



CARDIFF EARLY HELP COVID-19 SUPPORT PACK FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH FAMILIES

Psychological Approaches to Help People
Maintain and Develop Resilience



Dear Colleagues.

The opportunity for parents to have a safe and helpful conversation with another person who is a good listener and can ask questions to support them in thinking things through during challenging situations is something we are all skilled at doing and indeed do so on a daily basis with parents. These conversations will continue to be extremely helpful to parents given the current context.

As a group of Educational Psychologists working within Cardiff Early Help, we wanted to share with you some information about applying psychology to help people to maintain and develop resilience in challenging circumstances.

Our aim in creating this this pack is to provide you with some key resources underpinned by psychological theory and sound evidence to support your conversations with families. These resources will be just as helpful for us to use reflexively (on ourselves) as well as to support others.

It is important to acknowledge that most of the information collated from one of our generous Educational Psychologist colleagues Dr. Mark Adams who has created the free online resources: *HELPING PEOPLE TO COPE: A brief, practical resource pack to support 'helpers' (e.g. psychologists, coaches, therapists) who are supporting people with coping, resilience & wellbeing* and *COPING WITH CORONA: A psychology-informed resource pack to support coping, resilience and wellbeing in VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex & Ambiguous) times:*

<http://www.adamspychologyservices.co.uk>

We are aware that a resources such as this do not substitute your need to access your own helpful conversations with other people (peers, supervisors, colleagues, etc.). It will therefore be vitally important that we stay connected and maintain our own support network during these coming week sand moths so that we feel ready, willing and able to support others.

Warm Regards,

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1. Reflective listening

Not Listening...



Gordon (1970, 2000) points out that in everyday speech there are a number of ‘roadblocks to communication’ that do NOT constitute listening. Rather than ‘staying with’ or further exploring the meaning of the person’s statement, these are responses that divert the conversation, get in the way or introduce more of the helper’s own thoughts, for example:

- ***Why don't you.....(Prescribing)***
- ***I know how you feel.... You poor thing (Sympathizing, consoling)***
- ***Just like what happened to me when.... (Changing the subject, taking over)***
- ***Don't get upset, cheer up. (Directing)***
- ***But you're such a strong person, you'll cope (Reassuring, lecturing).***

These are termed ‘roadblocks’ because they divert the person/conversation away from the meaning of what the person has just said. While at some points in a conversation there may be times when the helper does intentionally introduce more of their own thoughts or ideas, we need to be conscious and mindful that such responses are not listening.



Listening

“Acceptance is not the same thing as agreement or approval. It is possible to accept and understand a person’s perspective while not agreeing with or endorsing it... The crucial attitude is a respectful listening to the person with a desire to understand his or her perspectives.”

(Miller & Rollnick, 2002, p. 37).

A vital skill for creating an atmosphere of acceptance is **Reflective Listening**.

Reflective listening is communication in which the listener focuses attentively on what the person is saying and then communicates that understanding in the form of a statement. This demonstrates that the listener has heard and understood the key message in what the speaker is saying, while also enabling both parties to check that they are on the same page.

Reflective listening statements often take the form of a sentence that contains the word **“You...”** (e.g. “You sound like you aren’t sure where to go next from here,” or “As well as being concerned about the situation, you’re also worried about how others will cope”).

Reflective listening statements might also begin with the phrase “Sounds like...” (e.g. **“Sounds like** you’re starting to get a bit frustrated having been cooped up together”).

Reflective listening gives the speaker the opportunity to check if the listener has heard them correctly, while enabling both partners to collaboratively shape between them the meaning of what has been said.

The aim is to tune into, understand, and articulate the person’s meaning. If the attempt at understanding is wide of the mark, it gives both parties the opportunity to get back on the same page.

Regular summarizing throughout the conversation can also provide another ‘checking in’ opportunity (“Have I understood that correctly? Have I missed anything? Anything else?”) while further cementing the sense of being ‘on the same page’ and the person’s sense of feeling heard.

All of this helps to create the climate that is so crucial for change to occur.

Within this climate, we can then ask questions to structure and steer the conversation.



2. Questions for guiding conversations

Openers

How are you?

How are things?

How have things been since last time?

Identifying a focus for the conversation

What would you like to talk about?

How would you like to use the time we have?

Exploring the person's goals

How would you like things to be different?

Imagine it's six months from now, and things have changed in a way that you're pleased with... What would that look like? For you? For others?

What would a sign of progress be?

Understanding the person's reality

What's happening at present?

Can you give me an example?

What did that look/sound like?

Tell me more about....

In what way?

In what way is this a problem for you? [to be used sensitively]

How are you feeling at the moment?

I imagine you might be feeling somewhat [tentative suggestion]?



Exploring 'exceptions' (times when the preferred future is happening to a degree, or when things aren't as bad)

When have things been better?

On a scale from 0-10, where are things now? Why are they [x] and not any lower?

Having a balanced perspective

What are you noticing that is positive?

