



RECOVERY, RESILIENCE & RESOURCEFULNESS IN HARD-TO-REACH LEARNERS



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What is Resilience and why does it matter?

In the context of psychology, resilience is considered in terms of protective factors that reduce a negative response to an aversive life event or situation. Resilience is characterized by an individual's ability to foster positive outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development. Resilience has been characterized as the ability to: "bounce back" and cope effectively in the face of difficulties"; "bend, but not break under extreme stress", "rebound from adversities", "handle setbacks, persevere and adapt even when things go awry", and "maintain equilibrium following highly aversive events" (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Reed, 2002; Rutter, 1999).

Research has indicated that the development of resilience begins in childhood and is predictive of later resilience in adulthood. Important to this concept is the idea that resilience is 'fluid' and can change over time. In support of this, research has highlighted a longitudinal association between resilience and successful development in early (Padilla-Walker, 2011; Nelson & Carroll, 2011; McKay, 2011; Buwalda et al, 2011), middle (Blondin et al, 2011; Padilla-Walker, 2011; Nelson & Carroll, 2011) and late (Lipsitt & Dermick, 2011; Vogel-Scibilia et al, 2009) adulthood.

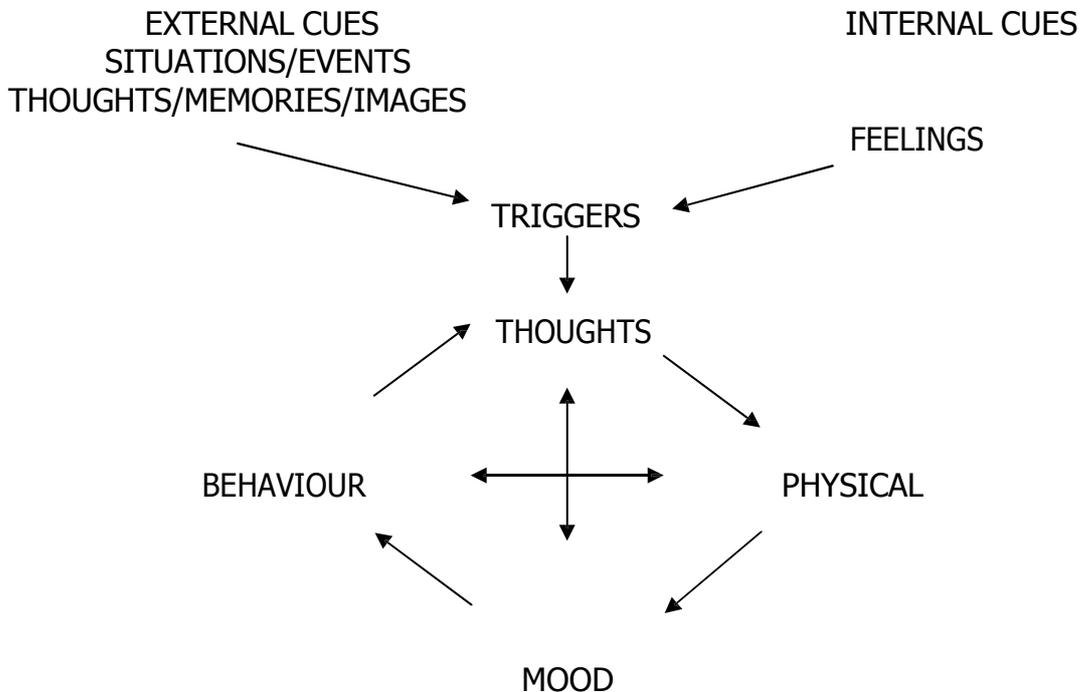
Therefore, resilience can be viewed as a developmental construct where "*Resilience is not a trait that a youth is born with or automatically keeps once it is achieved. Resilience is a complex interactive process.*" (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). More specifically, resilience is something that changes and develops over time, across situations, and from individual to individual (Bonanno, 2004).

Typically, research shows that people who exhibit resilience and deal with aversive events in a positive manner are more confident, secure and happy than those who don't (Blondin et al, 2011; Padilla-Walker, 2011; Nelson & Carroll, 2011). Therefore, if we want to lead happy and fulfilling lives, it is important for us to pay attention to our personal growth, where we are heading as human beings and more importantly, where we want to be heading.

