

Activities to Promote Resilience in School-Age Children

DCRC's School-Age Initiative focuses on promoting the social-emotional health and well-being of children in grades K-8th grade. As with academic learning standards, states and schools are increasingly being required to meet social and emotional learning (SEL) standards. In response, The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2009) was developed primarily to measure social-emotional skills in school-age children, in addition to promoting a strength-based approach to SEL.



This packet contains easy-to-use activities that focus on strengthening the following protective factors for youth:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Management
3. Social Awareness
4. Relationship Skills
5. Goal-Directed Behavior
6. Decision Making
7. Personal Responsibility
8. Optimistic Thinking

These activities were written for classrooms but can be adapted to out-of-school time and other settings.

Learn more about the DESSA at our website!

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Activities to Promote Resilience Through SELF-AWARENESS

***Self-Awareness** is defined as a child's realistic understanding of her/his strengths and limitations and consistent desire for self-improvement.*

Feelings Check-In

Conduct a feelings check-in 3-4 times a day to give students a chance to reflect on how they are feeling at that time and why. Explicitly having students recognize their feelings will help build their own understanding of Self-Awareness.

All About Me Collage

Use pictures, words, or symbols clipped from magazines that represent things students own, enjoy doing, places they've been, people they admire, or careers they desire. Students create a collage to represent themselves that can be displayed in the classroom.

Ranking Traits

Have students write 10 traits (positive or negative) on separate strips of paper about themselves. Ask students to rank the traits from what they feel is most important to least. After students have ranked, they can write a reflection about why these traits are important to who they are.



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Activities to Promote Resilience Through SELF-MANAGEMENT

***Self-Management** refers to a child's success in controlling his/her emotions and behaviors to complete a task or succeed in a new or challenging situation.*

Being Buggy

For primary grades, print off a picture of a bug. Older students should start by drawing a picture of a bug. Have the students write things that they do that may bother other students on the printed or drawn bug picture. Students may keep this in a folder to refer back to as necessary. The students may also make a pledge and plan to themselves that they will try to stop the behavior and what they will do to not do it anymore.

Checklist Systems

Some students have trouble completing tasks because they may be overwhelmed by too much information being presented at one time. Try breaking down tasks for these students in a step by step checklist. Primary grade students may need a pre-made checklist with each step needed to complete a task, but intermediate grades can be encouraged to write their own checklist as the teacher is giving directions for an assignment. This may help students manage their behavior and emotions because they can read and physically check off when a step is completed.



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Activities to Promote Resilience Through SOCIAL AWARENESS

***Social Awareness** refers to a child's ability to interact with others in a way that shows respect for their ideas or behaviors, recognizes her/his impact on them and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations.*



Random Acts of Kindness Poster

Create a Random Acts of Kindness Poster for your classroom. Explain to students that a random act of kindness refers to a positive action done for them or to them unexpectedly. If students experience a positive interaction with a classmate they can add it to the poster. Younger students can draw a picture and explain it to the class. At the end of each week read over the poster with the class and recognize these positive interactions between students!

Team-Based Games

When reviewing for a test, or practicing a new skill, turn questions into a game format. Students can be put in teams and instructed to work together in order to come up with an answer to the question or problem. Before beginning the game, explain to students that they will need to cooperate in order to figure out the final answer. You can also add a bonus point for the team that works together best on each question. This will ensure those positive interactions are being recognized as well as the academic content of the game. Award a team winner based on correct answers, as well as the team who has the most points for working effectively as a team. This is a great way for students to experience authentic relationship skill building.

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Activities to Promote Resilience Through RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Relationship Skills are defined as a child's consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others.

Compliment Hearts

Complimenting is a simple way to encourage students to form positive relationships as well as foster self-esteem. For the month of February, challenge students to compliment one of their peers every day. Older grades can be challenged to compliment a different person everyday to give students a chance to give and receive a compliment from someone they might not normally interact with. Students can write compliments on construction paper hearts. Place blank hearts somewhere in the classroom for students to access and set aside specific times for them to use them. After students write a compliment they can give it directly to their classmate, place it in a mailbox, or they can be collected and shared at the end of the week. At the end of the month discuss with the class how giving and receiving compliments felt. This can be continued all year with a different theme each month; shamrocks, flowers, etc.



