



CHURCHFIELDS
JUNIOR SCHOOL

Resilience and Coping with anxiety

Dear Parents and Carers

All parents and teachers would like pupils to be resilient: resilient against disappointment and bad news, resilient when things go wrong and when they make mistakes. I want all pupils to be mentally and emotionally tough: able to cope with the good times AND the bad; able to keep things in perspective and react appropriately. I want all pupils to grow into strong and self-reliant adults, able to manage their lives with minimum anxiety.

I say 'minimum anxiety' because it is unrealistic to expect a life devoid of anxiety. For this reason if no other, it is vitally important that we expect children, as they grow up, to develop the ability to manage anxiety – to be resilient. We won't do this by 'fixing' everything for them, by attempting to remove all sources of anxiety from their lives. In fact, I suspect that human nature is so attuned to having to deal with anxiety that we find it even where it doesn't exist. Trying to remove these anxieties may prove counterproductive as children may then invent their own anxieties.

What we want is that all our children can cope, even if something does throw them off balance. We want them to recognise that it isn't the end of the world, they know they will be able to cope, to get past it and move on.

There are seven traits which researchers have identified as helping children to become more resilient.

1. Resilient pupils are involved

They maintain their role in co-curricular activities and when times get tough they keep up this involvement. It is too easy when the novelty of learning an instrument or attending a club wears off, for pupils to ask their parents if they can give up. Instead adults should be insisting pupils persist with activities and not to take the easy option of giving up. They don't have to be great at an activity, but seeing this activity as part of their life is vital. It gives them perspective, social interaction and a sense of belonging.

2. They help others

This might be peer support at school, within their own year group or with younger children; it might be coaching or supporting them with school work

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or running a lunch-time club. Time and again the benefits of regularly helping others proves to be of enormous value in maintaining self-esteem and a sense of self-worth

3. They foster positive relationships with teachers and other adults

This may involve having adults, other than their Class Teacher with whom they spend time. For instance, pupils organising lunch-time clubs, attending Brownies or Scouts, participating in music or sports teams. Just talking to and getting to know an adult gives pupils a great sense of support and constancy whilst growing up.

4. They maintain personal routines

Such as sleep patterns, eating and finding time to rest in a calm environment. In essence, they invest in themselves and they understand how important this time is.

There have been a series of reports on how valuable sleep is to everyone, but especially children. I am often asked by parents about bedtime as it is can be a source of 'lively debate' in many homes in the evenings. I list below the amount of sleep that a child is recommended to have by the NHS. A simple calculation will enable parents to work out when their child needs to go to bed based on the time they are expected to wake up.

7 year olds:	10 hours 30 minutes
8 year olds:	10 hours 15 minute
9 year olds:	10 hours
10 year olds:	9 hours 45 minutes
11 year olds:	9 hours 30 minutes
Mrs Emeny:	8 hours at night! And another 8 hours in the day!

There is strong evidence that night time sleep is just as important as healthy eating and exercise. The pressures of life for children are becoming more and more difficult. Parents often ask me how to improve their child's scores or educational skills. The answer is often a question, 'Are they getting enough sleep?'

5. They find friends that they can spend time with

Not on social networking sites, but face to face. Ideally they meet them regularly, so perhaps these are class friends or people they do extra-

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curricular activities with. They learn to listen to and care about others as much as themselves. They should be encouraged to maintain these friendships.

6. They learn to manage and rationalise disappointments

Because they know it is normal not to achieve everything they want. They will have people (adults and peers) with whom they can share their disappointments and who will support them as they aim for their (often changing) personal goals.

7. They find things which help them to cope with adversity

They have certain activities, routines or people that they know they can turn to when times are hard or change is forced upon them.

Many pupils are already doing at least some of these things; here in school there are many opportunities for them to do all of them. And many pupils do things outside school which support this list. If they don't do all of these things now, it is never too late to start.

The final point is perhaps the most important: that they know who they can turn to when times are hard or when they are worried or anxious. None of us, whatever our age or level of maturity, are able to cope single-handedly ALL the time. We all need friends, relatives or outside experts to help us at times. The clever thing is to know and recognise this and to be ready and willing to ask for help when you need it.

Best wishes

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