Specifically, if we wish to grow and develop positively as people, and seek to resolve the conflicts of our adult lives, then resilience is essential.

What does the CBT model look like?

The way we think affects the way we physically feel, our mood and the way we behave. This is illustrated in the diagram below:



For example if we think worried thoughts, e.g. "I might panic when I have to do a presentation" it may make us start to feel stressed and anxious (including experiencing physical symptoms) when faced with such a scenario and we may try to avoid a situation e.g. calling in sick.

If we think negative thoughts e.g. "I'm never good enough", we may start to feel very low in mood which may in turn make us feel unmotivated to complete our work.

In order to be able to change the way we feel we need to break this cycle by looking at different coping strategies that can help us learn to make changes in our behaviour and our thinking. Emotional feelings of stress are not easy to tackle directly although we can use techniques such as relaxation and breathing techniques to help alleviate physical symptoms. Thoughts and behaviour are much easier to change, and by changing these we can indirectly reduce our feelings of stress.

Breathing and relaxation.

Be aware of your own breathing pattern. Do you experience any of the following?

- Shortness of breath or even feeling as though you are suffocating.
- Tensing of chest muscles which feels like a tight band around the chest and may even cause chest pain.
- Dizziness
- Tingling in the fingers
- Light-headedness or 'floating' feelings

If you do experience any of these then learning to control your breathing may help. This is because as we know anxiety is caused by adrenaline and in order for adrenaline to be produced oxygen is needed. When are stressed our breathing speeds up, we take in more oxygen and, as a result, produce more adrenaline.

Normal breathing method

Take slow regular breaths, and breathe through your nose and not through your mouth. Some times this comes naturally, for others it takes practice.

A useful tip to start with is to say phrases to yourself while breathing. For example:

Say 'one thousand' to yourself while breathing in.

Say 'one thousand two hundred and fifty' while breathing out.

So, your breathing pattern would be:-

'one thousand'	'one thousand two hundred and fifty'
IN	OUT

This is to help you to breathe out for longer as this reduces the adrenaline being produced.

Remember to *keep practising*. Do not give up; it takes a while to learn. It is important to practice when you feel calm so that you get used to controlling your breathing.

Relaxation

Relaxation can help to lower your anxiety levels and help make you feel more comfortable. Many people say that they 'can't relax'. The reason for this is that we need to learn to relax, it isn't just something that happens. Some people learn this skill very early in life, others not until much later. The following exercise is designed to help you to firstly recognise how tense you might be and then learn how to reduce this tension.

The first thing to do is to find time to do these exercises, which to start with may take half an hour. A good idea is to combine it with your breathing exercises. You also need a little peace and quiet, so choose your time carefully.

Settle back as comfortably as you can - let yourself relax to the best of your ability

Starting from you toes and working to the top of your head, you are going to tense and relax all the muscles in you body...

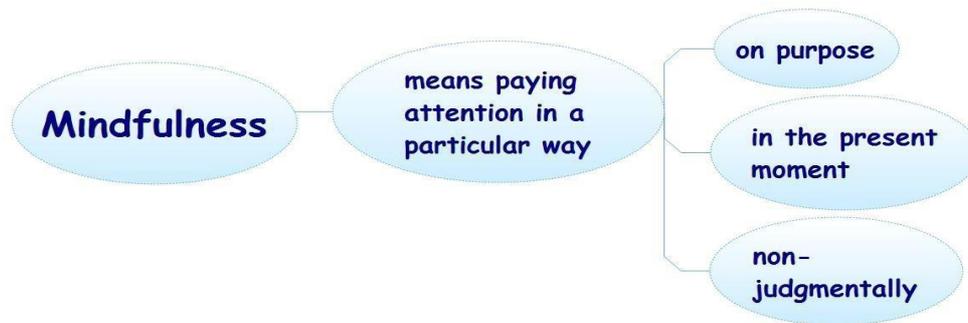
Tense your toes, but not too much – you don't want to pull any muscles or tendons, just enough to feel the tension – hold for a few seconds and then relax. Do this about five times until you recognise that you toes feel relaxed...

