differences in the trajectories of diverse individuals in response to adversity provide a varied canvas for the study of both the construction and the determinants of resilience.

The literature on resilience spans a wide range of definitions, approaches and determinants. This chapter explores these definitions of, approaches to and determinants of resilience, and examines how these contribute to our understanding of the skills and competencies commonly associated with the building of resilience during childhood and adolescence.

### The construction of resilience

The meaning of the term ‘resilience’ is not straightforward. It is commonly used to describe a variety of positive attributes and successes. Firstly, it may be a description of a collection of characteristics that children or young people may exhibit despite having experienced significant disadvantage in their earlier years. Thus, in this sense, resilience refers to better than expected emotional and developmental outcomes. Secondly, resilience may refer to young people having high levels of competence even when they have been exposed to high levels of stress when dealing with threats to their well-being. And thirdly, resilience may refer to positive functioning that indicates recovery from trauma.

A number of influential definitions (Box 1.1) have emerged from various disciplines and from research carried out in a variety of settings and life circumstances.

#### Box 1.1 Definitions of resilience

1. Resilience is a dynamic process when there is a threat to the child’s well-being and the child demonstrates positive adaptation. Children deal with stress at a time and in a manner that allows them to develop their qualities of self-confidence and social competence (Rutter, 1971).
2. Resilience is a process and not a fixed quality. It is seen in the successive positive adaptations of those who are exposed to adversity (Masten et al., 1990).
3. Resilience comprises a set of qualities that help one to deal with or overcome a lot of the negative impacts of adversity in life (Gilligan, 2000).
4. Resilience is the compound of personal, cultural and environmental factors that combine to make it easier for the individual to navigate difficult periods in life and do well (Ungar, 2008).
5. Resilience evokes relatively good outcomes in the face of adversity, facilitated by personal qualities such as self-efficacy, secure attachments and good relationships, and resources within the family and in the broader community (Daniel, 2010).

Whether one understands resilience as positive developmental outcomes, a set of competencies, or as coping strategies, the presence of resilience is associated with positive functioning and positive lifestyles for children, young people and their families. These conceptualisations of resilience share the notion that resilience is influenced by a child's environment and that the interaction between individuals and their social ecologies will determine the degree of positive outcomes experienced.

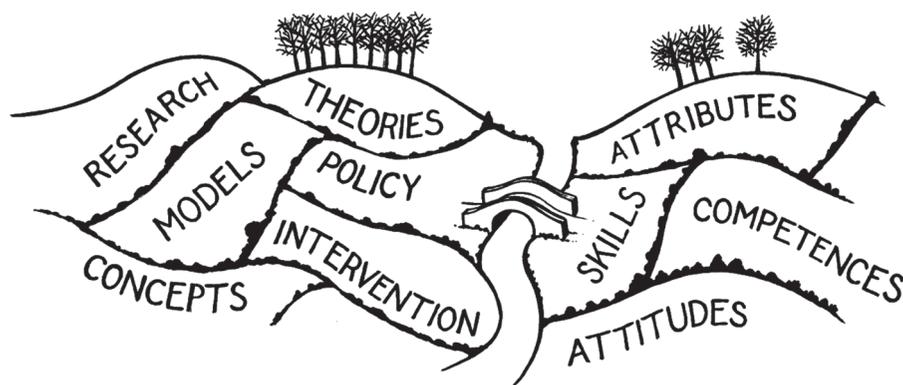
Recent trends in research have moved the debate from the 'what' to the 'how' – *how* do resilience factors lead to positive outcomes, and what mechanisms are involved? These definitions also emphasise an understanding of resilience as a *process* rather than as a set of individual character traits. However, processes for developing resilience are complicated. Every successful young person may take a different path or trajectory.

Rutter (1999, 120) suggests that for resilience to have any meaning, it must also apply to differences in responses to a given dose of the risk factor and that it must be acknowledged that individuals will have different trajectories in response to adversity. For Rutter, these differences are important and, in effect, provide the infrastructure for the study of resilience. This view of resilience as a dynamic process has itself generated a number of perspectives on the methods and processes of adaptations that may or may not result in promoting features of resilience within the child, family and community contexts.

The concept of resilience has emerged most strongly over the last 50 years. On one hand, resilience has developed as an academic construct through sustained research and scholarly activity. On the other hand, resilience as a concept has caught the imaginations of the political and professional classes. The result has been the emergence of perspectives, approaches, interpretations and expectations. For many, resilience is perceived less as discovered knowledge and more as individual constructions of models and schemas.

This conceptual framework of resilience is based on two interacting features – the conceptual foundations of resilience (the left side of the framework) and the personal resources and assets (the right side of the framework) – with the ability to cycle back and forth from right to left and vice versa. In this model, resilience has been constructed against a backdrop of academic research and presents a flexible framework that can be applied to different contexts and can facilitate different trajectories towards resilience (Figure 1.1). Figure 1.1 presents a portrait construction wherein either side may vary according to factors that underpin and/or drive an individual's pace and trajectories.

