Rubber band kids: KidsMatter and resilience

What is resilience?
Resilience refers to a child’s ability to overcome or bounce back from anything that they find challenging, including events that seem relatively minor to others. As such, resilience shares a close relationship with mental health because being able to bounce back from challenges or adversity is a significant protective factor that supports children’s mental health.

How do children develop resilience?

What messages might we accidentally send children by telling them to be resilient?
Resilience is an attractive idea for any professional working with children. Some children face so much hardship that caring adults in their lives are unable to protect them from or control. The great hope is that by helping children develop resilience we can ensure good mental health outcomes regardless of a child’s background and experiences in life.

However, we need to balance our desire for resilience with cautiousness about the messages we may be sending to children in the process.
Children have a fundamental need to express the range of emotions that arise through the process of growing up – and to have these emotions validated by the people around them (eg “It’s okay to feel upset when something bad happens”). Telling children to be brave and resilient may inadvertently teach them that emotions such as sadness, anger and worry should be suppressed in order to meet the approval of adults. We know that the suppression of emotions is detrimental to positive mental health and wellbeing.

Children may also get the message that resilience is within their personal control, so when they aren’t coping believe that they only have themselves to blame. We know that children are most resilient when they receive support from caring adults.

How do KidsMatter Primary schools help students build resilience?
The KidsMatter Primary framework helps students to build resilience by bringing together and working with all of the key people in a child’s life: their family, their peers, school staff and other members of the school community. The four components of KidsMatter Primary support the development of protective factors and developmental pathways that are strongly related to resilience.

Other resources
KidsMatter Primary Managing life’s ups and downs information sheet