Now do exactly the same with your feet... your lower legs... upper legs... buttocks... abdomen... lower back... back... chest... arms... hands... shoulders... neck... scalp... face, especially jaw...

Remember gently tense – don't go overboard, just enough to feel the tension.

You may find it helpful to monitor how tense you are during the day and to experiment with relaxing.

Mindfulness



Jon Kabat-Zinn

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an ancient eastern practice which is very relevant for our lives today. Mindfulness is a very simple concept. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally.



Mindfulness does not conflict with any beliefs or traditions, whether religious, cultural or scientific. It is simply a practical way to notice thoughts, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells - anything we might not normally notice.

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The actual skills might be simple, but because it is so different to how our minds normally behave, it takes a lot of practice.

We might go out into the garden and as we look around, we might think "That grass really needs cutting, and that vegetable patch looks very untidy". A young child on the other hand, will call over excitedly, "Hey - come and look at this ant!"

Mindfulness can simply be noticing what we don't normally notice, because our heads are too busy in the future or in the past - thinking about what we need to do, or going over what we have done.

Mindfulness might simply be described as choosing and learning to control our focus of attention.

Automatic Pilot

In a car, we can sometimes drive for miles on "automatic pilot", without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really "present", moment-by-moment, for much of our lives: We can often be "miles away" without knowing it.



On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our "buttons pressed": Events around us and thoughts, feelings and sensations (of which we may be only dimly aware) can trigger old habits of thinking that are often unhelpful and may lead to worsening mood.

By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, from moment to moment, we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice; we do not have to go into the same old "mental ruts" that may have caused problems in the past.

Mindful Activity

If we wash the dishes each evening, we might tend to be „in our heads" as we're washing up, thinking about what we have to do, what we've done earlier in the day, worrying about future events, or regretful thoughts about the past. Again, a young child might see things differently, "Listen to those bubbles! They're fun!"



Washing up or another routine activity can become a routine (practice of) mindful activity for us. We might notice the temperature of the water and how it feels on the skin, the texture of the bubbles on the skin, and yes, we might hear the bubbles as they softly pop. The sounds of the water as we take out and put dishes into the water. The smoothness of the plates, and the texture of the sponge. Just noticing what we might not normally notice.

A mindful walk brings new pleasures. Walking is something most of us do at some time during the day. We can practice, even if only for a couple of minutes at a time, mindful walking. Rather than be "in our heads", we can look around and notice what we see, hear, sense. We might notice the sensations in our own body just through the act of walking. Noticing the sensations and movement of our feet, legs, arms, head and body as we take each step. Noticing our breathing. Thoughts will continuously intrude, but we can just notice them, and then bring our attention back to our walking.

The more we practice, perhaps the more (initially at least) we will notice those thoughts intruding, and that's ok. The only aim of mindful activity is to bring our attention back to the activity continually, noticing those sensations, from outside and within us.

Mindful Breathing

The primary focus in Mindfulness Meditation is the breathing. However, the primary goal is a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them. This creates calmness and acceptance.



- Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
- Direct your attention to your breathing.
- When thoughts, emotions, physical feelings or external sounds occur, simply accept them, giving them the space to come and go without judging or getting involved with them.
- When you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.

It's ok and natural for thoughts to arise, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.

Breathing Meditation 1 (Kabat-Zinn 1996)



Assume a comfortable posture lying on your back or sitting. If you are sitting, keep the spine straight and let your shoulders drop.

Close your eyes if it feels comfortable.

Bring your attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.

Keep your focus on the breathing, "being with" each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration, as if you were riding the waves of your own breathing.

Every time you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath, notice what it was that took you away and then gently bring your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out.

If your mind wanders away from the breath a thousand times, then your job is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with.

Practice this exercise for fifteen minutes at a convenient time every day, whether you feel like it or not, for one week and see how it feels to incorporate a disciplined meditation practice into your life. Be aware of how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath without having to *do* anything.

Breathing Meditation 2 (Kabat-Zinn 1996)

- Tune into your breathing at different times during the day, feeling the belly go through one or two risings and fallings.
- Become aware of your thoughts and feelings at these moments, just observing them without judging them or yourself.
- At the same time, be aware of any changes in the way you are seeing things and feeling about yourself.



