

How to Build Resilience in Turbulent Times

Andrew Fuller
Clinical Psychologist, Author and Speaker



Turbulent times call for resilient minds. From COVID-19, the Ukraine invasion and rampant flooding, it's already been a tough start to 2022. As resilience is being tested, young people in our care are looking for support and guidance. This is a brief overview of ideas for how to talk to young people and each other about these times.

Little Kids

What we should look out for

At every age, we want to keep an eye on how people usually are and whether any changes seem to be occurring in multiple settings.

For example, a child who often shows some anxiety when their parents leave them at school or kindergarten but settles soon after their departure is less concerning than one who has a sudden increase in anxiety or fear and shows this when left at kindergarten or school and also when they go shopping with their parents.

- Clinginess
- Nightmares
- Stranger danger
- Nervy behaviours – rumbling tummies, unusual soreness, or heightened sensitivity.

What we can say

- Keep it simple. Fewer words are usually better.
- "Sometimes a person gets bossy and wants to tell others what to do"
- "Sometimes countries get bossy, and we need to help them learn a different way of doing things"
- "Our weather is changing, and we need to plan to make everyone safe"

What we can do

- Talk about how we can look out for and care for others.
- How we can be good friends
- What do we do when we feel angry – sort it out.

Middle Primary

What we should look out for

- School reluctance
- Wariness about some peers
- Odd theories and interpretations.

This age group can be susceptible to some unlikely conspiracy ideas. If this occurs, rather than disputing, do some research on the topic with them.

What we can say

- "I am someone you can talk to about this"
- "What have you heard or seen?"
- "There is a war, but it is a long way away and we will be safe"
- "We need to make sure our country is safe in the future"

What we can do

Show young people the distance between Ukraine and Australia (almost 12,000 km) on a map or even better on a globe of the world.

Walk with them for 1 km. Then ask them to imagine travelling for 12,000 km.

Ask them to work out if we could drive at 100 kms per hour how long would it take us to drive 12,000 km.

Upper Primary

What we should look out for

- We're all going to die – dooming and glooming
- Panic
- Feeling overly responsible

What we can say

- "How are you feeling?"
- Reassure (e.g. "I am not going to let you be hurt, we will stay safe")
- Don't be dismissive of fears or drama (even if they do seem over the top)
- Talk in terms of probabilities (frequency of weather events, the likelihood of Australia being directly involved etc.)

What we can do

- Look at forms of action.

Teens

What we should look out for

- Throwing in the towel – some teenagers can dramatically take a 'the sky is falling' attitude to adversity.
- Increased grumpiness
- Responses range from drama +++ to indifference

What we can say

- Ask them what they know.
- Ask them to research it themselves (generally, teens believe the information they access themselves more than they trust the information provided by others.
- If you can, share research findings together.

What we can do

- Show children the outpouring of help and aid sent to people in Queensland and New South Wales in the midst of the floods and the support offered.
- This is an opportunity to contribute to others. Ask teens to consider what they think would make a difference.
- Talk about what others are doing. For example, the support people provide for each other in flood-affected areas.
- Australia is accustomed to overcoming challenges – ask them what they think we could contribute to the world.

Ourselves

We also need to look out for changes in each other as adults. After everything that has happened, parents and educators can lose some of their usual sparkle. We need to connect, protect and respect one another.

What we should look out for

- People isolating themselves more than usual – either physically, emotionally or verbally.
- An increased rate of illness, despair or hopelessness.
- A tendency to furiously look after everyone else at their own expense.

What we can say

- "You matter to me"
- "I'm feeling worried about you"
- "How can I help?" If they say, they don't need help, say, "Ok so how can I help anyway?"

What we can do

- Check-ins
- Having a message that 'wellbeing is for everyone'.
- Developing a plan to contribute as a collective group.
- Teach people the RESOLVE method of conflict

Where to get help

- Headspace (ages 12-25) 1800 650 890
- Kids helpline (ages 5-25) 1800 551 800
- Lifeline (24/7 crisis support) 13 11 14
- BeyondBlue (mental health support) 1300 224 636
- Butterfly helpline (eating disorders) 1800 334 673
- Suicide Call Back service (all ages) 1300 659 467
- Mensline (24/7 counselling for men) 1300 789 978

theparentswebsite.com.au