

Daniel Thompson 00:00:13

Hello, welcome to the coaching podcast. Today's podcast episode is brought to you by the England Talent Programme. Today's podcast is all about the topic of resilience and specifically how parents can help their child to develop resilience. So in this podcast episode we'll discuss what is resilience, why it's an important characteristic for an athlete, how coaches can develop and build resilience within their coaching practice and we'll also be discussing simply how parents can help their child to develop resilience.

So, my name's Daniel Thompson. I'm the Slalom Foundations and Support Lead for Paddle UK and joining myself with discussions on this topic area today is Tom Haines. Tom is a volunteer psychologist with our Paracanoe Talent Academy.

I'm looking forward to chatting all things about resilience with you today, Tom. So yeah, thanks for being with us.

Tom Haines 00:01:09

You're welcome Daniel.

Daniel Thompson 00:01:11

So I mean resilience is a big topic and it's quite a widely talked about topic within sports and I think firstly before we talk about it, what is resilience and why is it important?

Tom Haines 00:01:25

And Daniel resilience is an athlete's ability to harness their personal qualities to withstand pressure, and it's important to look at pressure as stressors, everyday stressors or sort of adversity or bumps in the road that certainly young athletes will come across at school or within paddling and can you deal with those stressors and can you maintain your level of performance? That's pretty much what resilience is.

Daniel Thompson 00:01:59

Yeah, that's a useful definition because I know a lot of terminology people always kind of think about resilience as just overcoming adversity and what you talk about there, it's more to it than just that, it's stressors that come in and how they can deal

with that and as you said there are many bumps in the road during an athletes journey and so it's important to be able to understand.

Tom Haines 00:02:32

Yeah. There's a whole pile of stuff an athlete will come across daily, these things crop up for them, these bumps in the road and they just get on with it they seem to not be phased by it and we will probably recognise that as resilience.

Daniel Thompson 00:02:50

Talking about bumps in the road we had a chat before the podcast and we were talking about resilience, here you sort of posed a scenario to me which I thought was really good and I wondered whether you could introduce this again for our listeners, I think it'll be really interesting to see what they think about this.

Tom Haines 00:03:10

So something I want you to think about is your child has left home for a regatta that's two hours away and they've gone with a friend, and you have a whole day to yourself. It's lovely weather and you receive a text after about an hour and it's from your child saying I've left my paddle at home. You have nothing planned today, it's a lovely day. What are your thoughts? What are you gonna do and we're going to revisit this at the end of the podcast to see if your thoughts have changed. I'm a Sport parent myself and I have been in that situation, although not with a paddle. And yeah, I'm just interested to see if our discussion Daniel makes parents think maybe I won't do this. I'll do that.

Daniel Thompson 00:03:58

Yeah, I think that's a really really good scenario to think about and it certainly got me thinking of what I probably would want to do and potentially if it's the right thing to do. So let's pause that one there and let's talk a little bit more about resilience, in particular what are the key skills that are needed to develop and build resilience.

Tom Haines 00:04:24

I want to go back a little bit and just pick apart that definition just slightly. So we're talking about personal qualities. So it's what personal qualities athletes can harness to deal with resilience and pressure.

Personal qualities splits into two, you have your characteristics, your personality and you have some psychological skills and those psych skills is what we're going to talk about in a second. I just want to deal with the personal qualities. They are a little bit fixed and there's a debate on whether they're holy fixed but these are your personality but one of the most important things about personality that we can I think develop is being somewhat optimistic. Having a realistic optimism as a personal characteristic as a quality is really important with resilience. We think about this whole thing about bumps in the road being able to see the positives with leaving a paddle at home is really important. It's not great to leave your paddle at home, but being able to be optimistic about, saying it'll probably be okay. I can work around this, they'll be positives coming out of that. So having a healthy dose of optimism is probably the most important personal characteristic but actually personal characteristics suggests that it's fixed that you can't build resilience. And now I think when we talk about the skills you can bring and the skills we can develop we can learn actually resilience is something that can be really well developed. It's not a fixed thing we can build it and this is when coaches and parents really come into developing those skills. I think we're going to talk about this next.

Daniel Thompson 00:06:12

Yeah, I think we're certainly going to get into more detail in this podcast episode around those personal qualities, and as you said it's not fixed and it can be trainable?

Tom Haines 00:06:25

Absolutely.

Daniel Thompson 00:06:27

Yeah. And so you talked a little bit around and those psychological skills. I kind of want to go into a bit more detail around these skills, the importance of these skills, in addition to the personal qualities that you mentioned.

Tom Haines 00:06:41

For me the most important psychological skill is the ability to be self-aware. To be able to understand and be able to reflect on your own thoughts and feelings and

behaviours as you come across stressors. So for a young paddler that might be the whole thing being at school, social pressures, within paddling it could be what are your thoughts and what your feelings and your behaviours, what shows up for you when you come across a threat and a stressor. That stressor can be the coach asking you to do something that you're not quite sure you're going to be able to do, a particular practice of skill and what shows up for you? What are your thoughts? What are your feelings and what are your behaviours when faced with challenge, and I think that's probably the most important skill you can learn and you can develop that by practising just reflecting. Now that could be recording thoughts in a journal that could be speaking to your parents about what shows up for you. What did you bring to that? What thoughts cropped up for you?

Also a real key skill is wanting feedback from coaches. So not just wanting feedback, but then actually taking that feedback on as it should be taking on, how can that feedback develop me and receiving that feedback in a really constructive way. There's other skills. So having good attention, and these are all skills that the volunteer psychs that are positioned with all our squads can help with, having good attention or control being able to regulate your arousal level. So that means being able to relax when you need to relax and being able to ramp things up when you need to ramp things up and problem solving skills, planning skills, goal setting and this comes back again to that kind of optimism about having a what if scenario. So what if that goes on I can do x y z. It's all that kind of solving skills that help you deal with that bump in the road. What are you gonna do if this happens? Well actually I'm going to do this and it's not the end of the world because I know I can do these things. I've done them before, that's really the skills that can improve that resilience.