Using mindfulness to cope with negative experiences (thoughts, feelings, events)



As we become more practised at using mindfulness for breathing, body sensations and routine daily activities, so we can then learn to be mindful of our thoughts and feelings, to become observers, and then more accepting of them. This results in less distressing feelings, and increases our ability to enjoy our lives.

With mindfulness, even the most disturbing sensations, feelings, thoughts, and experiences, can be viewed from a wider perspective as passing events in the mind, rather than as "us", or as being necessarily true. (Brantley 2003)

When we are more practiced in using mindfulness, we can use it even in times of intense distress, by becoming mindful of the actual experience as an observer, using mindful breathing and focussing our attention on the breathing, listening to the distressing thoughts mindfully, recognising them as merely thoughts, breathing with them, allowing them to happen without believing them or arguing with them. If thoughts are too strong or loud, then we can move our attention to our breath, the body, or to sounds around us.

Jon Kabat-Zinn uses the example of waves to help explain mindfulness.

Think of your mind as the surface of a lake or an ocean. There are always waves on the water, sometimes big, sometimes small, sometimes almost imperceptible. The water's waves are churned up by winds, which come and go and vary in direction and intensity, just as do the winds of stress and change in our lives, which stir up waves in our mind. It's possible to find shelter from much of the wind that agitates the mind. Whatever we might do



to prevent them, the winds of life and of the mind will blow.

"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf" (Kabat-Zinn 2004)

How to lower the stressors in your life.

Sit down with a paper and pen. List the parts of your life where there are *stressors*. For example, finance (money), work, house, family, friends, and leisure. For each part of your life write a list of the stressors. Then decide which of these can be fixed, and which may be changeable, and write this down. Write down some ideas about how you can change the changeable stressors.

LONG-TERM WAYS TO REDUCE OUR ANXIETY/STRESS LEVELS

A healthy life-style helps lower our anxiety in the long-term. The following things help you have a healthy life-style:

- Regular healthy meals, which include larger amounts of foods like pasta, bread, potato, cereal, rice, fruit, vegetables and smaller amounts of lean meat, fish, cheese and other dairy products. Water, diluted fruit juice and herbal teas are healthy drinks.
- Regular sleep and enough of it.
- Regular exercise.
- Relaxation and leisure/pleasure activities.
- Socialising.
- Work and achievement – which can include things other than paid

employment. The following things are not helpful for a healthy life-style.

- Too much tea and coffee.
- Fatty and sugary food and drink.
- Too much alcohol.
- Smoking.
- Fizzy drinks with additives or colouring.
- 'Diet' drinks with sugar replacements ('e' numbers etc).

Changing your thoughts (Cognitive restructuring)

A major component of any emotional state is the thinking that accompanies the physical and behavioural symptoms. Most thoughts are automatic and many of these are 'unhelpful'. Key features are that these thoughts are automatic, seem believable and real at the time they appear, and are the kind of thoughts that would upset anybody. These thoughts act powerfully to maintain mood states. Cognitive restructuring is a way of changing unhelpful thoughts by identifying, examining and challenging them.

The stages of cognitive restructuring

Cognitive restructuring comes in three stages. Firstly, people need to identify their thoughts, particularly the exact content of their unhelpful thoughts. The key thoughts are those most congruent with someone's emotional state, so called 'hot thoughts'.

Secondly, people examine their thoughts more objectively. This often requires people to collect 'evidence' as to how accurate their thoughts really are and come up with alternative evidence against their thoughts.

The final stage is to reconsider thoughts in the light of the new evidence that has been collected – for and against. The thoughts are then reappraised, re-evaluated and alternative thoughts derived.

Implementing cognitive restructuring

Stage 1: Identification of thoughts

In order to identify your thoughts, record a situation in which you felt in a certain emotional state and try to identify the emotion you felt at the time. rate this emotion on a scale – usually from 0-100%. then try and capture the exact thoughts that were in your mind when you felt this emotion and write these down in the thought record. In particular, the 'hot thought' is the one that needs to be worked on. then rate your strength of belief in the thought, again from 0-100%.

