

# Building Student Skills that Lead to Resilience and Academic Tenacity

## Webinar 3: Learn to Think Like an Optimist

Presented by:  
Amy Moritz, M.Ed.  
Center for Schools and Communities

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Understand the concepts of pessimism and optimism and how they affect resiliency
- Learn basic cognitive techniques that can challenge negative thoughts and produce optimism over time

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What is Academic Tenacity?

“...academic tenacity is about working hard, and working smart, for a long time. More specifically, academic tenacity is about the mindset and skills that allow students to:

- look beyond short-term concerns to longer-term goals, and
- withstand challenges and setbacks to persevere toward these goals.”

(Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2014)

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## How Do We Promote Academic Tenacity?

- PART I:
  - Mindset
- PART II:
  - Grit and Self-Control
    - Goal setting
    - Mental contrasting with implementation intentions
    - Deliberate practice
- PART III:
  - Optimism and Resilience

(as cited in D. S. Yeager & Walton, 2011)

4

---

---

---

---

---

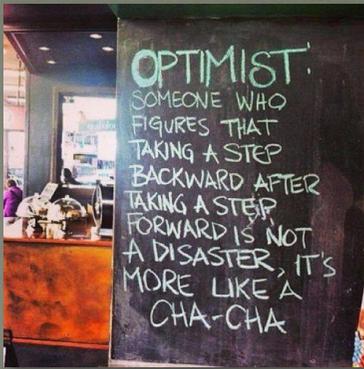
---

---

---

---

---



5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Pessimism vs. Optimism

- Explanatory style – how we explain the bad things that happen to us; learned at a young age
- Optimism is not about positive thinking but *accurate, non-negative thinking*
- The three Ps:
  - Permanent – sometimes versus always
  - Pervasive – specific versus global
  - Personal – internal versus external

(Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995)  
(Seligman, 1990)  
(Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979)

6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Pessimism vs. Optimism

- Pessimistic statement (permanent):
  - "I'll never be good at baseball."
- Optimistic version:
  - "I didn't play well in today's game."
- Pessimistic statement (pervasive):
  - "I don't work well with people in a group."
- Optimistic version:
  - "I didn't work well with the people in that group."

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Pessimism vs. Optimism

- Pessimistic statement (pervasive):
  - "My husband can't do anything right."
- Optimistic version:
  - "My husband messed up and got the wrong groceries this week."
- Pessimistic statement (pervasive):
  - "Nobody likes me."
- Optimistic version:
  - "Casey doesn't like me."

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Pessimism vs. Optimism

- Pessimistic statement (personal):
  - "These past few weeks, I have been so clumsy in gym class."
- Optimistic version:
  - "These past few weeks, we have done some really hard activities in gym class."

9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Permanence:** The belief that the bad event will persist.

Belief	Permanent	Temporary
She is always late.		
My boss is in a bad mood today.		
I failed this test because I didn't study last night.		
I'll never be good at public speaking.		

10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Pervasiveness:** The cause of this bad thing will affect many situations.

Belief	Pervasive	Specific
This book isn't helpful.		
All teachers are unfair.		
Nothing ever goes right for me.		
I can't count on him for anything.		

11

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Personalization:** I am the cause of this bad thing.

Belief	Personal	Not Personal
If I had just spent more time with my son, he wouldn't be smoking pot.		
We lost the game because of my teammate, Joel.		
My friend gave me bad directions so I was late.		
I have no willpower and just can't stick to a diet.		

12

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Effects of Pessimism

- Depression
- Lower achievement
- More physical ailments
- More likely to fall prey to “learned helplessness” – the quitting response that comes from the belief that whatever you do doesn’t matter
  - “What’s the point? It won’t make a difference anyway.”

(Seligman, 1990)

13

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Let’s “Chat”

How have you responded to “learned helplessness” in your classroom?

