

PROMOTING RESILIENCE

WORDS AND DIAGRAMMS BY BECCI PEARSON

WHAT IS RESILIENCE, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

It is often said that outdoor adventure programmes build resilience. However, resilience means different things to different people and our understanding of resilience is continuously changing. I like the definition which states that resilience is the ability to adapt to, deal with, and learn from stress and challenges; it involves using personal strengths, and resources from one's life and surroundings, to recover and bounce back from difficulties¹. How people experience resilience can change throughout their lives and people can't control everything that affects their resilience (for example, government policies, the environment, societal inequalities, etc.). However, there are things which people do have control or influence over which can influence their resilience. Although we can't ignore inequalities and injustice, it is important to empower people and give them some control over their mental health and well-being by providing opportunities to build their resources to support resilience.

Internal and external resilience resources can help people be resilient. *Figure 1* (over the page) shows examples of resources, considered important for resilience, which can be supported through outdoor adventure activities.

My PhD research is focused on promoting resilience in young women through outdoor adventure activities. I chose to concentrate on young women (aged 15-24-years) because UK research shows that they are more likely to have mental health disorders and lower well-being than young men and girls^{2,3}. I spoke with young women, and outdoor instructors, about what young women need and want from an outdoor adventure activity programme, what would be most beneficial, and how this might be facilitated in the real world. The remainder of this article will focus

on the findings. Although this research focused on young women, I urge readers to consider whether these findings might also apply to other groups of people, and how these might also be beneficial for other outcomes too, not only resilience.

THE THREE C'S

Choice, Connection, and Customisation should be the foundations of practice where resilience is a desired outcome.

Choice

When young women have choice, control and freedom, they are more likely to be motivated, internalise the experience, and find meaning⁴. It can also lead to participants using higher level thinking skills and having a more positive experience^{5,6}. The choices made must be genuine. This means that we must think carefully about how choices are presented and support young women to make the best choices for them by being clear and providing scaffolding experiences.

Connection

Connection with one's peers, supporters, facilitators, nature, and oneself, is vital to a beneficial experience. Connections promote growth and resilience, particularly in girls and women⁷. Therefore, when providing outdoor adventure experiences, we should intentionally encourage connection and foster relationships. This can help people find affinity, belonging, and acceptance; and grow their resilience by buffering the negative impacts of stress and challenge.

Customisation

Outdoor adventure activity programmes should not take a one-size-fits-all approach. We need to consider individual needs and wants, the participants' contexts, and group dynamics. By thinking carefully about how the programme can be tailored, and collaborating with

participants, we can provide representative experiences which are most likely to be beneficial for transferable resilience⁸.

THE 10 KEY INGREDIENTS

My research suggests that there are 10 key ingredients which help promote resilience in young women through outdoor adventure activities. These align with the three C's, giving more tangible examples of how these apply to practice. The 10 key ingredients are:

- 1 Appropriate challenge.** We should try to provide self-determined, experiences of challenge, which are built on previous experiences, completed within a supportive group, and result in a sense of achievement.
- 2 Psychological and physical safety.** Feelings of safety are important for successful engagement and positive outcomes. We should foster new social connections and feelings of belonging, to promote psychological safety. All-women groups are likely to increase feelings of psychological and physical safety, for young women who require more relational resilience resources (e.g., more positive friendships, mentors).
- 3 Reflection.** Young women often need to understand themselves better and be supported to understand how learning can be applied beyond the context in which it was learnt. We can facilitate this through structured, intentional reflection.
- 4 Accessibility and inclusivity.** Collaboration and creative communication, adaptability, provision of equipment and facilities, transport, and the support of the wider systems is required to address barriers to access and promote inclusivity. We should do what we can to break down barriers and improve access.
- 5 Immersion in nature.** We should give

CHOICE	CONNECTION	CUSTOMISATION
Let them choose their own challenge from three suitable options (appropriate challenge).	Have a celebration session which they can invite family and friends to (supportive others).	Ask them what they will need if they become stressed or overwhelmed and have a system so you can respond appropriately (flexibility).
Encourage ideas to be expressed and try to action them where possible (motivation).	Spend time at the beginning playing games which let participants get acquainted without pressure or risk (psychological and physical safety).	Align skills and capabilities, the environment, and the activity effectively and be open to changing your approach/the activity/the environment if you find these are not well matched (understanding interacting systems).
	Set aside time during or after the activity for solo or group reflection and provide prompts (reflection).	Delivering shorter sessions initially for young women who are new to outdoor activities and express some anxiety around full day sessions (alignment/openness)
	Have time for free exploration in nature and encourage taking photos of inspiring/interesting things they come across (nature immersion).	Making sure there are multiple sizes of equipment/clothing for participant use (accessibility/inclusivity).

TABLE 1. Putting the three C's and 10 ingredients into practice.

young women the opportunity to discover, and build on, their natural ability to adapt and be resilient through loosely structured activities which immerse them in the natural world.

6 Supportive others. We should try to include the support networks of participants where appropriate. Young women value support from others and are open to help from those who keep them safe and offer guidance, providing this doesn't take away their independence and they feel respected.

7 Motivation. If we give ways to build a sense of ownership and freedom, prioritise enjoyment and fun, and communicate understanding, young women will feel more motivated to participate.

8 Alignment and/or openness. Delivery preferences and requirements of young women may be misaligned to the traditional delivery methods, the design of outdoor programmes, and our perceptions of what is practical and beneficial to deliver. Therefore, we need to collaborate with youth and be open to new ideas and perspectives.

9 Flexibility. We need to be flexible, adaptable, and responsive to individual needs to improve the consistency of outcomes.

10 Understanding interacting systems. The context, the person, the environment, and the activities all affect each other. They are connected and will shape the young woman's experience and outcomes. Our practice should reflect this, and we should think about how one part of the system may impact another.

The three C's and 10 ingredients have



FIGURE 1. Examples of resilience resources.



FIGURE 2. The Firebird model.

been used to build the 'Firebird Model' (see Figure 2). Table 1 illustrates how this might look in practice.

CONCLUSION

Cultivating resilience by helping people build their internal and external resources is vitally important. By weaving the three C's and 10 ingredients into practice, we can design and facilitate experiences which will be beneficial for the resilience of young women. These principles are also likely to be beneficial for young people more generally and could have other positive outcomes for our participants. Outdoor adventure activities are a powerful tool for resilience building and growth. Reflecting on how to design and facilitate programmes and activities in the most effective way possible is the key to more consistent outcomes. This will help provide participants with the most beneficial and positive experience possible.

The ideas and model contained within



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