### About Resilience

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*About Resilience*
**Perseverance**

Keeping going in the face of difficulties, channelling the energy of frustration productively. Knowing what a slow and uncertain process learning often is.

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**Explanation**

It is quite likely that many children go through their school lives mistakenly believing that learning should be easy. If they are relatively ‘able’ learners, who have never been challenged, the greater demands and expectations made of them in later years can come as a demoralising and unsettling shock. Those who are labelled, or who label themselves, as lacking ability see themselves as inferior and seek any means of avoiding the unpleasant feelings that learning may induce. If ‘getting stuck’ throws you into a panic then you will look for ways of avoiding this experience again.

Are you able to identify children who may fit into either of those groups? Are you aware of children who are over-anxious to get things ‘right’? Do you have a reward system that rewards achievement or celebrates ‘having a go’? Are you aware of parents who look for success mainly in terms of achievement and progress?

What each of these groups has never been told is that learning can indeed be an uncomfortable activity. When we help children to recognise that all learners need to show perseverance, they are less likely to try to avoid challenges.

How do you encourage your young learners when they are finding the going tough? Do you encourage them to ‘keep at it’; ‘keep trying’; ‘don’t give up’? What do you say to them? What do you expect of them?

However, these exhortations will only get them so far. ‘Sticking at it’ won’t bring about success by itself. Just doing more of the same is not enough; what is needed are alternative strategies to get over that ‘stuckness’. Piaget thought that intelligence was about ‘knowing what to do, when you don’t know what to do.’ We need to offer children many opportunities to get stuck and find a way forward.

**Language to encourage thinking about perseverance**

- Stick at it.
- It’s good to have a go.
- If you try, try, try, then you can, can, can.
- What could you do if you get stuck?
- What did you do when you got stuck before?
- Could you try something different?
- You were stuck, now you’re not. That’s great!
- How did it feel when you finished that?
- Being stuck is an interesting place to be.
- What else could you try to do that?
RESILIENCE:
The emotional aspects of learning, ‘feeling’
The capacities that make up this disposition are:

Absorption   Managing Distractions   Noticing   Perseverance

Perseverance
Keeping going in the face of difficulties, channelling
the energy of frustration productively. Knowing what
a slow and uncertain process learning often is.

How to make the most of the story;
STICKABILITY

In this story Jay learns that everyone can find learning difficult
– even grandma – and he has advice for grandad too!

The story provides an opportunity to think about the feelings that
often go with learning, or doing, something new. Jay is cross and
frustrated because he can’t yet ride his bike alone; grandma still
remembers what it felt like when the birthday cake went wrong and
what she did about it. Jay uses what he has learnt about stickability to give his grandad some good advice.

If the story is introduced to the whole class, then the discussion prompt questions provide
opportunities for ‘talking partners’ to share their experiences and thoughts on the subject.

After the story
Connecting questions
• How did Jay feel about going to grandma’s house?
• What was he looking forward to doing?
• I wonder what happened that changed the way he was feeling. Do you know?
• How do you think he felt then?
• Grandma talked to Jay about something she had to learn. What did she tell him?
• Grandma said she needed ‘Stickability’. What do you think she meant?
• Grandad said it was a ‘silly bird table’. What do you think he meant?
• What did Jay and grandma tell him?

Transferring questions
• Have you ever felt like Jay when you were trying to do something new? Talk to your partner about how it felt.
• Do you like trying to do new things? What new things have you learnt to do?
• Can you think of anything you’ve done that you found hard? What did you do?
• What does it mean when we say ‘I’m stuck’?
• We could put some reminders up on the wall for people when they find it hard or when they’re ‘stuck’. What
useful things could we put on the wall? NB. This could form the basis of a class Stuck poster or Learning wall.
**STICKABILITY**

**A story to introduce: Perseverance**

Jay liked it when his mum and dad both had to go to work in the school holidays because it meant that he could go to grandma and grandad's house. To-day his big sister Milly went to the holiday Play Club, so it was even more special because he had grandma and grandad all to himself.

...so grandma was a bit surprised when Jay came in from the garden looking not at all happy.

“What’s the matter?” Grandma said. “You look a bit cross.” Jay sat down on the kitchen floor and started to take his shoes off.

“’It’s a lovely day. Don’t you want to play in the garden?” She asked him.

“No I don’t!” Jay sounded cross.

“Oh dear! You do sound grumpy; and you’ve brought your bike with you too.”

Jay’s dad had taken the stabilisers off his bike. He’d gone with Jay to the park a few times and Jay was beginning to get his balance, but only when dad held on to the back of his saddle.

