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Dr Jane Foster. Picture: Supplied

## Students are becoming less emotionally resilient – we need a different approach

By: Dr Jane Foster in Health+Wellbeing, In The Classroom, Opinion, Top Stories April 11, 2024 0

Despite our efforts to foster social and emotional intelligence and build resilience through specialised programs, the decline of our students' emotional resilience persists.

We live in a world where adversity is inevitable, yet there's an underlying expectation that we, as educators, should pave a seamless, joyful path for every individual.

However, this does not reflect reality, and is ultimately unachievable.

Along with schools, society needs to shoulder some of the responsibility of teaching children how to be resilient.

The increasing lack of emotional resilience in students is leading to strained relationships, poor academic performance, and mental health concerns such as increased stress and anxiety. This is also affecting their decision-making abilities and social growth.

It is common for students to blame others or consider themselves as victims in difficult situations, which can lead to conflict and further mental health complications.

In relationships, misunderstandings often arise from failing to communicate emotions, passing judgment onto another, or attributing blame during arguments. Healthy communication is essential if we are to foster strong personal and interpersonal relationships.

Educating students on managing their emotions and taking accountability for their actions is important to avoid such issues. We certainly don't need another program; another quick fix. We need long-term cultural change.

***The need to be happy***

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For some reason, we have created an expectation that to be successful, you need to be on a smooth, happy emotional road. This puts enormous pressure on students, teachers and parents, as they attempt to attain the unattainable.

Social success does not mean always feeling happy and rarely facing challenges.

Social media can exacerbate this notion, and some individuals now feel that they're failing when life takes them down a rough road.

To maintain the expectation of a happy and smooth life, we feel the need to be picked up off the rough, challenging road and placed onto smooth, easygoing pavement. But, it's the rough roads that increase driving skills and build resilience.

Unfortunately, when a person is not left on the challenging road long enough to build resilience, when they do face challenges, they crash. This is happening earlier and earlier, and not just to children.

Instead of pretending to be happy, students should be able to express themselves more honestly, as all emotional roads have a purpose: rough roads build resilience, and smooth roads build health. We need to be able to paint them a realistic picture of the world, while at the same time giving them the tools to take responsibility.

### **How do we encourage students to stop blaming and take responsibility?**

Some students blame others for their problems and do not take responsibility for their emotions. This pervasive "blame game" mentality can involve those students looking to others to fix their problems, rather than taking responsibility for their feelings and circumstances. This often manifests as being "entitled". If things are going wrong or are difficult, they expect others to fix it.

Just like driving a car, the symbolic steering wheel represents responsibility and emotional control. You can choose your path, even when others around you are on rough roads. Acknowledging that everyone has ultimate control over their steering wheel requires a change of mindset and vocabulary. Using language such as "It's their fault I am angry" or "They made me angry" gives control of the emotional steering wheel to the other person, or circumstance. This leaves them on a rough road with no means of control. They become vulnerable victims.

To regain control, they retaliate: you said this to me, so I'm going to say this to you; you hit me, so I'm going to hit you. They may also retaliate within: "I'm hopeless", or "I'm useless". Instead of saying, "You make me angry", children can say "I am choosing to be angry", thus retaining control of your steering wheel. It may sound small, but the consequences can be profound.

Approaching emotional resilience through a linguistic lens is only one way to initiate cultural change. It is crucial to educate students and parents that life has ups and downs and that mastering the ability to take control in any situation can be liberating. When students learn to express their emotions without judgment, interact with others with greater empathy and understanding, and take responsibility for their response to people and circumstances, they can navigate life's challenges more realistically and effectively.

*Dr Jane Foster has been a teacher for over 40 years, both in Australia and abroad. After witnessing students and teachers struggle to manage their emotions and take responsibility for the way they feel, she began her [doctoral research on emotional resilience](#). Dr Foster teaches people how to shift their emotional management strategy from blaming others, to taking responsibility.*






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