



Resilient educators cultivate positive mindsets

BY LINDSAY PRENDERGAST AND PIPER LEE

Educators face complex and challenging experiences daily that may cause stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. What is the difference between those who become overwhelmed by the difficulties and experience burnout and those who navigate problems with confidence and remain steadfastly optimistic no matter their environment? Research suggests that positive psychology — the study of what’s right with people rather than what’s wrong — may hold the answers (Luthans et al., 2015). By intentionally cultivating specific mindsets, educators can learn to withstand the external influences surrounding them that kill joy.

In our book, *Habits of Resilient Educators: Strategies for Thriving During Times of Anxiety, Doubt, and Constant Change*, we explain how to apply

four mindsets that help people thrive in any environment: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. While each of us possesses these mindsets to varying degrees, they vary and change depending on different experiences and throughout our careers. In the book, we champion how educators can intentionally develop and practice these skills and “strive to master the art of thriving amidst any environment or setting” (Prendergast & Lee, 2024).

Habits of Resilient Educators was chosen to be a Learning Forward Book Club selection, and in May, we met with Learning Forward comprehensive members to explore and practice resilience-building strategies and tools from the book, which is available at learningforward.org/store. Adapted from the book, the tools on the following pages can be used to develop

a bank of practical strategies for cultivating the four mindsets to help you thrive in any environment.

REFERENCES

Luthans, F., Youssef, C.M., & Avolio, B.J. (2015). *Psychological capital and beyond*. Oxford University Press.

Prendergast, L. & Lee, P. (2024). *Habits of resilient educators: Strategies for thriving during times of anxiety, doubt, and constant change*. Corwin.

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DEVELOP HERO MINDSETS

Read the descriptions of the four mindsets and tips on how to develop them. Jot down ideas for ways you might want to rekindle or emphasize it in your work.

Mindset	Description	How to develop it	Strategies I want to try
Hope	A thinking state in which an individual is capable of setting realistic but challenging goals and expectations, and then reaching for those goals through self-directed determination, energy, and perception of internalized control	Set goals toward something (tasks, emotional states, etc.). Identify your motivation sources and develop plans to engage with them more consistently.	
Efficacy	The level of confidence teachers have in their ability to guide students to success	Before attempting something new or challenging, focus on identifying past successes or mastery experiences. In the case of negative experiences, practice reframing their outcome as something positive.	
Resilience	An individual's capacity to respond to and even prosper from negative or positive stressful circumstances	Try new strategies to solve a problem. Improvise! Journal around the experience and the outcome. Practice identifying your purpose and revisit your purpose whenever faced with a challenge or obstacle.	
Optimism	An optimist attributes positive events to personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and interprets negative events in terms of external, temporary, and situation-specific factors	Collect some data. Reflect on your response patterns to different situations at work. (To what do you attribute events and interactions occurring?) Practice strategically shifting your response in future experiences and reflect on the change outcome.	

Source: Adapted from Prendergast & Lee, 2024, pp. 167-168.

TOOLS

YOUR HERO IN ACTION

Practice applying HERO mindsets to an experience you have had as an educator. Write or discuss a recent event or interaction that may have caused you to feel increased stress, pressure, anxiety, or frustration. Then generate new mindsets about how you might approach the situation, shift your thinking about it, or react in a manner likely to reframe your thinking toward realistic optimism.

Describe the situation	
Apply HOPE	I am hopeful that the outcome of this situation will lead to the positive change of ...
Apply EFFICACY	While this is a difficult or challenging experience, I know I possess skills to navigate it, including ...
Apply RESILIENCE	Even though I'm unhappy or uncomfortable in this situation or I find it challenging, I will focus my actions on demonstrating my personal values and stay true to myself. Some values guiding my actions include the following:
Apply OPTIMISM	This challenging situation isn't easy. However, I will gather some data to determine if it's as bad as it seems. Reflecting on the data that I gathered, I learned ...
Source: Adapted from Prendergast & Lee, 2024, p. 169.	