What are some of the less-bad things at present?

Helping the person focus on what they can control or influence

What have you got more control over?

How much control do you have over that?

On a scale from 0-10, how much control do you have over that?

Which of these things might you be able to influence in some way?

Exploring coping strategies

What are some simple ways in which you can look after yourself/those you live with? (consider e.g. activities, time spent).

What (small) positive difference could you make today? To yourself? To others?

Who could you give some time to?

How can you use your time?

How can you talk to yourself in a way that will be helpful?

Encouraging self-compassion

What would you say to a friend who said that?

How can you look after yourself in the coming days and weeks?



Exploring resources

What do you have within you that is going to help you?

What are your strengths?

When have you achieved a success previously? How did you do that? What strengths and qualities did you draw upon?

Who do you have around you that can help?

Who can you connect with that might help?

Where can you find information? (signposting to other services or to a few useful links or sites might be helpful here).

Exploring options

What options do you have?

What else might you try?

What have you done before in other situations?

What has worked for you in other contexts?

What have you seen others do that might help?

What have you thought about doing but not tried yet?

Would you like a suggestion? I don't know if this would work for you, but...[suggestion]. What do you think?

Action planning

Having had this conversation, what do you think you might do?

What might you try in the next few days/weeks?

What barriers might you encounter?

Who else could help you to achieve this?

On a scale of 0-10, how committed are you to taking this action?



Some messages that might be helpful (to be discussed or delivered with caution)

This will pass.

There will be a point when you will not feel like this, when things will be different.

Some good might come from this.



3. ABC model of reactions to adversity

The ABC model below might be a helpful tool to explore with ourselves and others. The model is called ABC because that stands for Adversity – Beliefs – Consequences.

In the ‘Adversity’ column, we can write a description of the event that is worrying us.

In the ‘Beliefs’ column, we can make a note of the thoughts we are experiencing, including any Resilience-Undermining Thoughts.

And in the ‘Consequences’ column, we can write what the emotional and behavioural consequences of those thoughts may be (e.g. If I tell myself “This is all wholly bad and no good can come from it” the consequences of that might be feeling disheartened and becoming apathetic).

Adversity	Beliefs	Consequences (Emotional and Behavioural)

This model, derived from Cognitive-Behavioural Psychology (Beck, 1976, 2011; Ellis, 1988; Centre for Coaching, 2012), recognises the crucial role that our beliefs can have in influencing our emotional and behavioural reactions.

It is important to note that, according to the cognitive-behavioural approach, it is not the adversity itself that causes our feelings and behaviour; rather, it is the thoughts we hold about it that influences our reaction. From a cognitive-behavioural perspective, these thoughts are under our control. That is, if Resilience-Undermining Thoughts are giving rise to unwanted emotional and behavioural consequences, we can work to change them.

The next pages focus on how we can do this.

4. Challenge your thinking (1): disputation

We can often make the assumption that the thoughts we tell ourselves are true. However, our inner 'gremlin' is not necessarily a reliable and accurate commentator on reality. It can be prone to, for example:

- Selective perception (focusing on some things at the expense of others).
- Extreme thinking
- Being illogical
- Being irrational
- Being misleading

So, we don't necessarily need to take what it says as the truth.



Instead, we can 'cross examine' our thoughts and see if they up to scrutiny!

To challenge and change Resilience-Undermining Thoughts, the first approach we can try is to use questioning to dispute them. Rather than taking the thought at face value, we can ask ourselves the following questions:

- What is the evidence for your thought? What is the evidence against your thought? How does the evidence balance up?
- How logical is that thought?
- How helpful is that thought? What are the consequences of thinking that?
- What alternative ways of thinking about it might there be?
- What would you say to a friend who said that? (This can help us if we are being overly critical of ourselves, which we are less likely to do to others).

The key point here is: Just because we think something, doesn't make it true. (For more on this, see Beck, 1976; Beck, 2011; Williams, Palmer & Edgerton, 2008).



5. Challenge your thinking (2): resilience-enhancing thoughts

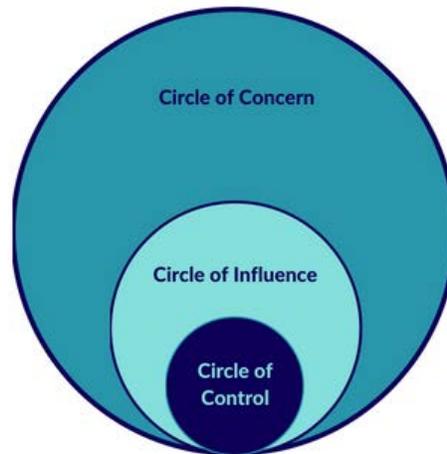
One of the Disputation questions we considered was: What alternative ways of thinking about it might there be? This is where an awareness of Resilience-Enhancing Thoughts (Palmer, 2013) can be helpful. The following are some ways of thinking that can help us to maintain our resilience in times of change, challenge or adversity:

