



PSDP—Resources and Tools: How well do you promote emotional resilience in your team?

Introduction

Resilience is a dynamic concept that constantly fluctuates for individuals and teams in social work. This tool is designed to encourage you to think about the concept of resilience, and to work with your supervisees in strengthening your collective capacities to encourage it.

As practice supervisor, you play a key role in creating a team culture that supports staff to share when they're feeling less resilient and to seek support without fear of judgement or blame.

This tool, therefore, highlights the importance of maintaining awareness of your own resilience and remaining alert to issues for your supervisees. At the end of the tool you'll have the opportunity to explore ways in which you can develop strategies in supervision that promote emotional resilience.

A brief overview of emotional resilience

Social work can be a stressful job and building and sustaining resilience is, therefore, an important element in social worker wellbeing. Resilience is described as the: ‘potential to exhibit resourcefulness by using available internal and external resources in response to different contextual and developmental challenges’ (Pooley and Cohen 2010, p34).

As the definition makes clear, resilience neither relies completely on the individual nor is it a static process within the individual as it interacts with other facets of their personal, professional and organisational lives. Additionally, strategies can be developed that build resilience individually and as a team.

What we know about resilience is that it is strongly affected by having emotional support and that family and friends are crucial in maintaining it, as well as connections to community networks. Resilient people have an internally-located sense of control and self-efficacy. Grant and Kinman (2014) suggest there are four further components to being resilient in social work:

emotional intelligence – the ability to understand your own and other people’s emotional reactions

reflective ability – the ability to think about the impact of situations on self / others

social skills – the skills to relate to other people

empathy – the ability to understand how other people may feel about their situation.

You can read a knowledge briefing by Grant and Kinman on ‘Promoting emotional resilience’ in this section of the website.

Recent work by Bunce (2019) has also found the following factors to be important in developing and maintaining emotional resilience:

autonomy – being trusted in decision-making

competence – being skilled and knowledgeable

relatedness – being able to make relationships and connections to other people (Bunce describes this as Self Determining Theory).

In section one of this tool, you are asked to think further about professional autonomy both in relation to yourself and with staff you supervise. This is followed by questions, linked with the concepts outlined above, which are designed to encourage your thinking about developing resilience in yourself and your supervisees.

In section two, you are invited to consider the ways in which you can facilitate discussion about emotional resilience with staff in supervision discussions. We have provided a grid for you to use with your supervisees to facilitate a discussion about what you are doing well and, based on their feedback, to identify areas where you might improve.

Section one

Task one

As a private activity, please spend a few minutes thinking about how you would answer the questions below. You might find it useful to set an alarm for 15 minutes and jot down your responses as you work through the questions, which focus on your experience of working autonomously as a practice supervisor.

What parts of your role do you enjoy?	What irks or frustrates you about your role? What would you change if you had a magic wand?	What elements of your work or your interactions with your team are you proud of? What do you do well?
How do you know you are doing a good job?	Where are you able to work autonomously as a practice supervisor?	When are you encouraged to make decisions independently?
What deadlines are you in charge of setting?	How much of your professional life is non-negotiable?	How much is your sense of resilience boosted or diminished by your experiences as a practice supervisor (and by the factors the questions ask you to focus on)?
We know that resilience is bolstered by connecting with a team – what influence do you have in promoting this in your team? Who supports you to sustain your resilience?		

Task two

Now please look at the questions you have just worked through and put yourself in the shoes of the staff you supervise. How might they answer these questions from their perspective?

Spend a few minutes considering this, then move on to the following questions:

What can you do to enable your staff to become more autonomous?

What are the barriers to doing this? You might want to consider personal (for both you and individual staff members), team-specific or cultural factors and organisational barriers in your reflections.

How do you promote self-efficacy in the staff you supervise? What responsibilities belong solely with them? What specific support might staff need from you arising from their lived experience (e.g. religion, class, culture, education)?

Can you identify any areas where you might give staff more autonomy? What do you think would change if you did?

