

Resilience Matrix

The resilience matrix allows practitioners to take the strengths and pressures identified from gathering information using that information within the four headings of resilience, vulnerability, protective environment and adversity. The concept of practitioners is fundamental to children's wellbeing.

A resilience-based approach fits with the aim of building on the strengths in the child's whole world, always drawing on what the family, community and universal services can offer. Focusing on the positives and the strengths in a child's life is likely to help to improve outcomes by building a protective network around children. (Daniel and Wassell 2002). At the same time, it is always important to be alert to whether any adversity or vulnerability is putting children's well-being at risk and make sure this is taken into account. Home is important but so too is what is going on in the rest of the child's world. School and spare time activities, for example, can provide opportunities for enhancing resilience.

The level of individual resilience is usually used to refer to the **intrinsic** qualities of an individual. Some children are more intrinsically resilient than others because of a whole range of factors.

A further dimension for understanding individual differences is that of protective and adverse environments. This dimension covers extrinsic factors (family, school and community). Examples of a protective environment might include a supportive adult in a child's wider world, such as a teacher or grandparent.

These two dimensions will interact, and an increase in protective factors will help boost a child's individual resilience.

Resilience is a complex issue however and that nothing can be taken for granted when assessing how resilient a child is. Although pointers to resilience may be present these have always to be taken in the context of a child's situation. For example, some children may appear on the surface to be coping with adversity, but they may be feeling very stressed internally. This is why it is important to get to know a child in the process of assessment and also why views of a child from different adults in their world are so valuable. There are many factors associated with resilience, but Gilligan (1997) suggests that there are three fundamental building blocks of resilience:

1. A secure base whereby the child feels a sense of belonging and security
2. Good self-esteem, that is an internal sense of worth and competence
3. A sense of self efficacy, that is a sense of mastery and control, along with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations.

Using professional judgement

Professional judgement needs to be taken when assessing each factor as some factors will create more adversity or protection to the child than others. Furthermore, children's resilience will be affected by what happens to the adults with whom they live. It will be therefore important to predict how changes in the adults may affect the children. Sometimes, some factors which may be both protective and suggest adversity for example, removing an abuser from a domestic violence situation may be proactive to both mother and child but can result in poverty which increases adversity. In making decisions about whether to plot this information requires practitioners to exercise judgement, make sense of these different aspects of information and weight the competing influences.

Using the matrix to plan

Once judgements have been made, it will be possible to see what needs to be done to help the child and family in order to strengthen protective factors and resilience and reduce adversity and vulnerability.

Using the matrix

Practitioners will find it helpful to identify and make sense of resilience and vulnerability as well as adversity and protective factors by using a blank matrix and 'plotting' this on the matrix the strengths and pressures the child is experiencing in relation to two sets of factors at each point of the matrix.

Along the axis of adversity and protective environment, all the factors that provide strengths in the environment, such as the child getting on at school, should be placed from the centre along the protective environment axis. Likewise, all the factors in the environment which are causing adversity, such as insufficient money or a dangerous neighbourhood, should be placed from the centre along the adversity axis.

The same process can be repeated for factors with the child that are likely to promote resilience and for those which are making a child vulnerable.

General learning points

- Cases that appear in the top right hand quadrant of two axes are in safe situations and bounce back from difficulties. This is the safest area for young people to be.
- In the lower right quadrant are young people who are protected, but for whatever reason are vulnerable. These young people will only need specialist support if their protection is removed, but ideally universal and

perhaps targeted services will work to increase to resilience.

- In the top left quadrant of this graph are children and young people in adverse circumstances. These are the children with whom targeted and specialist services should be working to increase the level of protection, whether by raising them from poverty or taking action to safeguard against abuse.
- Young people in the lower left corner of the graph are the most vulnerable young people who do not have the resilience, personally or within their environment to protect themselves. As well as identifying the associated risk this model allows us to develop care plans in two directions – to increase the level of protection and to improve young people's resilience, improving the chances of reducing risk.
- Once criticism of this model is that resilient young people in risky situations [the top left quadrant] may be ignored as relatively safe. It is crucial to recognise that no matter how resilient young people may be, there will be times when the risks are too severe to ignore and the presence of resilience factors should never be an excuse for lack of attention or inaction.

Further reading: Daniel B, Wassell S & Gilligan R [1999] *Child development for child care and protection workers*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications

Resilience Matrix