The construction of resilience is presented here as one that can fluctuate and can be strengthened or weakened by different actions and interactions as well as experiences and practices. Resilience as an asset depends on its particular context, interactions and resources for change. The promise of resilience is its potential as a mechanism for positive citizenship into the twenty-first century – a citizenship permeated with sustainable, personal, cultural and social values (see Chapter 9). Cultural factors play a significant role in determining the legitimacy of the construct while individual factors govern the form and characteristics of resilience (Ungar, 2008). Figure 1.1 provides a framework wherein political, cultural, social and economic policies and factors can shape complex understanding of resilience at an individual level.



**Figure 1.1** The construction of resilience

### Vignette 1.1

Monica is a young woman who lives in a farming community in the US. She is very close to her paternal grandmother, who lives close by. Her father was an alcoholic, and when he was drunk – which was most days – was abusive to her mother, Monica and her two younger brothers. Monica was 11 years old when her father left home and never came back. Monica helped her grandmother come to terms with this loss. Home life became better for a short time, and Monica was able to begin to enjoy sports – she joined a basketball team and became an athlete in track and field. However, her mother's partner, Tom, moved into the family home six months ago. Monica does not like her mother's partner, and there are constant rows between Monica and her mother and Tom. Monica became angry that her life had changed again and started drinking in high school. However, she continued with her sports to spite Tom, who kept telling her that she should be at home looking after her two brothers. She continued to live at home but had very little interaction with her mother and drifted away from family activities. In her third year of college, her drinking became out of control, and she was expelled. Her drinking continued and she moved in and out of low-paid work. She recently got a job at a local gym (as an assistant) and is desperate to keep this job and to go back to college – but she continues to drink.

Jenny lived in South London in a block of flats with her family. Jenny was always closer to her father than to her mother, but her father died suddenly when she was 11 years old. She felt the loss of her dad very deeply and felt lonely and left out because she believed that her mother preferred her younger sister. Her mother married again, but Jenny hated being around her mother and her new husband, as they would make explicit sexual references about her, such as 'Hey, Jenny, you look very sexy tonight'. As an adolescent she began to do very badly in school and to lose interest in her studies. When she was 14, she ran away from home and lived on the streets for two years, with no contact

with her family. During that time, she worked as a sex worker and regularly presented for emergency contraception. Recently Jenny has got a couple of low-paid cleaning jobs. She is now 16 and hates her life but continues to have no contact with her family and has no friends her own age. She has now approached the Salvation Army to ask for help to find somewhere to live near her cleaning jobs.

### **Discussion**

With reference to Figure 1.1, consider the two case studies in the vignette and answer the following questions.

1. Compare the different personal resources and assets available to the adolescent in each case.
2. Explore the different external factors that may help or hinder recovery in each case.

## **Approaches to resilience**

Recognising the building of resilience as an interpretative and constructed process leads to recognising childhood as (i) having the rudimentary beginnings of resilience and (ii) having the potential to develop these fledgling beginnings into adept realisations. In essence, this forms the basis for understanding how resilience can be developed and fostered during childhood and into adulthood. An analysis of approaches to and perspectives of resilience provides an opportunity to critically explore the matrix of factors that constitutes the shaping of resilience through childhood.

### **Behavioural and adaptation perspectives**

Olsson et al. (2003) identify two different approaches to resilience, the differences between which are not always clear, and considerable confusion can arise as they are often used interchangeably:

1. a behavioural approach – defined as an outcome characterised by particular patterns of functional behaviour despite risk;
2. an adaptation approach – defined as a dynamic process of adaptation to a risk and involving interaction between a range of risk and protective factors from the individual to the social context.

The behavioural approach focuses on individual behavioural deficits and shortcomings (Olsson, 2003) and utilises, for example, poor academic skills, chaotic anger management responses and unwanted behavioural characteristics as markers of resilience function. It adopts a psychopathology view of negative developmental outcomes (Box 1.2) to assess resilience function and focuses on a lack of coping strategies in the face of adversity.

The behavioural approach, therefore, appears to be limited insofar as it relies on a rather narrow response view of resilience. It is limiting to view resilience as purely applying coping strategies adequately to the daily challenges of life – particularly for children and young people who may be disadvantaged in a range of objectively considered ways such as poverty, abuse in childhood or poor physical health.

### Box 1.2 Examples of negative behavioural outcomes

- Failing to reach social or behavioural milestones at an appropriate age
- Not acquiring the skills essential to functioning in adult life
- Engaging in excessive risk-taking behaviour
- Poor regulation of emotions
- Inability to develop positive relationships of attachment (disordered attachment) with the important people in his or her life
- Poor self-care, including problems with diet, alcohol and drug consumption
- Lower cognitive function, resulting in more difficulties communicating thoughts and feelings, and engaging in complex behaviours (i.e. at school or at work)
- Poor problem-solving skills

(See, for example, Gilbert et al., 1991.)