- Acceptance of reality: “This is happening/has happened. Now what can I do?”
- De-Awfulizing/De-Catastrophizing: “It is not as bad as it could be.”; “It’s not 100% awful. Some good may come from this.”; “It’ll pass/I’ll adjust.”
- Balanced thinking: Rather than evaluating events in extremes, looking at the details and acknowledging that there may be both good and bad aspects to a situation.
- Broadening the picture: Considering the range of factors influencing a situation (depersonalizing); considering the broader context in which an event/situation occurs.
- Self-confidence: “I will handle it.”
- High Frustration Tolerance: “I might not like it, but I can stand it.”
- Facing your dragons: “What’s the worst that could happen? If that happens, how will I handle it?”
- Being realistic: “That’s the worst that could happen... How likely is it?”
- Compassion (to self or others): Focusing on specific behaviours. Not rating/labelling ourselves or others on the basis of specific actions. Accepting self/other as fallible.
- Preferences (rather than demands): “I would prefer it if...”
- Gratitude / Appreciation: Keeping in touch with the positive aspects of a situation (or one’s life more broadly)
- Resilience-Enhancing Imagery: Imagining oneself coping with difficulty or experiencing success
- You might wish to consider if any of the above might be helpful alternatives to any negative thoughts you may have been experiencing.
- Below is a form you can use to list any negative thoughts you may be experiencing (left-hand column) and any positive thoughts they could be replaced with (right-hand column).



Negative (Resilience-Undermining Thoughts)	Positive (Resilience-Promoting Thoughts)

6. Circles of Control



When times get tough it can help us to have some generic structured problem-solving or solution-finding approaches to call upon.

In any situation, there will be some things that we can CONTROL or INFLUENCE, and some things we can't. You might wish to use the following table to help you reflect on that:

Factors that are present but that I can't control or influence	Factors that are present but that I can't control or influence

There may well be a lot in the left-hand column! The stuff we CAN'T control – well, we may just have to accept that it's there, that it's important, but we can't do anything about it. If we spend all our time thinking about it, it won't be helpful or constructive as it will prevent us from focusing on other things.

Having identified some factors that you CAN exert some influence and control over, you might wish to apply one of the following problem-solving/solution-finding models to it.



7. The practice problem-solving framework (Palmer, 2007, 2008)

Problem Identification

- *What's the problem you want to focus on?*
- *What is it that you would like to change?*

Realistic, relevant goals developed

- *What do you want to achieve?*
- *How would you like things to be different?*

Alternative actions

- *What are your options?*

Consideration of consequences

- *What are the pros and cons of each of these options?*

Target most feasible solution

- *On a scale from 0-10, how interested are you in pursuing each of these?*

Implementation of Chosen solution

- *Go and do it!*

Evaluation

- *How successful was it?*
- *What can be learned?*
- *Where next?*



8. Enable: a solution-focused coaching model (Adams, 2015, 2016)

Elicit preferred future

"Imagine a time in the future when things are as you want them to be... What does that look like?"

Notice exceptions

"On a scale from 0-10, where 10 is that your preferred future is happening, where are things now?"

"Why [x] and not any lower?"

Activate strengths and resources

"What helped to achieve those successes?"

Build on what's working

"What would a step forward look like?"

Look for opportunities

"How can you go about that in the coming days or weeks?"

Evaluation

"What I've heard/noticed is..."

"What progress has there been since last time?"



9. Consider Support Networks

This final section is perhaps one of the most important. While we can do a lot of work on ourselves, it's also important to be able to access the support of others, to be able to provide support to others as best we can.

You might wish to reflect on the following questions yourself and whilst helping others:

- *Who is in a support network? (friends, family, neighbours, colleagues, professionals etc.).*
- *Which aspects of support (e.g. practical, emotional, financial, psychological) might I/others need more help with?*
- *Which aspects of a support network might need developing?*
- *How can I/others access support if self-isolating or in quarantine?*
- *Who can I give support to? In what way?*

The following reflection questions pull together the material covered in this booklet. You might wish to refer to some of them to help you apply the material to your present situation:

- *How am I feeling at present?*
- *What thoughts am I experiencing?*
- *How am I thinking about this situation? How is my thinking influencing my reaction?*
- *Can I identify any Resilience-Undermining Thoughts in my thinking?*
- *How can I dispute some of those Resilience-Undermining Thoughts?*
- *How can I turn some of my Resilience-Undermining Thoughts into Resilience-Enhancing Thoughts?*
- *What are my values? How can I continue to act upon my values?*
- *To what extent am I living in congruence with my values?*
- *How can my values inform my goals and behaviours?*
- *How can I defuse from unhelpful thoughts and keep focused on my goals?*
- *What factors are relevant in this situation? Of all those factors, what can I do something about?*
- *What different options are available to me? Having considered each of those, what am I going to do?*
- *Who is in my support network, and how can I develop that or use that?*

If we can help further at all in any way please let us know. Take care of yourselves, and each other.