14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Learned Optimism

- Not an inborn trait – it can be taught (at any age)
- Emotional disturbances are caused not by *what* happens to us but by *our perceptions* of what happens
- Automatic thoughts (self-talk)
- Thoughts affect emotions and behaviors
- Can learn skills to challenge these thoughts

(Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995)  
(Seligman, 1990)  
(Bernard, 2008)

15

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### How Optimistic Are YOU?

- <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/>
- Create an account
- Questionnaires
- Optimism Test

16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### The Role of the Teacher

- Teachers and coaches are hugely influential
- Teacher criticism can affect explanatory style (Dweck & Licht, 1980)
  - Teachers more likely to criticize girls' lack of ability
  - Teachers more likely to criticize boys for lack of effort, not paying attention

17

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Strategy #1: Model Optimism

- Use optimistic language when you provide feedback
  - Focus on specific behaviors that they can change
- Use optimistic language when things go wrong in your classroom
  - Emphasize that the setback is temporary
  - "We can work to correct the problem" or try to avoid making the same error in the future
  - Avoid using words like "always" and "never"

<http://characterlab.org/character/optimism/>

18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Let's "Chat"

Describe a time when something went wrong in your classroom and how you handled it. What worked well? In hindsight, what would you have done differently?

19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Strategy #2: Teach Students How to Challenge Negative Thinking

- ABC Model developed by Albert Ellis
- Can be used with children as young as 8 years old



(Ellis & MacLaren, 1998)

20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Step 1: Thought-Catching

- Introduce the idea of "self-talk" - the automatic thoughts that pop into our heads
- These automatic thoughts affect our feelings and behavior
- Most of us do not realize that we do this
- Ask students to identify their thoughts verbally
- Older students can keep an ABC or "thought diary"

(Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979)  
(Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995)  
(Seligman, 1990)

21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Thought-Catching Practice

- Adversity:
  - You texted a new girl in your class who you were interested in and asked her to the movies. She said she was busy that weekend and would have to take a rain check.
- Belief:
- Consequence:

22

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Thought-Catching Practice

- Adversity:
  - You texted a new girl in your class who you were interested in and asked her to the movies. She said she was busy that weekend and would have to take a rain check.
- Alternate Belief:
- Consequence:

23

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Thought-Catching Practice

- Adversity:
  - Your best friend hasn't called you back all week.
- Belief:
- Consequence:

24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Thought-Catching Practice

- Adversity:
  - Your best friend hasn't called you back all week.
- Alternate Belief:
- Consequence:

25

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Thought-Catching Practice

- Adversity:
  - You try out for the lead in the school musical. You get a small part but not the part you wanted.
- Belief:
- Consequence:

26

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Thought-Catching Practice

- Adversity:
  - You try out for the lead in the school musical. You get a small part but not the part you wanted.
- Alternate Belief:
- Consequence:

27

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Step 2: Evidence Gathering

- The things we say to ourselves are not necessarily true or accurate
- Treat the belief as a hypothesis
- What is the evidence to support the belief?
- What evidence counts against the belief?
- Consider the source of the evidence
- Confirmation bias

(Ellis & MacLaren, 1998)  
(Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995)  
(Freeman, Pretzer, Fleming, & Simon, 1990)

28

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Step 3: Consider Other Ways of Seeing It

- What are some possible other causes for this setback?
  - List as many other interpretations as possible
- Use evidence to evaluate each possibility
  - Which possibility including the original one has the most evidence?

(Ellis & MacLaren, 1998)  
(Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995)

29

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Activity

- Listen to the scenario (also on handout)
- Look for the character's belief and then search for evidence that supports the belief and doesn't support the belief.
- What might be an alternative way of seeing the situation?

30

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Tony's Story

- What does Tony believe?
- Evidence For:
- Evidence Against:
- Other Ways of Seeing It:

31

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Step 4: Decatastrophize and Plan

- What is the worst possible thing that can happen?
  - What is the one thing you can do to stop the worst thing from happening?
- What is the best possible thing that might happen?
  - What is the one thing you can do to help make the best thing happen?
- What is the most likely thing that will happen?
- What can you do to handle the most likely thing if it happens?

(Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995)  
(Freeman, Pretzer, Fleming, & Simon, 1990)  
(Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 1985)

32

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Scenario 1

Diego has lived in the same neighborhood his whole life. His best friend, Luis, lives down the street and they have been friends since Luis moved into the neighborhood at age three. Diego is fairly shy but since he's known most of the kids in his school for so long, he has several friends and he really likes his teacher, Ms. Vega.

Diego's father gets laid off from work and this causes a lot of tension at home. His mom already works full-time but her income isn't enough to keep them afloat. After about six months of money trouble, Diego's dad lands a great job but in another state. Diego is devastated by the news and calls his best friend.

33

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Scenario 1

Diego: Hey, Luis. I got some good and bad news today. Which do you want to hear first?  
 Luis: I guess the good news.  
 Diego: My dad finally got a job! In fact, it's even better than the one he got laid off from. He'll make so much more money that my mom won't even have to work if she doesn't want to.  
 Luis: That's awesome, Diego! But what's the bad news?  
 Diego: The job is in California.  
 Luis: California? You're kidding! That's all the way on the other side of the country. We'll never be able to see each other again.  
 Diego: I know, Luis. I guess there's always Skype and FaceTime, right?  
 Even though Diego makes light of the situation, he gets off the phone and is very upset.

34

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Decatastrophize and Plan

- What is the worst thing that can happen to Diego?
- What is one thing that he can do to prevent the worst thing from happening?
- What is the best thing that might happen to Diego?
- What is one thing Diego can do to help make the best thing happen?
- What is the most likely thing that will happen?
- What can he do to handle the most likely thing if it happens?

35

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Scenario 2

John and Sara have been dating for a year. Sara is madly in love with John and is convinced that he is "the one." She has even started planning where the two of them can go to college someday so both can pursue their interests but still be together.

Lately, John has appeared distracted and while they used to spend most of each weekend together, he has been making plans with other friends. The more Sara gets upset about it, the more he seems to pull away. Sara decides to get John a really nice gift for Christmas so she saves up all of her birthday and babysitting money and buys him tickets to see his favorite band. The week before Christmas, Sara goes to give John his gift.

36

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Scenario 2

Sara: Merry Christmas, John. I love you so much and I hope you like your gift. Go ahead and open it.

John: Actually, Sara, I've been meaning to talk to you about something. I really think that it's time that we broke up. I want to see other people.

Sara: What? I thought you loved me! And, it's Christmas time. Who breaks up the week before Christmas?

Devastated, Sara goes home and calls her best friend.

37

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Decatastrophize and Plan

- What is the worst thing that can happen to Sara?
- What is one thing that she can do to prevent the worst thing from happening?
- What is the best thing that might happen to Sara?
- What is one thing she can do to help make the best thing happen?
- What is the most likely thing that will happen?
- What can she do to handle the most likely thing if it happens?

38

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Optimism Summary

- Learn to be an optimist yourself
- Use optimistic language in the classroom
- Teach students how to challenge negative thinking:
  - Thought-catching
  - Evidence gathering
  - Consider other ways of seeing it
  - Decatastrophize and plan

39

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Resources

- <https://characterlab.org/resources/optimism>
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1990). *Learned Optimism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Reivich, K., Jaycox, L., & Gillham, J. (1995). *The optimistic child: A proven program to safeguard children against depression and build lifelong resilience*. Houghton Mifflin.

40

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Contact Information

Amy Moritz  
[amoritz@csc.csiu.org](mailto:amoritz@csc.csiu.org)  
 717-763-1661 ext. 191

© 2015 Center for Schools and Communities. This work may not be reproduced or redistributed, in whole or in part, without the express prior written permission of the Center for Schools and Communities. To request permission, contact [info@centerschool.org](mailto:info@centerschool.org).

41

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---