Rutter (2005) warns of the risk of drawing inappropriate correlations and conclusions from observable competing facts and explores the consequences of judging behaviour purely from one set of facts. In making the point, he argues, that we are ill-advised to assume a direct link between observed outcomes and observed social factors. As an example, Rutter (2005, 8) draws on a case study of a Native Indian community. The study found that poverty had been considerably alleviated when a casino was opened. It was also found that subsequently there had been a major reduction in disruptive behaviour on the part of the community's children. Rutter warned that this change in the children's behaviour and attitudes did not necessarily relate directly to the reduction of poverty associated with the opening of the casino, but to a tangential issue: parents started to engage more with their children.

In his 2000 paper, Rutter (2000, 654) writes that 'many studies of resilience have been based on a rather restricted range of outcome measures' and asserts that these can lead to misleading conclusions. Within this approach, he also identifies the notion that one pays a 'price' for resilience; that children and adults who demonstrate resilient behaviour may do so at the expense of some social function. Thus, although it is tempting to define resilience solely in terms of behavioural skills in the face of adversity, this may not reflect the complete context and/or circumstance that would explain these behaviours. Ong et al. (2009) also suggest that one runs the risk of inferring a strong deterministic perspective on how children and young people develop and respond to their environment. In addition, they suggest that children and young people may find themselves in situations

that may, on the one hand, pose a hazard to their well-being but, on the other, may not present a setback in every instance.

Ong et al. argue that, ‘within the developmental and academic literature, most researchers agree that it is important to consider adaptive functioning more broadly beyond just the skills of avoidance of negative developmental outcomes’ (Ong et al., 2009). The adaptation perspective is based on a process design which emphasises the mechanisms or processes that act to modify the impact of risk factors and safeguard the developmental process to enable young people to develop resilience. According to Lee et al. (2013, 275), ‘building resilience can be thought of as a dynamic cognitive process that both protects an individual in adverse situations and enhances his or her social and emotional development’. In effect, the adaptation approach presumes development over a period of time, characterised by effective responses despite the presence of developmental risk and acute stressors. It may refer to resilience not as a fixed quality but, instead, as a ‘whole interaction between individuals and the environment around them, such as family, community or the social system’ (Lee et al., 2013, 269). Importantly, the adaptation approach also recognises that, as environmental conditions change, the vulnerability or resilience of an individual can also change.

### **Developmental and emotional perspectives**

Both developmental and emotional perspectives have strong support among politicians and professionals and are based on a strong belief in a cause-and-effect model of resilience. These approaches are seen in the work of Goldstein and Brooks, who define resilience as ‘a child’s achievement of positive developmental outcomes and avoidance of maladaptive outcomes under adverse conditions’ (Goldstein and Brooks, 2006). They advocate that the achievement of positive development outcomes demonstrated through, for example, an ability to perform well at school and to interact with peers and adults in an appropriate manner, could culminate in resilience capability.

Goldstein and Brooks refer to resilience as a ‘mindset’ and describe a resilient mindset as ‘the product of providing children with opportunities to develop the skills necessary to fare well in the face of adversity that might lie in the path to adulthood for that individual’ (Goldstein and Brooks, 2006, 6). Their definition of the resilient ‘mindset’ as a ‘product’ promotes the view of inputs (actions and interventions) designed to craft and create certain qualities and characteristics leading to required outputs (competency and mindset). For children and young people, this ‘mindset’ can comprise, for example: a preference to focus and concentrate on schoolwork; the development of negotiating skills to help to avert conflict in social relationships; the ability to self-comfort when difficulties arise; an understanding of how to adapt behaviour to local social norms; and a rejection of antisocial behaviours.

This approach, which focuses on the social and emotional aspects of child development (see Chapter 3), suggests that children and young people who are exposed to appropriate social and emotional conditions during their developmental years are likely to exhibit better levels of physical and mental health

(Dowling, 2010, 77). Here, the craft of resilience lies in child development opportunities. The emphasis is on providing appropriate antecedent conditions to enable children and young people to become emotionally well balanced and adjusted to social and behavioural norms and values.

According to Schoon, individuals who have achieved positive outcomes in their lives despite experiencing difficult circumstances are considered to display positive social and emotional adjustment which, he argues, ‘has been defined not only in terms of a lack of pathology, the attainment of psychosocial developmental milestones, the statistical average, the utopia of self-actualisation, but also as the ability to negotiate life’s developmental and emotional crises’ (Schoon, 2006, 11).

