

Embracing emotional resilience beyond "R U OK?"

By adopting the language of emotional resilience, schools can pave the way for students to express themselves without judgement or stigma.

The recent "R U OK Day" reminded us to check in on our students, colleagues, and the broader school community. Days like this are dedicated to mental health and wellbeing, encouraging conversations that can help someone through a tough time. However, we can take this day further in the education sector by focusing on the inner strength that helps us navigate school life's inevitable ups and downs. Enter emotional resilience – a vital skill that empowers educators, students, and staff to handle challenges gracefully and with strength.

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping a school's culture. Emotional Resilience (ER) gives educators the opportunity to introduce a new language to facilitate the expression and discussion of emotions, removing judgment and stigma. Instead of labelling experiences as simply "good" or "bad," we can adopt the ER language of "smooth" and "rough" roads.

Consider how much easier it is for a student to say, "I'm having a rough day," instead of, "I'm having a bad day." The former acknowledges the challenge without harsh judgment, opening a space for more constructive conversations. This shift in language can be especially beneficial in a school environment where students may struggle to articulate their feelings. As educators, embracing this language helps us model healthier ways to communicate emotions without judgement and stigma, fostering a culture of understanding and support within the school community.

In a school environment that often demands high performance and constant positivity, it's easy to feel like anything less than perfect is unacceptable. However, ER teaches us that being on any smooth or rough road is okay. The key is

understanding how to regain control when challenges arise.

For students, being "okay" doesn't mean they must be academically perfect or emotionally unshaken. It means recognising where they are emotionally and knowing they have the tools – and the support from educators and peers – to navigate their journey. By redefining "okay," we allow students and staff the space to experience the full range of emotions without guilt or shame, fostering a more compassionate school culture.

One of the most powerful lessons of emotional resilience is that it's okay not to be okay every day. In the education sector, there is often an unspoken expectation that students and staff must be constantly upbeat and in control. However, true resilience isn't about avoiding difficult emotions but knowing that you're "okay enough" to regain control when needed. Instead of striving for constant positivity, schools can focus on maintaining enough emotional strength to steer through life's rough patches.

This change in expectation is liberating; it allows students and staff to accept their emotional state as it is, no matter what road they are on, and trust in their ability to manage it. Normalising this approach, we help create a more supportive and understanding school environment.

It's important to extend these conversations beyond individual interactions and into the wider school community. Educators can engage with parents, caregivers, and fellow educators, fostering a shared understanding of emotional resilience while reinforcing the objective language of rough and smooth roads. Hosting workshops or discussions on



emotional resilience can empower everyone involved in a student's education to support their emotional wellbeing effectively.

By adopting the language of emotional resilience, schools can make it easier for students, staff, and parents to express and understand emotions. This shared language not only strengthens communication within the school but also builds a stronger, more resilient community that is better equipped to handle the challenges of school life.

We need more than just a moment to check in on others; it's an opportunity for the entire educational community to reflect on emotional resilience. By adopting the language of smooth and rough roads, we can change how we communicate about mental health within schools. This new language makes expressing and hearing emotions easier, paving the way for more meaningful conversations.

Redefining what it means to be "okay" and adjusting our expectations around emotional wellbeing are critical steps in building resilience within the educational sector. By embracing these concepts, we empower students, educators, and the wider school community to navigate life's challenges with greater control and confidence.

So, let's start a dialogue about emotional resilience in our schools and offer the support needed to keep moving forward – one road at a time. **EM**