

# mental health matters



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## AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Mental illness in youth, classroom accommodations and interventions; LPS School Social Worker DocuShare; Mental Health Matters, Doll PowerPoint “Mental Health and the Schools”

[www.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry](http://www.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry) and [www.macmh.org](http://www.macmh.org)

## UPCOMING STAFF DEVELOPMENT EVENTS

An Ounce of Prevention: Responding to Mental Health Needs of Students: Febr. 18.

Resilient Schools: Places Where All Children Succeed: March 4

“**Resilience** research gives us a scarce commodity these days: **Hope.**”  
-Dennis Saleebey

“**Resilience:** A self righting capacity for healthy growth and development even in the face of challenges.”  
-Dennis Saleebey

## Resilient Classrooms; Educators can make a difference

Experts have identified that both biology and the environment are contributors to mental illness. Biology, as well as a student’s past experiences and family situation are areas educators are not in a position to change. This article will focus on factors educators can impact through school and classroom climate, attitudes and relationships.

Remember the age old adage “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.”? Studies of chronically deprived children who have succeeded have shown it did not happen because they single-handedly overcame risk, but that those children benefited from the caring, sustenance and guidance of a community. Schools can be that kind of community.

Traditional research on school success identified instructional characteristics of successful classrooms. However, educators using even excellent instruction can fail to meet the needs of the growing number of vulnerable at-risk children in our schools. Resiliency research has identified the characteristics of classrooms and protective factors for students that interact to prompt school success. Teachers can focus on school and classroom climate and make a difference for all students.

## The Resilient Classroom

In The Resilient Classroom, Doll describes classrooms where all children can be successful academically, emotionally and socially. Doll’s construct is of a “two-stranded tether that binds students to their classroom community.” One strand emphasizes the characteristics of the students. The second strand emphasizes the caring and connected relationships among members of the classroom and community.

**Characteristics of students** Academic Efficacy, Behavioral Self-Control, Academic Self-determination.

**Characteristics of relationships** Effective teacher-student relationships, Effective peer relationships, Effective home-school relationships.

**Academic Efficacy;** Children that expect to be successful act in ways to be successful. It is the same concept of “self-fulfilling prophecy” that research has

shown regarding teacher expectations of students. Studies have shown that students can be trained to be more efficacious and their achievement improves as a result. Academic efficacy is also a group phenomenon. The stronger the beliefs that groups (teachers, classrooms, schools, districts) hold about their collective capabilities, the more they achieve.

**How does Academic Efficacy Support student success?** Positive efficacy beliefs most strongly impact basic cognitive skills, such as memory and attention. Class work improves once their memory and attention become more deliberate, and eventually these improvements will be reflected on standardized tests. Efficacious expectations of success enhance students’ use of self-regulation strategies, such as concentrating on the task, using proper procedures, managing time effectively, setting and committing to challenging goals and seeking assistance as necessary. Student effort, persistence and use of strategies are influenced by efficacy. Students with efficacy are less vulnerable in the face of failure, anxiety, stress, and depression. Efficacy can be a protective factor against anxiety and stress that some testing can arouse.

## How to encourage academic efficacy:

Involve students in;

- decisions about tasks/homework, deadlines, order of completion
- tracking their own progress toward goals
- self-evaluation
- setting appropriate, attainable goals

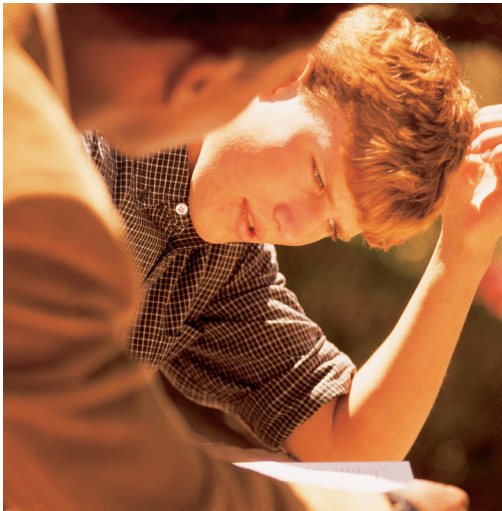
Give feedback quickly, accurately and detailed on;

- effort for early successes
- ability as skills develop
- small incremental gains tied to their own effort
- personal understanding vs. normative academic and social comparisons