### **The importance of the cultural context**

Michael Ungar (2008), in his work following the International Resilience Project, emphasises the importance of the cross-cultural perspective in resilience:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to *navigate* their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to *negotiate* for those resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways. (Ungar, 2008, 225)

This definition shifts the debate on resilience from an individual concept to one that is culturally sensitive. The individualised concept is, however, most popular in Western countries and is utilised extensively by Western-trained researchers and service providers. Ungar suggests that resilience should be understood as a social construct that leads the debate towards cultural norms, values, procedures and goals. Specifically, a cultural explanation (explored more fully in Chapter 9) makes explicit the notion of resilience as an outcome that may evolve if services, supports and health resources are provided in such a manner that makes it more likely for children and young people to do well in ways that are meaningful to them, their families and their communities. In this perspective, resilience emerges from successful navigation to resources and negotiation for resources, and builds confidence and identity based on culturally informed success.

The International Resilience Project highlights the importance of a sense of power and control and an understanding of place in family and community. This project recognises the value of spirituality to meaning and identity in many parts of the world, and the subsequent influence on children and young people building self-efficacy and competence within a cultural environment.

Ungar (2008) explored resilience among over 1500 young people from different locations around the world, finding that there are certain propositions that contribute to an understanding of resilience that is ‘more culturally and contextually embedded’. Ungar argued that the focus on social and behavioural outcomes that are considered desirable in highly developed nations in Western culture is unlikely to be applicable to populations within other cultures. He warns that little attention has been paid to these many cultural factors and suggests that other factors that impact on how resilience is experienced and perceived in different cultural and community contexts are too important to be ignored.

In their investigation of resilience with 1500 young people in 14 different communities on five continents, exploring both global and cultural/contextual aspects of resilience, Ungar and his colleagues carried out an investigation of ‘paying special attention to the influence of culture and context on definitions of risk, the mediating factors associated with resilience, and localized definitions of positive outcomes’ (Ungar, 2008). Their work revealed major variations in how young people cope with different periods in their lives, depending to a great extent on their culture and context.

Based on this research, Ungar puts forward four propositions that he suggests will be useful in both researching and designing culturally relevant interventions:

1. There are global as well as culturally and contextually specific aspects to young people’s lives that contribute to their resilience.
2. Aspects of resilience exert differing amounts of influence on a child’s life, depending on the specific culture and context in which resilience is realised.
3. Aspects of children’s lives that contribute to resilience are related to one another in patterns that reflect a child’s culture and context.
4. Tensions between individuals and their cultures and contexts are resolved in ways that reflect specific relationships between aspects of resilience.

These propositions suggest that resilience can be seen as a component and consequence of environmental factors as well as a component and consequence of individual factors. In an effort to move away from heavily Western interpretations and understandings of resilience, Ungar (2008) suggests that in the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of an individual to navigate his or her way to health-sustaining resources and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide these health resources in culturally meaningful ways.

### Vignette 1.2

Hamid is a 15-year-old Muslim boy who was born, educated and raised in Pakistan. Hamid was a good student who had previously done very well in school. However, recently Hamid began to draw away from school, not attending regularly, not handing in homework and presenting unusually poor-quality work. His teacher spoke to Hamid, who said that everything was fine. The teacher also contacted Hamid’s parents, who said they would take him to the doctor. Hamid had recently been diagnosed with epilepsy. Following the teacher’s enquiries, Hamid refused to go back to school because he was afraid that his friends at school might find out. He was given medication by his GP, and after two weeks began to feel better but hated taking these tablets. Neither Hamid nor his parents wanted the school or his teacher to know about Hamid’s condition and instead told his teacher that Hamid had gastroenteritis. Three months later, his teacher continues to be concerned about Hamid and has had a meeting with Hamid and his parents. However, Hamid and his parents continue to say that Hamid is just tired and will be better soon. The teacher feels that Hamid should be over his gastroenteritis

by now, and so feels that there may be more to this story but is unable to get to the bottom of the problem. Hamid has returned to school but continues to be withdrawn and underperforming, and tells his parents that he will do better next year when he gets used to the tablets, but not to tell his teacher.

### Discussion

Explore the cultural factors that may be at work in the vignette. Examine the positive resources and assets that may be helpful to Hamid on the path that he has chosen.

## Domains for resilience

Much of the work on resilience (for example, Goldstein and Brooks, 2006; Schoon, 2006; Dowling, 2010) has highlighted the importance of positive characteristics as cornerstones to any display of resilience. Gilligan (1997) has identified six positive domains (Table 1.1) that he suggests can be used to frame our understanding of factors that can impact on childhood resilience.

