

What is academic resilience?

YoungMinds, a charity that aims to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people, explains that academic resilience is the ability to achieve "good educational outcomes despite adversity".

Risk factors

The charity says that though all pupils will have to cope with some adversity and will benefit from efforts to promote academic resilience, some pupils face more difficulties than others. There are a number of 'risk factors' that can have a negative effect on pupils, including:

- Poverty
- Family instability
- Poor educational attainment
- Low self-esteem and self-confidence

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Protective factors

At the same time, there are protective factors that research suggests help to promote resilience in pupils. These may be characteristics of the child themselves, or elements of their family or community. Protective factors are summarised in a handout from YoungMinds and include:

- Good communication skills
- Experience of success and achievement
- At least one good parent-child relationship
- Clear, firm, consistent discipline
- A wide support network

[Which pupils are we talking about?, YoungMinds \(Adobe pdf file\)](https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1466/which-pupils.pdf)

[Resilience in children, the family and the community, YoungMinds \(Word docx file\)](https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1451/resilience-in-child-family-community-handout.docx)

Schools' role

Public Health England (PHE) and University College London Institute of Health Equity conducted research into building children's resilience in schools.

On page 16 it explains that schools have a statutory responsibility to promote pupils' wellbeing and are a key factor in building pupils' resilience in the face of adversity.

Actions schools take to promote resilience can:

- Address inequalities in wellbeing, experience and academic achievement among children
- Lead to better academic attainment for all pupils
- Support pupils' transitions to school, between schools, and to adult life

It recommends taking a whole-school approach to promoting resilience and integrating it into the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum.

[Building children and young people's resilience in schools, GOV.UK – PHE \(Adobe pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355766/Review2_Resilience_in_schools_health_inequalities.pdf)

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Supporting individual pupils

The PHE guidance explains on page 18 that schools can build resilience by focusing on individual pupils, promoting protective factors such as certain personality traits, intelligence, communication skills and sociability.

YoungMinds explains in the guidance linked to in section 1 above that 'high risk' pupils "are often those that are on the receiving end of behaviour management strategies, safeguarding frameworks, attendance strategies, or pastoral support."

However, it warns that the school may be less aware of 'medium risk' and 'lower risk' pupils and suggests that schools try to reduce the need for later intervention by thinking about how to build resilience across the whole school. This will help them identify and support individuals who have the potential to become 'high risk' later on.

General strategies

To promote resilience in individual pupils, pages 18-31 of the PHE guidance recommend focusing on:

- **Improving achievements:** evidence suggests pupils who do well academically, and/or have confidence in other activities such as sport, music and art, are more resilient in general. Supporting engagement in school, opportunities for play and teaching social and emotional skills can also promote resilience
- **Supporting transitions:** times of transition are a key time to build resilience, but can also pose a risk to it. Schools should focus on engaging and

supporting parents, sharing information and working with other organisations, and providing extra support for pupils who change schools regularly

- **Encouraging healthy behaviours:** resilience and risky health behaviours are closely inter-related. To improve resilience schools should put in place both individual and whole-school interventions or programmes aimed at reducing risky health behaviours, such as eating unhealthily, smoking, drinking, drug-taking and failing to exercise
- **Addressing interpersonal issues:** relationships with family, teachers and friends are key to promoting resilience. Schools should:
 - Promote parental engagement with the school and their child's education, help build parenting skills and identify parents who would benefit from further support
 - Create an environment that supports positive relationships between pupils and teachers, support staff to act as mentors and train staff to identify pupils whose mental health or wellbeing is at risk
 - Promote and facilitate supportive friendships between pupils, tackle bullying and promote awareness of the benefits and potential negative impact of online friendships and social networking