Hint: to identify your 'hot thought' consider which one which is most congruent with the emotion

Stage 2: Looking for the evidence

Once the thoughts have been collected, you should choose one to work on, ideally the hottest thought and one with a belief rating of at least 60%. The Evidence recording sheet is used to examine the evidence for and against the thought, including the percentage belief rating. In the Evidence recording sheet, one column is labelled 'evidence for' and one is labelled 'evidence against'. Next, almost like the prosecution and defence counsel in a court, evidence for and against the truth of the thought is written down. People often find this quite difficult, particularly coming up with evidence that the thought is not true. Here are some questions which can be used to help:

- If I were speaking to a friend with this thought, what would I say for and against it?
- How would someone else think about this?
- If I rate the belief in my thought as 75%, then there is 25% of the thought I do not believe to be true. What makes up that 25%?
- If I was not depressed, would I believe this thought?
- Is there another way of looking at this situation?

Stage 3: Reconsidering thoughts

Once the Evidence recording sheet has been collected, you need to reconsider your thoughts in light of the evidence. The idea is to come up with revised thoughts and consider if this changes your emotional feelings. In the fourth column of the Thought diary write down new thoughts and rate how much you believe them on a scale of 0-100%. In the final column rate your feelings again using the same 0-100% scale. You may notice that by changing your thoughts, your mood also changes. This is the way cognitive restructuring works to change the way people feel.

Points to remember

- Unhelpful thinking takes time to change. Often people need to challenge their thoughts several times before change takes place.
- It can be useful to ask a friend you trust to help look for evidence for and against unhelpful thoughts.
- Cognitive restructuring should be practised with other thoughts using Evidence recording sheets to judge them.
- As people become more expert in this they can be advised to try and catch the thoughts and judge them as they actually occur.

Situation	Feeling Rate how bad it was (0-100%)	Thought Rate how much you believe this thought (0 – 100%)	Revised thought Rate how much you believe this thought (0 – 100%)	Feeling How bad was it (0- 100 %?)

My thought	My % belief
Evidence for	Evidence against

Here are some examples of faulty thinking patterns, which are very common, but which can make things seem much worse and more difficult to cope with. If we notice when we think in these ways, we can challenge our thoughts, so that we can get a more balanced viewpoint. Use this list to see if you notice any common negative thinking patterns in your thoughts when you are trying to challenge them.

a) *All-or-nothing thinking* This means thinking that something is useless, or that we have failed, if it is not 100%. For example, thinking the decorating we did is a disaster because one seam did not match up. This is sometimes called perfectionism and sets us up for feeling anxious about everything we do and generally feeling like a loser. Why? Because very few things in life are perfect.

b) *Over-generalising* This means thinking that everything will always be awful because of one bad experience. For example, thinking we can never say the right thing, because someone was upset by one of our comments. Thinking we are a useless parent because our child had a tantrum in the supermarket. Thinking no-one will ever fancy us, because one girl turned down our invitation for a date. Like all-or-nothing thinking, over-generalising will end up with us feeling really down on ourselves, as nobody gets through life without mistakes or bad experiences.

c) *Personalising* This means thinking *we are responsible* for things which seem to us to be wrong. For example, our partner seems to be in a bad mood, and we wonder what we have done to cause this. This kind of thinking suggests we are taking too much responsibility for other people. This causes feelings of stress and guilt.

d) *Mind Reading/ Jumping to negative conclusions* This is thinking we know what other people are thinking. For example, we are talking to someone at a party, and they keep looking round the room, so we think that they are bored by us. We leave a message for a friend and she doesn't phone us back, so we think she is not interested in us any more. This can lead to us seeing situations as negative, when this is not necessarily so.

e) *Catastrophising* This is a bit like, "making a mountain out of a mole-hill". For example, we have one quarrel with someone and think it is the end of the relationship. We may even start thinking we will never find any one else, and we will end up spending the rest of our life on our own. This means our life becomes full of potential catastrophes.

f) *Ignoring the positive* This means overlooking any success or good experience. If someone compliments us we may think they are only saying that because they feel sorry for us, or that anyone could have done that just as well. We may think that the things we do OK in are not important - other people succeed at things that count. This means we are always likely to feel negative about ourselves. It can be difficult to notice ourselves doing this. We have to keep a careful look-out.

g) *Shoulds/Musts/Oughts. N.B.*

It is important to write down your negative thoughts and challenge them *on paper*. It helps stop things from going round and round in your head.