The presence of these domains can often be perceived as providing a strong underpinning for good social and emotional adjustment. As a consequence, certain

**Table 1.1** Domains for resilience

<i>Domains for resilience</i>	<i>Descriptors</i>
Secure base	When the child is physically healthy and robust and has a positive and functional home environment, he or she is said to have a secure base – a foundation upon which resilience can be built. Children with a secure base feel that they belong; they are secure in their identity; and they feel safe. The positive effects of a secure base can be seen in terms of physical, psychological and neurological well-being.
Social competencies	Socially competent children can engage easily with the world and the other people around them. They are able to regulate their emotions and behaviour, such as having the ability to engage in conversation and behave in a positive way with others and form rewarding friendships. They are also adept at assessing situations, understanding various perspectives and learning from social situations such that their competence continues to grow.
Positive values	Optimism, hope and a sense of empathy for other people are some of the positive values that contribute to resilience. Young people who have a sense of the importance of qualities such as integrity, social justice and equality, responsibility and honesty often experience that these values can be channelled into positive behaviour, including the ability to think critically and have better skills in the areas of conflict resolution and problem solving.

Talent and interests	A sense of 'being good at' something and caring about it – whether it is sports, the arts, music or any other interest. Feeling 'good at something' is an important contributor to healthy self-esteem. Talents and interests also provide many opportunities for the young person to engage with others and form positive relationships with them.
Friendships	Healthy, affirming relationships, especially with peers, are an important factor in securing positive relationships. These can potentially moderate the effects of negative aspects of the child's life that run counter to building resilience.
Education	Access to education and the ability to engage with an education system can provide the child with the academic and other skills necessary for a successful life in his or her cultural milieu. In many societies, education is also an important forum in which to create positive friendships, to grow social competence and to develop a sense of positive attachment to adults other than parents.

Source: Gilligan (1997).

domains are perceived as evidence that some of the attributes of resilience may be present or possible. According to Gilligan (1997), a combination of domains and behaviours are key components necessary for a child or young person to achieve greater competence and capability and should form the cornerstones for social care practice.

## The texture of resilience

Resilience research has consistently emphasised what Barnett et al. (1996) referred to as 'keystone behaviours' (Table 1.2). These are drawn from a range of perspectives and are identifiable behaviours that are generally applied to all children and young people. In the context of resilience, key behaviours and attributes have been commonly applied. However, it is important to note that every child is wholly distinct from any other, with a different social and family background, a different genetic heritage and a different range of behaviours.

**Table 1.2** Characteristics that support resilience

• Confident	• Optimistic	• Future-focused
• High in self-esteem	• Creative	• Rational
• Adaptable	• Flexible	• Persistent
• Autonomous	• Reflective	• Realistic
• Socially aware	• Solution-focused	• Articulate
• Responsive	• Help-seeking	• Courageous
• Empathetic	• Positive	• Self-aware

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These descriptors highlight qualities that children and young people may display at various times and are also behaviours and qualities in which they can become more accomplished over time. Contrasting those who have developed resilience with those who have not can also be revealing:

- Individuals who are resilient tend to see themselves in terms of what they have accomplished and achieved, whereas those who are non-resilient believe themselves to be non-achievers (even in the face of objective evidence to the contrary).
- Resilient people can constructively recognise and build on their strengths and weaknesses and promote those areas in which they are skilled and competent. In contrast, those who are not resilient are more likely not to believe themselves to have valuable skills or be able to recognise and build effectively on their strengths.
- Resilient people typically have a strong sense of ‘belonging’ and connection to others, whereas non-resilient individuals generally feel detached from their family, community and those around them; they often describe themselves as feeling ‘disconnected’ from others.
- Resilient people generally feel a distinct sense of autonomy, expect positive things from their future and have good levels of self-esteem, whereas those who are not resilient feel powerless and as though they have little control over their future, do not see many good things in their future and tend to have markedly low levels of self-esteem.

According to Barnett et al. (1996, 95) key behaviours can be framed within three integral parts:

1. pivotal behaviours associated with response to maladaptive behaviours that can positively influence other child behaviours;
2. behaviours that result in other beneficial child, peer and/or adult outcomes; and
3. foundation skills necessary for adaptation to present and future environments.

The varied texture of resilience is not only identified by key behaviours but also by behaviour traits that can act to buffer a child from risk or enable the child to navigate an alternate path (for example Werner and Smith, 1987; Morrison et al., 2006; Ward and Thurston, 2006).

### **Risk and protective factors**

Considerable work has been carried out by a range of researchers towards determining the factors that confer risk or a protective effect on children and young people in terms of resilience. It is worth noting that these factors, when present, are not necessarily predictors of what will happen in their life – not least because everyone has his or her own individual story of risk and protection.

As Zolkoski and Bullock (2012, 2295) state, individual stories ‘may be probability statements; the likelihood of a gamble where levels of risk change depending on the time and place’. It is important to reflect on the gamble between protective

and risk factors, and to explore a fuller understanding of the contributions that these can make to different interventions (more fully explored in Chapter 6).

