Supporting Student Resilience
Guidance Counsellor Day – November 27, 2019

Chad Jankowski & Julia Smeed
Introductions

◉ Chad Jankowski (he/him) – Health Education Coordinator, Health & Wellness, Uof T

◉ Julia Smeed (she/her) – Innovation Hub Lead, Division of Student Life, Uof T
What is the Innovation Hub?

Student-led initiative in the Division of Student Life

Supports development of innovative strategies for improving the student experience

Collaborates with partners in the UofT community (e.g. internal divisions, departments & student organizations)

Designing with students through empathy-based research
Domains of Innovation

Five domains of innovation

Co-created through community consultation during 1st year

Vision of change behind our work: fulfilling aspirational goals

We support community partners whose programming & planning falls within the domains
Introductions
U of T Student Life Resiliency Project

- A 2-year Project - now extended for years 3-5
- Tasked with developing a toolkit: a definition, framework, and curricula to foster academic and psychological resiliency
- Staff training & Student programming
- A web resource to house the toolkit
- Aligned with our institutional Mental Health Strategy & Framework: mentalhealth.utoronto.ca
Resiliency Definition

“A developed capacity, one that is a common and ordinary human adaptive process. It is the capacity to overcome adversity and the ability to adapt and learn from challenges; it is an individual capacity that exists in relation to stress or adversity and it is the capacity of a community to alleviate individual and/or systemic stress and adversity.”
Resiliency Six-Factor Framework

- Harnessing Strengths
- Self-Compassion
- Grit & Growth Mindset
- Optimism & Control
- Community & Belonging
- Care & Support
Harnessing Own Strengths

- Actively develop character strengths as protective factors for responding to stress, adversity, or failure.
- Resilient people reflect on the behavioural, emotional, and social resources they have, and understand how to best apply them across different situations.
- Unpacking our own narratives → identify own “arc of resilience”
Cultivating Self-Compassion

- An alternative to self-esteem; Counters self-criticism and perfectionism

- Emotion-focused coping strategies
  - E.g., Be Kind To Yourself (Kristen Neff)
    - Acknowledge suffering +
    - Recognize common humanity +
    - Mindfully practice self-kindness

- Treat yourself like you would treat a friend
Grit & Growth Mindset

- Intelligence alone does not equal success – passion and perseverance are key
- Focus on deliberate practice: doing the difficult, rewarding work, and pushing past the struggle (includes help-seeking)
- Reframe challenges & failure as learning opportunities
What Kind of Mindset Do You Have?

**Growth Mindset**
- I can learn anything I want to.
- When I'm frustrated, I persevere.
- I want to challenge myself.
- When I fail, I learn.
- Tell me I try hard.
- If you succeed, I'm inspired.
- My effort and attitude determine everything.

**Fixed Mindset**
- I'm either good at it, or I'm not.
- When I'm frustrated, I give up.
- I don't like to be challenged.
- When I fail, I'm no good.
- Tell me I'm smart.
- If you succeed, I feel threatened.
- My abilities determine everything.

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Thinking Habits: Optimism & Control

- Optimism is a learned behaviour (as is helplessness and pessimism)

- Un-learn unhelpful habits & thinking traps
  - Fortune telling
  - Catastrophizing (overestimating danger)
  - Mindreading
  - Negative feedback

- 3 explanatory styles of learned optimism:
  - Permanence + Pervasiveness + Personalization
Community & Belonging

- Many challenges cannot be tackled alone; Resilience is a community trait as well as an individual trait.
- Social support networks & sense of belonging are protective factors (buffers) against stress.
- Involvement is a means by which we can develop personal connections, foster relatedness, and find a sense of belonging.
Experiencing Care & Support

- Caring relationships provide an objective lens through which to acknowledge strengths, and support learning and growth.
- Affirming relationships encourage us to set high (but realistic) expectations & to bounce back from failure.
- Being cared for and supported allows us to learn by taking safer risks.
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Operationalizing within the Student Context

- Theme student-facing initiatives around resilience
  e.g., Student Leadership Retreat, Student Staff Summit
- Incorporate curriculum and tools into student programming
  e.g., students at academic risk, mindfulness workshop series
- Website & train-the-trainer curriculum... eventually
- Exploring student experiences via ethnographic study with campus partner (Innovation Hub)
  themes: managing the self, self-advocacy, involvement as resilience
Stories of Resilience
It was the first time in my limited experience where I realized that failure is absolutely possible.
“I said to myself: what do you do in the face of difficulty? You tough it out. You do whatever is necessary to survive the year.”
Quotations from Students

“I don’t really discuss my accessibility with friends or anything, I just don’t bring it up, but I told him (a friend) and he was like “are you dying” and I said no, and he just went on like, “you’re dying, you’re dying oh my god.” So, um, that didn’t go well and I don’t really tell anyone about my accessibility issue anymore.”
“Even if in the end I come out with nothing at UofT, I can say I did something – a small publication, poster, I can hold with me regardless of whether or not I complete this (my degree). I can say I got this”
“Um... faith, I guess? Faith that I can get through this, believing I can get through this. To be honest that’s really it.”
Data Insights
Operationalizing within the Staff Context

- Introduce framework to diverse stakeholders via professional development opportunities
- Staff training at onboarding  
  *e.g.*, Accessibility Advisor team, Student Life student staff
- Symposium on Resilience... eventually
- Program Design Institute
- Service Design Institute
Advising Resiliency

- ...is not about “pulling oneself up by their bootstraps”
- ACAD: a conceptual framework (Bowers-Bhat) and strategy for supporting someone in responding, in a resilient way, to a challenge or problem

Acknowledging
Coping
Adapting
Designing for Change
Acknowledging

- Helping a student recognize what they’re experiencing and why it’s important to them
- Recognizing the “suffering” – the difficulties and pain of stress, adversity, and change – before solving problems
- Practicing self-compassion
Coping


- Coping can be both adaptive (e.g., physical activity, peer support) as well as maladaptive (e.g., Netflix binge, substance misuse, denial)

- Situationally-dependent
Adapting

- Deciding what behaviours or mindsets can shift to address the challenge

- A problem- and solution-focused strategy for responding to new or changing situations
Designing (for Change)

- Imagining and implementing changes within their environment or community to mitigate or eliminate challenges

- Making positive change and moving beyond acknowledging, coping and adapting
ACAD:

- Acknowledge
- Cope
- Adapt
- Design

Actions / Next Steps

Advocate – Follow-Up – Refer
### Defining & Coaching Resilience (ACAD): Case Study Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Acknowledge</th>
<th>Recognizing the suffering — acknowledging the uncomfortable steps, adversity, and change</th>
<th>Believing in your solutions and your unique experiences</th>
<th>Coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can you acknowledge the experience? How can you validate or name emotions?</td>
<td>• How might you reflect on the suffering?</td>
<td>• How do you discover current coping strategies?</td>
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### Coping

- What questions do you ask to prompt modified behaviour?
- What resources (both internal and external) might you recommend the student access? Think about the 6 boxes (strengths, self-composition, optimism, self-efficacy, mindset, community, and care).
- What coping skills does the student have (e.g. relaxation, problem-solving, etc.)?
- How might you follow up on the where might you reflect on the suffering?
Q: How might you apply this within your context?
Questions?
Thank you!

Want to get in touch?

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