When encountering these negative thoughts in the future try putting this process into place, it will not be easy at first but persevere – every new skill needs practice!

By using the last two columns of the diary, you should now rate the belief you have in the *revised thought* and *how you now feel* – there should hopefully be a difference.

If you find you cannot change the thought, ask a friend or family member to go through the process with you, or try using the process with a thought that is easier to work with. Keep practicing and use your diary – as you get better, try to catch your thoughts and challenge them *as they occur*.

Hint.

Unhelpful thoughts like this will take time to change and will sometimes need to be challenged many times before a change occurs – be patient and persistent – keep trying.

Ask a friend to help you look for evidence that the thought is not right or unhelpful – get them to go through the process with you.

Keep your diary with you so that you can catch and challenge thoughts when they occur.

There are no particular right answers to your thoughts – just keep looking for the ones that help to change the way you feel. Remember – persevere – don't give up on the process – research has proven how effective this can be in helping someone who feels depressed to feel better. It may not work for you the first time you try it, but keep going – get some help from a good friend if you get stuck.

Goal setting

Problem solving and goal setting are closely linked. Once the problem is defined, you can decide what changes you want to make. These changes will be your goals.

Goals help you to work on potential solutions to your problems. As with problem solving, it helps to be as specific as possible. For example, a goal of "To feel better" might be difficult to achieve on its own unless you have clarity about what you need to do to help yourself feel better.

Examples of goals are:

- To go to the gym twice a week for an hour.
- To go out with friends on a Friday night to play darts.
- To read a book for an hour a day.

Successful goal setting usually means that your goals are 'SMART', that is:

- Specific (It is very clear what you will do!)
For example: My goal is to go swimming.
- Measurable (You will know whether or not it has been achieved)
For example, I will do it once a week.
- Achievable (You stand a fair chance of succeeding)
For example, there is a swimming pool locally.
The pool is open at times I can manage.
- Relevant (It fits in with your lifestyle, and you are motivated)
For example, I know how to swim and I used to enjoy it.
- Timed (When to start, when to review)
For example, I will start next week. I will go for one hour each Monday afternoon for one month.

Achieving goals can help us to feel more positive and in control of our lives, and so being able to set realistic, achievable goals for ourselves is a useful skill to develop.

Working on one goal at a time is often better than overloading yourself by trying to achieve too much at once.

Short term goals are important – if we can succeed with these and enjoy that success, our confidence to work on larger, longer term goals will be increased.

It helps to phrase your goals positively (for example to eat a healthy balanced meal every evening) rather than negatively (e.g. to stop eating junk food)

It is unrealistic to think that we can always be successful in achieving all our goals. If your efforts don't seem to be paying off, use it as a learning experience and think carefully about how you could change your tactics, rather than giving up without giving yourself a real chance of success.

Remember that if you feel anxious or overwhelmed it doesn't necessarily mean that you are failing. It may be that you are in fact succeeding in tackling

SPECIFIC

Be very clear in what you want to achieve. Consider breaking the goal down into smaller steps.

MEASURABLE

How will you know when you have achieved your goal? What will you be doing at that time? What will others notice you doing? What will be different? What will you have started or be doing regularly? What will you have stopped or be doing less of?

ACHIEVABLE

Ensure your goals are not too high. Don't set yourself up to fail! Consider setting smaller goals on your way to the big one. Celebrate your successes. If you don't achieve what you set out to, then ask what you could do differently, what would make it more likely to succeed next time?

REALISTIC & RESOURCED

Is this achievable with the resources I have? Are there any other resources you need before you can, or to help you, achieve your goal? How can you access these resources? What problems might you have? What can you do to minimise those problems?

TIME LIMITED

Set a reasonable time limit to achieve your goal. 1 week, 1 month, 6 months, 1 year, 5 years? Consider different (smaller) time limits for smaller steps.

NOTES