### **Risk factors**

The risk factors associated with a lack of resilience are complex and nuanced. West and Farrington (1973) identified a number as relatively common in a cross-cultural context. In their study of juvenile delinquent boys, they determined that the most potent risk factors for delinquency were low family income, large family size, parental criminality, low levels of education and poor parenting. Brackenreed (2010) suggests that ‘it is disheartening to note that these same risk factors are on the rise causing children to be vulnerable to failure in school and in life, despite widespread efforts on the part of the educational system to address risks and provide interventions’.

Recent studies have determined that, for example, similar categories may be considered as at-risk properties (Lee et al., 2013, 270), and according to Lee et al. (2013) these could include, for example, poor mental health, family and community dysfunction, high levels of individual stress and belonging to certain demographics. Lee et al.’s meta-analysis argues that depression is one of the ‘strongest negatively related variables to resilience’ (Lee et al., 2013, 274). In his 1990 paper *Resilience Reconsidered* (Rutter, 2000, 651), Rutter states that ‘there is abundant evidence that disturbed parent-child relationships do indeed constitute an important risk factor for psychopathology’. Schultz et al. (2013, 697) demonstrate the effects of violence on children, and in their US study they reported that 61 per cent of all children had seen at least one type of ‘violence, trauma and abuse’ in the course of a year, and that 66 per cent of those children had seen violence more than once, with 30 per cent witnessing five or more types, and 10 per cent experiencing exposure to 11 or more types of violence in the course of their lives. Exposure to violence is associated with various negative outcomes, including behavioural problems and the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder (Schultz et al., 2013, 698). It is important to note that the cumulative effects of multiple risks as described above are perceived to be a major inhibitor to the building of resilience (Yates et al., 2003, 245).

Rutter cautions that, ‘there have been many examples of risks that have been assumed to be due to one factor but that subsequently were found to be due to some other feature with which it happened to be associated’ (Rutter, 2005, 5). He cites the fact that, previously, many focused on the risks thought to be associated with ‘broken homes’ (divorced or separated parents) where one parent was now absent from the child’s life. However, with subsequent research it became apparent that the principal risk had more to do with parental conflict than the break up per se.

Rutter (2005, 5) suggests that whereas, statistically, children do better when there is a father in the home, this is contingent on the qualities that the father brings into the home environment. He argues that if the father displays anti-social behaviour, the child is at *greater* risk of doing the same with the father present than absent. Luthar and Zigler (1991) also stress the fact that the relationship between risk and a lack of resilience is often far from linear. Significant

differences also exist between genders. A study carried out by Werner and Smith (1982) demonstrated that, ‘whereas permanent absence of the father and maternal employment were related to resilience among high-risk girls, the same conditions were destructive for boys’. This study suggests that, in some circumstances, a child’s gender can put him or her at elevated risk. Rutter (1990, 189) also recognised the depth of gender differences in relation to resilience and has argued that boys are ‘more likely than girls to develop emotional/behavioural disturbances when exposed to marked family discord’. Various reasons for this have been posited, including the fact that boys are more likely to display disruptive oppositional behaviour than girls, which in turn makes it more likely that they will elicit a punitive response and/or be placed in institutional care (Rutter, 1990, 190–1).

A 2006 study of children at risk in Crewe in Cheshire, Britain, also found quite significant differences in terms of both risk and protective factors for girls and boys: ‘There was a greater prevalence amongst the boys for aggressive and angry behaviour, difficult behaviour at school, difficult behaviour at home and their achievement at school being well below potential. The girls were more likely to have the risk factors of a low level of exercise, poor health and an increased likelihood of being bullied’ (Ward and Thurston, 2006, 48).

However, the major concern with the classifications of risk factors is that the relationship between the degree of risk and the extent of adaptation and/or maladaptation is far from straightforward. In her research for the Scottish Government, Fox (2012) identified seven tensions (Table 1.3) that may exacerbate personal risk factors.

These tensions indicate that it is very important to recognise the complexity of risks in children’s lives and the circumstances within which young people find themselves. The picture of risks and tensions can be much more complex than it may first appear. Tensions may be subtler, not least because they often impose similar constraints to known risks and are therefore easy to miss. They can also be easily overlooked, resulting in classic misdirection and misleading correlations.

### **Protective factors**

Personal qualities identified by a range of researchers have included life satisfaction, optimism, positive affect, self-efficacy, self-esteem and identity (Lee et al., 2013, 270). According to Lee et al., ‘the strength and predictive power of demographic and psychological factors can directly impact on resilience levels’. They determined that the greatest effect on resilience came from protective factors, with risk factors having a smaller effect, and demographic factors a smaller effect again (Lee et al., 2013, 273):

Self-efficacy was the strongest positively related variable to resilience compared with the other variables (e.g. life satisfaction, optimism). That is, a greater level of self-efficacy was closely related to an increase in an individual’s resilience, for example, having the ability to cope with change and to use a repertoire of problem-solving skills . . . positive affect was strongly correlated with resilience, which indicated that resilient individuals are able to use positive affect to protect themselves against the effect of traumatic life events. (Lee et al., 2013, 274)