- Avoid giving students with low efficacy the message that they could succeed if they only tried
- Teach students how to accept public recognition of success
- Make students’ successes immediately apparent
- Publically celebrate strategies that led to success
- Use peer models that demonstrate coping rather than mastery.
- Discourage classmates from making negative comments about each other
- Facilitate students to encourage each other

- Teach for and carefully monitor student understanding
- Avoid any shaming, embarrassing, or cajoling of students
- Provide support for effective note taking and confident test-taking strategies
- Provide opportunities to tackle challenging learning tasks with instructional supports that make success likely.
- Communicate (and facilitate among students) a belief that all students can be successful

The spring issue of Mental Health Matters will continue with the resiliency characteristics of students and relationships.



## A Naughty Kid or a Child with a Mental Health Disorder?

Children and adolescents demonstrating a persistent pattern of difficulty following the rules and behavior that violates fundamental social rules and/or the basic rights of others may be viewed as “bad kids” when in fact they may have a mental illness called a **Conduct Disorder**. These children’s behaviors significantly interfere with their daily lives in multiple settings. Many children with conduct disorders have coexisting conditions such as mood disorders, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse or thought disorders. It is essential that these children receive a comprehensive evaluation and early treatment with their families.

### Youth with conduct disorders may;

- Initiate aggression or bullying toward people,
- Show cruelty to animals, destruction of property, fire setting, deceitfulness or thefts
- Seriously violate rules
- Choose high risk behaviors
- Misperceive the motives of others as intentionally hostile
- See themselves as victims
- Have academic and social difficulties
- Lack respectful, positive social skills

Many factors may contribute to a child developing a conduct disorder, including brain damage, child abuse, genetic vulnerability, family interactions, neighborhood factors, school failure and traumatic life experiences. The cause is usually a complex interplay of societal, biological, family and interpersonal factors. Parents are often blamed; however, it is important to remember that a number of these children were born difficult to soothe, moody, irritable and stubborn. Some parents are unable to provide what their children need for a variety of reasons, have unintentionally rewarded negative manipulative behaviors or struggled with mental, emotional or physical challenges themselves.

Youth with conduct disorders can be very challenging and time consuming for school staff. They can be helped to behave more appropriately and move away from antisocial behaviors. Negative and coercive parenting are often the experience of these youth and the temptation is great for school staff to respond in kind. These students, however, will respond better to more positive behavioral supports.

### How to Work with Students with Conduct Disorders;

- Provide student with choices for completing tasks
- Talk through student’s alternatives and project likely consequences
- Identify student’s good efforts even if results are ultimately unsuccessful
- Reinforce student’s prosocial efforts
- Use “I need you to” rather than “You need to”
- Allow student time to demonstrate compliance
- Provide student with an opportunity to briefly describe his/her perception of events
- Have student visualize an appropriate response to a provocation
- Help student identify feelings of anger and anxiety and plan for appropriate resolution of these feelings
- Use active listening
- Help student identify and use appropriate, social acceptable methods of dealing with triggers and targets for angry or antisocial outbursts
- Ask student to draw the cycle of negative behavior and resulting consequences and list strategies for breaking the cycle
- Acknowledge the student’s frustration about not making his/her goal
- Collaborate on solutions to achieve his/her goal next time
- Have student verbalize an understanding of empathy and how it can reduce conflict
- Develop and role-play various methods of resolving conflict
- Acknowledge the student’s frustration about not making his/her goal
- Collaborate on solutions to achieve his/her goal next time
- Help student understand how behavior affects relationships with peers
- Identify limits of acceptable behavior in class and activities
- Prevent other students from reinforcing inappropriate student behaviors
- Engage staff in supporting acceptable behaviors and consistent responses
- Enlist friends to help student succeed
- Devise consistent cues or language to redirect student
- Allow student to fix problems rather than affix blame
- Address student’s distortions or lies apart from other students
- Privately examine how things would be different if the lie were true
- Involve student in reciprocal activities that encourage feelings of belonging and support self-worth
- Designate a time and place for working through conflicts
- Identify a time out area where student can regroup when disruptive or uncooperative ([www.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry](http://www.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry))
- Use interventions aimed at rewarding behaviors;
- Teach appropriate behaviors;
- Avoid power struggles
- Have clear behavioral expectations.
- Show an active interest in student’s ideas, interests and activities.
- Work together as a team with parents and mental health staff