Peer Scavenger Hunt

Sometimes students need a fresh start mid-way through the school year. Take time to reenergize relationships by having a peer scavenger hunt. Create a worksheet with a list of 10-15 statements, such as “lived in a different state” or “favorite flavor of ice cream is chocolate”, etc. Provide a copy of the sheet to every student in the class. Instruct students to go on a “scavenger hunt” around the classroom to find a classmate that fits each statement. This is a fun way to get students up and moving as well as discover some different information about their peers!

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Activities to Promote Resilience Through GOAL-DIRECTED BEHAVIOR

Goal-Directed Behavior is a child's initiative of, and persistence in completing, tasks of varying difficulty.



Praise

Hearing “good work” or “I can see you tried really hard on this test” can go a long way. Take time to pay attention when a student succeeds and praise them. This can be done verbally or in a note that is sent home so it can be shared with family members.

Encourage students to praise their peers when they see them working towards a goal and succeeding! Remember to make your praise specific, and focus on the effort, not just the outcome.

Marble Reward System

This strategy can be modified as you see fit for your classroom, but the general idea is that your class will decide on one goal that they want to try and meet in a given time frame. For example, as a class you and your students decide that everyone is going to work on completing their homework every night. Each day that this happens, a student can add a marble to a jar. Once the jar is full, celebrate students' successes. This activity can be done as a whole class, in small groups where each group comes up with a goal they are trying to reach, or for an individual student who seems to be struggling in a certain area.

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Activities to Promote Resilience Through DECISION MAKING

***Decision Making** is a child's approach to problem solving that involves learning from others and from her or his previous experiences, using her or his values to guide her or his actions and accepting responsibility for her or his decisions*

Give Students Options

An easy way to encourage Decision Making is to give them options for academic assignments. This can be as simple as offering a choice of different assignments that all meet the same standards (write a paper, or perform a skit) or giving choices over which problems to complete for homework. By providing options for completing assignments, students will learn how to identify which option is best for them, as well as feel the independence of making a choice.

Advice Columnist

This can be done using a guided reading, novel study, or independent reading book where a character is having a problem. In younger grades teachers might identify the problem for students. Older students can identify the problem a specific character is having and then ask students to write a letter giving that character advice on how to solve the problem and explain why their solution would work.

Role Model

Ask students to identify a positive role model in their lives. Then, have them write a letter to this person explaining why they are their role model. By identifying the positive traits that they want to uphold, students gain experience in understanding what they value and how this guides their actions.



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Activities to Promote Resilience Through PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

***Personal Responsibility** is a child's tendency to be careful and reliable in his/her actions and in contributing to group efforts.*



Jenga

Explain that the game Jenga is exactly like working in a group. You must work together like the wooden blocks to stay strong, as soon as you stop working with or pulling away from the group, just as you pull away the wooden blocks from the tower, it becomes weak and may fall apart. You may also write different emotions on the blocks, and each time they pull out a block they must discuss a time they felt that emotion.

The Bag

One student from the class is given a brown paper bag with an object inside. That student, Student A, is instructed to look inside and remain completely quiet about what he/she saw. Remaining students will ask and record a series of self-produced YES/NO questions to Student A. Student A may only give a thumbs up (YES) or thumbs down (NO) to answer the questions. The goal is for the group of students to guess what is in the bag based Student A's clues.

Goal Setting

Give students a blank piece of paper. Ask students to write a goal they have, how can they achieve their goal, and one strength and one weakness they will need to overcome to reach that goal.

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Activities to Promote Resilience Through OPTIMISTIC THINKING

***Optimistic Thinking** is a student's attitude of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking regarding herself/himself and her/his life situations in the past, present and future.*

Positive Self-Phrases

Talk to students about how we all have things that we are good at and things we aren't as good at and that's what makes us unique! Ask students to reflect on one academic and one behavioral trait they really like about themselves. On a small piece of paper have students write these traits and tape them to their desk. When they are feeling defeated or unsure of themselves remind them to look at their positive self-phrases to help themselves think more positively about their strengths.

Optimistic Advice Collage

This can be a helpful activity to do prior to PSSA's. Discuss with students that sometimes when we feel stressed or overwhelmed we say phrases in our head to keep ourselves going and to think positively. Ask students to think about a phrase they've said to themselves or heard somebody else say, (such as "Keep trying!" "You can do it!" "Believe in yourself!") and write it on a sheet of paper. Allow students to be creative and use markers and other supplies to make their phrase decorative. After each student has created a phrase they can put them together on a large poster board to create an Optimistic Advice Collage. The collage can be displayed in the classroom for students to see daily!



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