**Table 1.3** Tensions that exacerbate risk factors

	<i>Tension</i>	<i>Factors</i>
1	Access to material resources	Lack of availability of financial, educational, medical and employment assistance and/or opportunities to access food, clothing, shelter and safety
2	Relationships	Lack of relationships/models with significant others, peers and adults within one's family and community
3	Identity	Failure to develop a personal and or collective sense of purpose, self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, beliefs and values, including spiritual and religious identification
4	Power and control	Experiences and feelings of lack of control factors that inhibit the ability to effect change in one's social and physical environment in order to access health resources
5	Cultural adherence	Non-critical adherence to one's local and or global cultural practices, values and beliefs
6	Social justice	Lack of opportunity to experience or communicate a meaningful role in community and social equality
7	Cohesion	Inability or lack of opportunity to balance one's personal interests with a sense of responsibility to the greater good; unable to feel a part of something larger than oneself socially and spiritually

Source: Fox (2012).

Individual, personal characteristics, such as the individual's academic performance, temperament or character, degree of motivation and, depending on the given situation, gender, can all provide a protective effect (Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012, 2298). Additionally, Yates et al. (2003) focus on the use of and access to social support as protective factors. According to Yates et al. (2003, 247), there are three 'fields of resources' that can help to protect children who find themselves in adverse conditions:

1. child characteristics (personal qualities of the child in question);
2. family characteristics; and
3. community characteristics.

In contrast, Rutter (1990) advocates that the focus should be on whether or not a child is able to navigate his or her way through risk factors. He therefore describes four types of protective processes that he argues are likely to moderate risk factors:

1. those that reduce a child's exposure to risk;
2. those that reduce negative reactions to bad experiences;
3. those that promote self-esteem through achievement; and
4. positive relationships that provide opportunities for success.

Following this theme, Ong et al. (2009) suggest ‘ego resilience’ as a ‘stable personality trait that has emerged as an important psychological asset’. Longitudinal personality studies have shown the benefits of ego resilience in children and adults alike:

For example, in a series of coordinated experimental and individual difference studies . . . ego-resilient individuals exhibited faster physiological and emotional recovery from stress. In one study, higher ego resiliency was linked to quicker cardiovascular recovery following a laboratory stressor. (Ong et al., 2009)

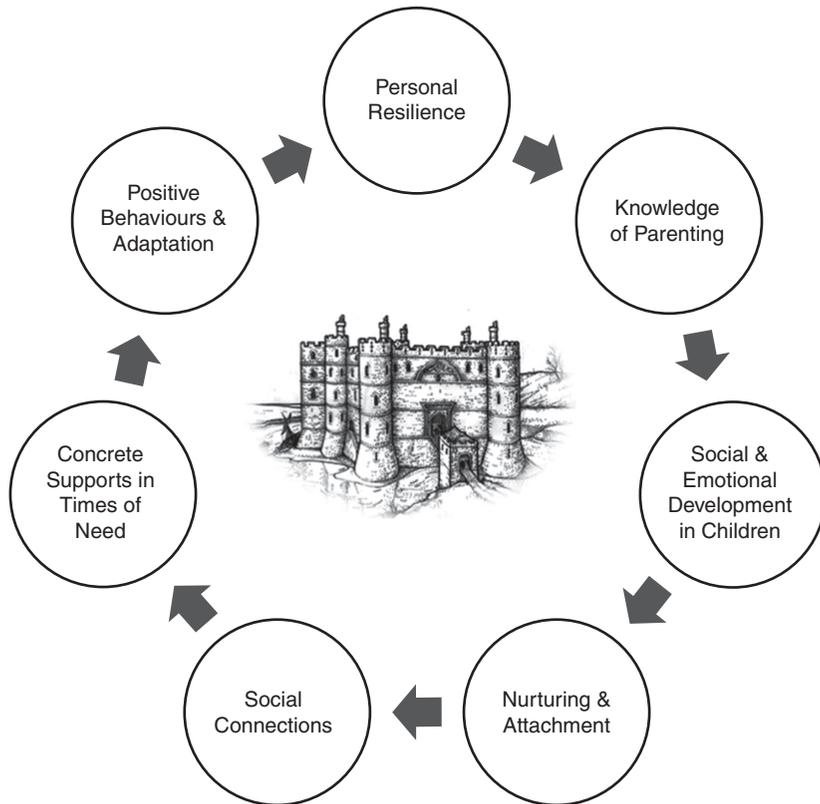
According to Ong et al. (2009) ego resilience, refers to a person’s ability to respond adaptively and resourcefully to new situations. This, they argue, can be characterised as having the capacity to ‘overcome, steer through, and bounce back from adversity’. Although ego resilience can be an important protective factor, they argue that it is not necessarily the same thing as resilience per se.

