

Coping and the Challenge of Resilience

Erica Frydenberg

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Erica Frydenberg is a prolific author with 15+ books, 26 chapters in books, 88 refereed journal articles and a set of Coping Scales. She also has an impressive record as mentor to a brace of postgraduate authors. Her resilience and sustainability in the research arena are notable, and her high standing in the profession is acknowledged by Michael Eysenck in the preface to this text. In this new work, Dr Frydenberg paces the reader through the life stages, as she tells the story of coping theory and research, through the contribution of a range of psychological approaches, to explain and promote the power of the construct of coping, which can be measured and has been well tested.

In this context, how does resilience stand up to scrutiny? Dr Frydenberg contends that resilience is the current ‘magic bullet’ that everyone wants. This capacity to bounce back under adversity is an attractive 21st-century attribute and fits into a number of popular approaches to wellbeing in current literature. With a deft pen, the author takes the reader through concepts of positive psychology, grit, hardiness, mindsets, mastery and emotional regulation, to draw the conclusion that all of these approaches reflect the essential processes of coping. Coping is a set of thoughts, feelings and actions; it is measurable, can be operationalised, addresses the influence of individual and contextual factors, and can be enhanced by skills teaching.

Resilience, on the other hand, is more difficult to define, not readily quantified, and does not offer specific skills that can be taught. Although it has been extensively discussed and researched, it remains dependent on the processes of coping or adapting to events faced by the actor.

Hence Dr Frydenberg’s position is that resilience and coping are essential buddies: to respond to adversity with resilience the individual needs coping resources. Coping is the process, and by using coping skills and resources, the result or outcome is resilience, that is, the capacity to deal with the difficulty and utilise strategies to adjust and respond.

The reader is then taken through the story of coping, its conceptualisation, its measurement and its application throughout the lifespan. In reporting on a substantial set of studies investigating the teaching of positive coping skills and the impact of reducing negative coping, the text presents an impressive story of the research on coping skills and the benefits that come with skilled adaptation to the obstacles that arise in daily life. With resilience programs gaining considerable attention and popularity, this text invites a reconsideration of what resilience means and what can be taught in these programs. It also encourages a sharper understanding of the specific processes that are to be encouraged. This is highlighted in the review of research conducted with high achievers and the capacity they show to deal with adverse conditions and setbacks.

This text throws new light on the ‘challenge of resilience’. The challenge is to be clear about what it means to ‘bounce back’ in the face of risks or in the aftermath of adversity, and the challenge to clarify the components of ‘bounce back’ so that there can be consistency in training that builds adaptability that can support individuals in difficult times. Dr Frydenberg points the reader of this text to the substantial support there is for considering coping as the training kit and resilience as the result. *Coping and the Challenge of Resilience* provides an excellent update of these concepts with a comprehensive summary of the field of coping and resilience to date.

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Overcoming School Refusal: A Practical Guide For Teachers, Counsellors, Caseworkers and Parents

Joanne Carfi

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The students who attend school the least are often those who school psychologists, pastoral care and other wellbeing staff spend the most time on. Due to a lack of consensus on a definition of school refusal, prevalence data is hard to find; however, it has been estimated (e.g., Kearney, 2008) that the rate of school refusal is similar to that of depression and anxiety, and other emotional and behavioural disorders. The defining characteristic of school refusal, as opposed to truancy or parental withdrawal, is the anxiety and distress associated with the prospect of attending school, which tends to increase with the amount of time a student has been absent. One of the major difficulties with overcoming school refusal is that often by the time the student’s absences have been recognised as school refusal, the avoidance behaviour has become entrenched with inadvertent reinforcement.

The stress caused by school refusal on the student, their family and the school is acknowledged by Joanne Carfi in her book *Overcoming School Refusal: A Practical Guide for Teachers, Counsellors, Caseworkers and Parents*. Using straightforward language, the book is directed to parents as much as school staff and other professionals, offering context for the management strategies we as psychologists often suggest. While identifying factors such as bullying, conflict, learning difficulties and developmental disorders that can underpin the anxiety that leads to school refusal, Carfi focuses on strategies to enhance the student’s ability to manage anxiety. The exception to this is in discussing school refusal in students with an ASD diagnosis, where the strategies largely relate to modifying and managing environmental factors. Schools are good at making environmental adjustments and accommodations, but there may be less confidence when it comes to the mental health aspects of school refusal. Grounded in neuropsychology, Carfi outlines simple relaxation strategies, which are recommended as preventative, not just reactive, measures. Mindfulness is a strong feature of Carfi’s