

Shifting from blame to responsibility involves removing phrases such as 'You are making me angry'.

Cultivating emotional resilience in a crowded school environment



Dr Jane Foster

Image: Dr Jane Foster

In a world fraught with uncertainties, emotional resilience emerges as a critical asset for navigating the challenges of modern life both inside and outside the classroom.

An emotional resilience program should not add to the stress of teaching but instead help to alleviate daily pressures for staff, students and parents. It needs to be easily integrated into the school culture, providing a sustainable solution rather than just a temporary fix.

From my 45 years of experience as a teacher and researcher, I created ER, a powerful yet straightforward language designed to increase emotional resilience throughout the school community.

By involving staff, students, and parents, ER creates a common language that simplifies emotions and boosts emotional intelligence and resilience. Using the same language regularly leads to long-term changes in the brain, resulting in greater control over reactions to people and circumstances. Similar to a muscle, the more you use it, the stronger it becomes.

These four ER principles can be easily incorporated into everyday conversations, no matter where you are:

1. Instead of labelling emotions as good or bad, view them as rough or smooth

emotional roads. Teenagers often struggle to answer how they feel but find it easier to share if they are on a rough or smooth road. Being objective removes stigma and judgement, making those difficult conversations much easier. Just as roads serve different purposes, so do emotions. Rough emotions build resilience, while smooth emotions promote well-being, removing the need to lift everyone off a rough road. This makes recognising and accepting feelings easier without feeling pressured to always be on a smooth road.

2. The metaphorical steering wheel in ER represents emotional control and the power of choice in navigating life's challenges. As in a car, you should be the only one controlling your emotional steering wheel. This logical approach empowers students to regain control over their focus, emotions, and destination. Just because someone else is on a rough road doesn't mean you must join them, fostering resilience and responsibility.

3. Understanding that emotional resilience cannot be built when out of control on either road is crucial. Out-of-control scenarios activate the amygdala, the brain's fight, flight or freeze mode, disabling the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for thinking and creativity. It is only possible to discuss a situation once the involved parties have regained control and can access the thinking part of their brain. Therefore, regaining control is essential for having productive discussions and maintaining emotional wellbeing. Ways of regaining control will vary, so ER teaches how to work out the ones that will work for you.
4. Shifting from blame to responsibility involves removing phrases such as 'You are making me angry', which inadvertently hands your emotional steering wheel to others. Replace it with, 'I am choosing to feel angry in response to this situation'. This subtle alteration, substituting 'making' with 'choosing', helps reclaim ownership of your steering wheel rather than relinquishing

control to external factors. Assigning blame, such as 'It's your fault, it's the school's fault, it's my parents' fault' leaves you feeling like a victim, often leading to retaliation to regain control.

By embracing this verbal shift towards personal responsibility, students foster a sense of empowerment rather than perpetuating a victim mentality. This adjustment can profoundly influence their perspective and emotional wellbeing, equipping them with the tools to navigate challenges with resilience and control.

Here are some simple questions to help incorporate the language into your daily life:

- What road am I on?
- What road are they on?
- Are you in control?
- Are they in control?
- What helps me regain control?
- Am I being influenced by other's emotions?
- Who has control of my steering wheel?

ER helps students and the school community develop emotional resilience. Awareness of the emotional state of yourself

and others fosters emotional intelligence, while learning to regain control builds resilience. It shifts focus from dwelling on challenges to managing responses. Incorporating language changes into daily life builds new neural pathways, creating new thought patterns and removing judgment and blame. Recognising that navigating tough emotions is crucial for growth takes the pressure off always having to be on a smooth road. Taking responsibility for your emotions improves mental and emotional health and well-being, creating a positive relationship with yourself and others.

Some students may balk at or make fun of the language, but that's ok. When students are at the pointy end of life, schools have found that they revert to the language, as it helps them communicate their feelings without judgement, stigma or blame. It's certainly worth a try. **EM**

For more information, visit:
www.emotionalresiliencetraining.com.au

LEADING FROM WITHIN: Leadership Development Program for Middle Leaders

For more information call Helen on **0427 219 664**
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The Brown Collective's flagship program, 'Leading from Within' acknowledges the importance of middle leaders to a school's overall performance. The vast majority of middle leaders want to remain in these roles.

Leading from Within supports and enhances the formation of middle leaders through exploration of key aspects of their leadership such as leading teaching and learning, and leading teams. Every program is customised to ensure contextual relevance to the school, network, region or system that it is being delivered to.

The program is typically conducted over a nine-month period with a minimum of 20 participants. Successful completion of the Leading from Within program enables participants to make application for a 1 unit credit towards a Master's Degree offered by Australian Catholic University (ACU), Charles Sturt University (CSU) and Broken Bay Institute—The Australian Institute of Theological Education (BBI TAITE).

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