Luthar et al. (2000, 546) argued that ‘the terms ‘ego resiliency’ and ‘resilience’ differ on two major dimensions. Firstly, ego resiliency is a personality characteristic of the individual, whereas resilience is a dynamic developmental process. Secondly, ego resiliency does not presuppose exposure to substantial adversity, whereas resilience, by most definitions, does’ (546).

In exploring the underlying mechanisms involved in the acquisition and deployment of protective factors, Ong et al. (2009) focus on the role of positive emotions and the degree to which they can ‘serve as a bulwark against the normative disruptions and setbacks in later adulthood’. They point out that multiple studies, especially since the 1980s, have indicated the useful protective qualities of positive emotions, which can ‘sustain continued coping efforts and restore vital resources that had been depleted by stress’ as well as promote flexibility in thinking and solving problems. They argue that positive emotions can counteract the physiological effects that can be caused by negative emotions, facilitating coping and building social resources that will serve to help the individual in the longer term. These, they suggest, generally contribute to greater well-being, creating what Ong et al. (2009) refer to as a ‘resilience cascade’. Ego resilience, which contributes to the greater expression of positive emotion, can be an important contributor to the more positive ways in which some people appear to be able to respond and adapt to stress. Similarly, children whom Ong et al. designate as ‘ego brittle’ tend to display ‘behavioural problems, depressive symptoms and higher levels of drug use in adolescence’.

Resilience commonly refers to protective factors that are internal and external to the individual, and like risk factors, protective factors are perceived to have a cumulative effect. Figure 1.2 draws together a picture of cumulative protective factors that are attributable to children and young people.

We know that splendid isolation (represented by the castle in Figure 1.2) is not effective in enabling children or young people to develop the skills of resilience. The building of resilience is entirely dependent on social interaction and is only important in a social context. Figure 1.2 outlines a cycle of protective factors needed to shape and craft resilience as a process of social and emotional development.



**Figure 1.2** Cumulative protective factors

Goldstein and Brooks (2002) suggest that the more protective factors there are, the more likely children are to be resilient. However, Rutter (1990) argues against this optimistic spin. Instead, Rutter (1987) promotes social competence as a child's ability to think of several solutions to social problems, drawing on levels of autonomy, problem-solving skills, empathy, task orientation, curiosity, peer relations and a sense of purpose and future. Rutter continues to promote social and emotional competence as a primary protective factor.

## Conclusion

Definitions of resilience vary, and diverse approaches have been taken to understanding the different facets of resilience and determining how it is formed. Researchers have identified approaches, domains, textures, behaviours and a variety of risk and protective factors which all demonstrate the complexities and multiplicities inherent in the construct. Although the breadth of interest in the subject hints at its complexity, it also provides us with a range of pathways and routes to understanding and building resilience. Resilience offers a very wide lens through which parents and practitioners can champion and nurture routes to its attainment.

**Vignette 1.3**

Robert and Albert are growing up in a depressed former mining town. The area is grim: most of the shops on the town's high street are boarded up; unemployment is high; and social problems such as vandalism and antisocial behaviour are common. Alcoholism, gambling and drug abuse are all significant issues here, as are occasional outbursts of racist violence against the town's few ethnic minority families. The local schools struggle with a school population that often seems to be characterised by apathy, at best. Robert and Albert's family shares many of the problems that are so common in the area. Their parents left school early, are only sporadically employed, and making ends meet is often hard.

Despite these difficulties, both Robert and Albert are doing well. They have a good relationship with their parents and with their grandparents, who live nearby. The family takes part in a local faith group that provides not just spiritual guidance but also a ready-made community of supportive friends and acquaintances. The boys' parents are determined that their children get the most they can from their education, and are keen to engage with teachers and ensure that homework is done properly and on time. Despite everything, the outlook for these brothers is quite good.

**Questions and points for discussion**

1. What are the risk factors facing Robert and Albert? How have these cumulatively impacted on their development?
2. What are the protective factors in Robert and Albert's lives? How have these cumulatively impacted on their development?

Thus, the level of complexity inherent in the construction and characterisation of resilience can also be seen as one of its strengths. There are many possibilities, framed in a multitude of ways, along the journey of childhood into adulthood. There is no one route to building resilience, and a route to resilience can potentially be shaped and crafted to accommodate the many configurations of life circumstances in childhood.

Even in lives that appear to be compromised by many difficulties, so long as there is capacity and capability, there is the potential to adopt an approach and structure domains that could effectively foster the development of resilience during childhood and adolescence. Resilience is a construct that is interpreted in a range of ways, which is one of the reasons why it draws from academic, political and social debates. Applying what we have learned in these diverse areas holds promise for many, in a variety of ways and at different times and in different places.

The promise of resilience, and its success in enabling people to live productive, happy lives despite difficulties and challenges, lies in the pliability of childhood and adolescence which facilitates the ebb and flow of social, emotional and behavioural competence over a sustained period of time.

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