Task three

Please read again the factors identified by Grant and Kinman (2014) and Bunce (2019), which are thought to promote emotional resilience:

emotional intelligence – the ability to understand your own and other people’s emotional reactions	reflective ability – the ability to think about the impact of situations on self / others	social skills – the skills to relate to other people
empathy – the ability to understand how other people may feel about their situation	autonomy – being trusted in decision-making	competence – being skilled and knowledgeable
relatedness – being able to form relationships and connections with other people.		

Please now work through the [stress management competency indicator tool](#) developed by the Health and Safety Executive.

Having done so, ask yourself the question: What can I do to promote emotional resilience in my team?

We suggest that you group your responses to this question into three areas:

1. What should I continue doing?	2. What should I stop doing?	3. What new things would I like to start doing to promote emotional resilience in my team?
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Section two

The ability to reflect is an important component of resilience and the obvious place to focus on this is by facilitating reflective discussions in supervision. The activity in this section of the tool encourages you to seek feedback from your supervisees about the role that supervision plays in promoting emotional resilience.

The table below asks you to think about how you promote emotional resilience with staff you supervise. In the first two columns, 'How well are you doing' and 'Feedback from your supervisee', you are encouraged to use a five-point scale as a guide. One being 'needs considerable improvement' and five being 'managing this well most of the time'.

The first column is for your own assessment, it will be interesting to see how closely that tallies with your supervisee's view (column two). Column three could include feedback from your supervisee about ideas that would help them, as well as your own thoughts. The final column is for you to set your own goals.

	How well are you doing this 1-5 (your perspective)	Feedback from your supervisee 1-5	What needs to improve?	How will you know you are getting better at this?
Identifying, challenging and supporting supervisees to recognise and change any negative self-talk	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	....................	....................
Ensuring staff have a) a manageable workload and b) capacity to manage time effectively	a) 1 2 3 4 5 b) 1 2 3 4 5	a) 1 2 3 4 5 b) 1 2 3 4 5	....................	....................

	How well are you doing this 1-5 (your perspective)	Feedback from your supervisee 1-5	What needs to improve?	How will you know you are getting better at this?
Being self-aware and calm in supervision – providing a safe base for supervisees	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	....................	....................
Helping supervisees to name their emotions as well as the impact of their experiences (this may need to take into account aspects of diversity and individual difference)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	........................................	........................................
Managing a safe space to explore the discomfort of not knowing what to do	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	.........................	.........................
Assisting supervisees to put forward their own ideas and plans about what happens next (developing autonomous practice)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	...................................	...................................

	How well are you doing this 1-5 (your perspective)	Feedback from your supervisee 1-5	What needs to improve?	How will you know you are getting better at this?
Noticing and looking to improve on success (strengths oriented)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	....................	....................
Offering developmental feedback to supervisees (building self-esteem / competence)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Summary of your learning

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Identify the first goal you are working on and give yourself a method for knowing when you will have succeeded

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There are a range of strategies that can supplement this work, which can take place in individual and group supervision and peer coaching or mentoring. One strategy that is particularly helpful for those involved in emotional labour is reflective journaling. Writing down and reflecting on how you feel builds your awareness and ability to identify your emotional responses to experiences, and take actions to better manage them (Grant and Kinman 2014).

You can access three other learning tools that focus on emotional resilience in this section of the website: 'Using visual metaphors to respond to stress and trauma', 'What motivates your team to keep going?' and 'Containing difficult emotions in supervision'.

Other ways you can use this tool

You might want to discuss the factors that promote resilience with your team, to get their views about how to promote autonomous, competent practice, and what responsibilities team members can take forward for supporting each other to maintain resilience.



We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.

References

Bunce L (2019) *Understanding resilience in social work students*. Totnes: Research in Practice. Available online: www.rip.org.uk/news-and-views/blog/understanding-resilience-in-social-work-students/

Grant L and Kinman G (2014) *Developing Resilience for social work practice*. London: Palgrave.

Pooley J and Cohen L (2010) *Resilience: A Definition in Context*. Melbourne: Australian Community Psychologist 22 30-37. Available online: www.researchgate.net/publication/215701599_Resilience_A_Definition_in_Context

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