He’d asked his mum if he could take his bike with him when he went to stay at grandma’s because her garden had a nice long, straight path and he thought it would be great to ride his bike up and down the path. But it hadn’t been such fun when he tried it. It had been so much harder to balance when dad wasn’t there.

“I can’t ride it by myself. I can only ride it when dad holds on. It’s a stupid bike!” Jay was very cross.

“I don’t think bikes can be stupid,” said grandma, “and you’re not stupid either. It’s not easy when you start learning anything new.”

Jay wasn’t sure about that. Everybody else seemed to be able to ride their bikes easily. Milly had told him it was easy to ride a bike. When he told grandma what Milly had said, grandma laughed.

“Even Milly had to learn when she was your age. We all have to learn when we want to do something new. Just you wait there.” Grandma went upstairs. When she came back she was carrying a book. The book was a photograph album. She turned over a few pages and then she pointed at a photograph.

“What do you think that is?” she asked, with a big smile on her face.

Jay, still with his cross face, looked at the picture. Then he began to smile.

“It’s a mess!” he said.

“You’re right there,” said grandma. “It was meant to be a birthday cake. I made it for your mum when she was a little girl. I was very proud of that cake, with all the pink icing. After I finished it I left it in the kitchen and I was getting things ready for the party. Everyone arrived and we played games and did all sorts of things, then I went to get the cake to put it on the table. And that’s what it looked like - a mess! All the pink icing had slid off the cake and it looked like a cake island sitting in a pink sea! Your grandad thought it was very funny so he took the photograph. I didn’t think it was funny. I felt like crying. But just you look at this next picture.”

Grandma turned over and there was another cake. This time it was a beautiful cake that looked like a basket of flowers.

“I made that cake too. It was for your mum on her 18th birthday. What do you think of that?”

“Wow!” Jay said, “that’s clever. Did you really make it yourself?”

“Yes I did, but only after I’d been learning about decorating cakes for a long time. I went to special classes to learn how to do it.”

“Was it easy?” Jay asked.

Grandma laughed “No it wasn’t! Sometimes I felt like giving up because the cakes still went wrong, but I kept trying different ways to do things and I looked at how the other people were doing it and I tried to do it like them. When you’re learning to do something new you need STICKABILITY! When you aren’t getting on too well then you have to think about other ways to get it right.”

“How can I ride my bike better then?” Jay asked. “I keep wobbling on that path ‘cause it’s a bit bumpy.”

“Perhaps that’s the problem. Why don’t we go down to the park this afternoon? The paths are wider and they’re flatter too. Do you think that might help?”
Jay thought that sounded like a good idea.

Just then they heard a loud shout from grandad.

“Aaargh! I give up!”

Grandad had been trying to put together a bird table for the garden, but it sounded as though he wasn’t getting on too well.

“What’s the matter?” grandma asked.

“It’s this silly bird table. I’ll never get it right!”

“I don’t think bird tables can be silly grandad!”
Jay said. “You just need some stickability.”

“That’s right,” said grandma, “and have you looked at the instructions? That might help, you know.”

Grandad had a guilty look on his face. “No I haven’t. I thought it would be easy.”

“There you are then,” said grandma, “that should help you get it right.”

So Jay helped grandad with the bird table, and in the afternoon they all went to the park and grandad held on to Jay’s bike while he practiced. By the end of the day Jay could ride all along the path by himself, without falling off, and grandma and grandad had a super new bird table in the garden.
Challenge Time Activities

Remind the children that persevering isn’t just about keeping going, it’s about trying new approaches too. Try to use language that not only says “stick at it” but encourages children to try other ways of completing the task.

Some useful prompts:-
• How’s it going?
• Are you stuck?
• Has anyone in your group got a different idea?
• Can you think of another way to do that?
• Why don’t you watch each other and see what’s working?

The challenges

1. Construction
Resources: A range of construction kits
Aim: To build a tower taller than one metre
Guidance: Ask the children to work in pairs and explain the task showing them a metre ruler.

2. Aiming and throwing
Resources: Lots of bean bags, a bucket, a large chalk circle and paper or a white board to keep score.
Aim: To get all the bean bags in the bucket without stepping into the circle.
Guidance: Draw the circle on the floor at an age-appropriate size. Arrange the beanbags around the perimeter and put the bucket in the centre. Explain the task to the children saying that there is no need to take turns and each thrower can throw as many bean bags as they are able, BUT they must not go inside the circle to retrieve any mis-throws. When all the beanbags have been thrown someone should count how many are in the bucket. All the bean bags should be collected from in and out of the bucket, placed outside the circle and the group tries again. There should be a scorer in each group who keeps a record of the number scored for each round. As many tries are allowed as needed until they manage to get all the bean bags in or the time runs out. In which case, decide what was the highest number achieved.

