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Building resilience both inside and outside of the classroom

By Naomi Bartholomew, Headmistress of St Catherine's Prep School, Bramley



Naomi Bartholomew is Headmistress of St Catherine's Prep School which is situated in the village of Bramley, 3 miles south of Guildford. Prep School girls benefit from the world-class facilities of the Senior School, including the extensive grounds, 25m indoor pool, Sports Hall, dance studio, magnificent auditorium and 19th century chapel. www.stcatherines.info.

I also feel strongly that educational visits and residential trips are key to building confidence. We encourage these at St Catherine's and build a programme which ensures that children are taking steps to be away from home for one night in Year 3 to four nights away in Year 6. Such experiences may start with a visit to a local farm and culminate in children rock climbing and abseiling. Regardless of the nature of the visit, working with peers in a different context and environment often with different adults too are very valuable experiences.

It is clear that such opportunities and the confidence they build can they be transported back into an academic context. We often say to pupils in Year 6 that if they can climb a telegraph pole at a PGL camp they can take on algebra. It is also often the case that we observe leadership in children when outside of the classroom and particularly when out of their comfort zone. Again, this can easily then be encouraged back in class when working collaboratively to solve a problem.

As parents and teachers, the following are a useful 'top ten tips' on building resilience both inside and outside of the classroom.

We need to encourage children to:

1. Make connections
2. Help others
3. Maintain a daily routine and see things through
4. Take a break and return with fresh eyes to a problem
5. Ask for help having tried first
6. Move step by step toward goals
7. Take time to celebrate effort
8. Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook
9. Look for opportunities for self-discovery and learning through experiment
10. Accept that change is important and part of life

Top
Tips

Armed with these guiding principles we are well placed to ensure children in our care are resilient, curious and flexible in their outlook and will be in a strong position to respond to challenge and learn from it.

Young children are naturally curious and resilient. They enjoy watching their Lego tower fall to the ground as toddlers and we have most likely all seen joy and anticipation as they remove the case from a fragile sandcastle not sure if it is going to stand tall or not. As children start school this curiosity and natural ability to learn through failing can start to ebb away. By even six years old children are aware of 'results' and compare their achievements with others.

If we are able to provide safe, fun spaces for children and encourage them to continue to be curious and to learn through failing, their resilience both inside and outside of the classroom is much more likely to be secure.

We all experience knocks and challenges in life and many say that they judge others best by how they respond in a crisis. We don't want to go back to times we may have experienced ourselves where failure and humiliation went hand in hand and yet we do need to ensure that we don't remove all challenge and obstacles from children. If we remove risk and challenge the result is that children do not have a sense of having achieved for themselves.

How then can we build resilience and nurture curiosity in primary aged pupils? A very important ingredient is outdoor play and opportunities for children to play across age groups. Extra-curricular activities are also important as these allow children to develop their own talents and interests which often require different skills from those needed in the classroom. Hobbies require some commitment and a sense of seeing something through to an end result whether that be baking, learning a musical instrument or touch rugby.

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