3. Modelling
Resources: Play dough
Aim: For each child to make 3 models: - something with legs, something that grows and something you might find in the kitchen.
Guidance: Explain the task to the children and share the play dough out between them.

4. Sequencing
Resources: Beads and strings or multi-link or other suitable resources.
Aim: For each pair of children to make 3 sequences:- one with 2 colours, one with 3 and one with 4.
Guidance: Explain the task to the children and remind them that a sequence keeps repeating itself. It may be helpful to suggest a minimum length for the sequences.

4. Reasoning
Resources: Three familiar, age appropriate jigsaws with all the pieces mixed together.
Aim: For the group to sort out the pieces and assemble the three jigsaws separately.
Guidance: Explain the task to the children.
Resilience: The emotional aspects of learning, ‘feeling’
The capacities that make up this disposition include:

Perseverance
Keeping going in the face of difficulties, channelling the energy of frustration productively, knowing what a slow and uncertain process learning often is.

More Ideas

1. Draw up and display a ‘Stuck Poster’. This activity follows on from the talk you will already have had after sharing the story. A Stuck Poster should not list your strategies about what to do when stuck, but should contain all the ideas which your children can come up with – and it can be added to as more and more strategies are identified. The ‘Stuck Poster’ is a visual prompt – and you will need to consider how to make it useful for those children who will not yet be able to read the words.

2. ‘Adopt’ a character – real, imaginary, human or animal – who exhibits the best features of perseverance. Talk about the character until your children become familiar with its attributes. When you have set a group to work on a particular task – numeracy, reading, writing etc., leave this character (actual or picture) on their table as a reminder of ‘what to do when you don’t know what to do’.

3. Use circle time to think about things that we have found difficult and what we did to overcome the difficulty e.g. ‘I found it really difficult to… so I…’ Reflect on what different children have said and begin to build the idea of using different strategies to get over the difficulties. This will also provide a good opportunity to discuss the single most over-used strategy when becoming stuck – to ‘ask the teacher’!

4. Use phrases like “If you try, try, try then you can, can, can!” and discourage them from saying, “I can’t…” by saying “I can’t yet…but I’m learning to”.

5. Share some of the things you have struggled with as a learner or perhaps start learning something new and tell them how it feels when you don’t make as much progress as you want. Juggling can be a lot of fun!

6. Use an assortment of games like Jenga and Pick up Sticks which most children will be motivated to stick at. Reward their stickability.

7. Learn to sing ‘Incy Wincy Spider’ and talk about how spiders persevere with their web building and thread climbing.

8. Develop a perseverance area on your Learning Wall. Use the idea of the three zones – comfort, stretch, panic. Children can fix their Velcro pictures to show which zone they have been working in when they have had the chance to choose an activity or where they felt themselves to be when given a particular task to do.
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Recognising Progression…
What you are trying to develop in young learners is:

• An awareness that there are positive and negative feelings attached to learning.
• Recognising the consequences of their feelings on learning.
• Recognising what is meant by ‘being stuck’, and that this is a positive part of learning.
• An awareness that there are emotional and cognitive things they can do to overcome stuckness.
• A willingness to try different strategies to overcome difficulties.

Observe your young learners and begin to move them from:

Being Unaware to Developing the Capacity

Are they:

Unaware? (using the capacity unconsciously)

Behaviours to build on:  
• Spends significant periods of time on individual activities 
• Manages frustration, boredom calmly 
• Tries different ways to do things to achieve an outcome

Behaviours to counteract:
• Spends little time on anything 
• Tends to show boredom quickly 
• Gives up quickly and seeks help

Beginning (to be aware of the capacity as a distinct idea)

• Able to talk about how they feel about different learning experiences 
• Knows when they find learning difficult 
• Willing to try new activities 
• Can offer suggestions about ‘what to do when you don’t know what to do’ 
• Knows ways to calm themselves down when feeling scared or upset

Developing (able to apply awareness of the concept)

• Knows that trying hard is important in reaching goals 
• Uses several strategies to overcome negative feelings of learning 
• Remains positive in difficult situations 
• Can talk about how they keep going even when a task is difficult 
• Willing to select activities in their ‘stretch’ zone 
• Willing to try different ways to solve a problem 
• Sustains involvement and perseveres particularly when trying to solve a problem (Early Years dispositions and attitudes)

Use the reward sticker to build awareness of these behaviours. You might add things like “I got myself unstuck” “I persevered” “I stayed positive” “I’ve got stickability” “I tried something new” “I kept going” “I tried a new way to do...”