Daniel Thompson 00:09:02

It's a skill that's constantly being developing and your self-awareness at a certain age as you progress on can be completely different a year down the line and because of those skills that you talked about and developed over time and the experiences that you have

Tom Haines 00:09:26

And that's a really good point Daniel. That's why I want to reinforce the fact that for resilience you're not just a resilient person, so somebody may demonstrate resilience

in one particular aspect of their lives. It might be at school, it might be in competition or that might be in training. It doesn't mean they're going to be resilient across the board, and so it does require work. It does require practice because it isn't just 'you are resilient', people bring resilience in certain aspects and certain times of their life.

Daniel Thompson 00:10:06

Yeah. Yeah, I think that's a really really important thing to mention there. I want to discuss a little bit about emotions, and what resilience is not. It's not suppressing your emotions, is that right?

Tom Haines 00:10:21

Yeah that's right. A common conception of resilience is that kind of very emotional athlete that just relentlessly drives and drives. It's not about that because that will lead to burn out. So it's not about suppressing emotion. It's about being in touch with your emotions knowing what emotions show up. It's not about putting up with a very abusive or intolerable circumstances. Neither is it about relentlessly pursuing goals that are on attainable? It's about being flexible, having really good goals set. But if those goals are unattainable it's about resetting those goals and having the flexibility. That will produce an athlete that can train week on week for multiple months rather than an athlete that burns out and it's also not about training through injury and making it worse. It's about having that self-awareness of 'I have an injury, it's not going to get better if I just keep doing the same thing. I need to actually reappraise my goals seek help' and that will create resilience. That'll be the athlete that is still paddling after months and after years.

Daniel Thompson 00:11:35

Yes. Yeah, that's really important, so they're the key sort of psychological skills but also the environment has a huge part to play within that and is an important characteristic. Talk a little bit around the environment Tom. I know that there is a lot of literature around how environments are really important in developing resilience?

Tom Haines 00:12:00

It is key. And one of the really important things of those personal qualities in the definition I used is that it doesn't put all the emphasis and all the responsibility on the

athlete. It's not all about what are you doing about your resilience, but actually the environment and how you can really develop that resilience and what a big significant chunk of the literature talks about is having an environment that's facilitative.

So they talk about having an environment that's high challenge and also high support. So a high challenging environment is one that is where the coaching staff have high expectations from their athletes and they do hard stuff. It's not an environment where there's nothing hard to be done. It's doing hard stuff, but actually it gives some accountability to the athlete, gives them responsibility but it also gives them ownership of their journey. It gives them more autonomy. They make decisions within that environment and this is probably a key takeaway for the parents is that your child has to own their journey. It's their Journey. It's not our journey as parents. It's their journey. It makes sense when dealing with pressure. So if you think about a child that has autonomy within their sport, if they choose to race, they're probably more likely to accept the pressures of racing if they choose to train and they choose to train hard they're probably more likely to accept the pressures of training if they're forced to race and therefore to train and they're forced to do all these things. They don't have all that autonomy. Then quite understandably they're less likely to embrace the hardship of training, so autonomy is really important and coaches can create that environment and parents can create that environment. So that kind of challenge and support is really important and there's another fact I really want to talk about is the differences in the environments. If you have a high challenge environment that has high support then it's very facilitative of resilience because that kind of support allows the athlete to grow and to try stuff and fail and have that kind of safety net within that environment.

You can't have coaches that relentlessly push athletes without that support. That environment is an unrelenting high pressure environment and within that kind of environment you get athletes that are continuously tested, but without the explanation why they're always tested, they'll continuously do hard things and fail, but without that kind of safety net of learning from their failure. And then within that environment you will get athletes that avoid that testing, they'll be that blame mentality on the athletes and sadly we can see in the Press that those environments are there but at Paddle UK we really want to produce that environment whereby

we're going to challenge you, it's going to be really hard, we're going to do hard stuff but we're going to support you by giving you the psychological skills to be able to push through and learn and constantly reflect and have that space for reflection and also that space to be vulnerable and say to the coach 'Look I'm really struggling with this' and then be reassured that the coach is going to then go 'well that's a weakness and therefore you're going to be off the programme'. Instead that's a weakness that you can really develop and work on.

There is one more point that I would really like to cover about the environment that is really useful for parents... If you had an environment that was low challenge but high support, then it becomes very parental, there's no learning from mistakes. It's all very safe and it can be over caring, athletes will spend so much in their comfort zones that they may actually get bored and complacent. So this is a message for us parents that we may want to clear all the hurdles out the way of our child developing in sport and I get that from being a sport parent but that environment becomes too comfortable.

We want our children to grow and develop as autonomous beings where they can think for themselves. They can problem solve and I think we're going to get on to a little bit in a minute about we're not going to be snow ploughing hurdles out in a way, instead we're actually going to be sitting back and letting some hurdles present themselves, letting our child problem solve their way out of that because once they do that once they've learned that they can do that and then that becomes the development of resilience, but when bigger hurdles come up, and we're not there because they're a major championships and we're halfway around the world watching on telly and you can't do anything then so let them practice that.

Daniel Thompson 00:17:20

Thanks Tom, there was a lot in there, as you say that facilitative environment with that high challenge and high support, that it is ultimately what the coaches aim for within their coaching structure and what parents should aim for and it's not just that environment where it's just low challenge and high support where it's examples like 'oh my parent will get my drinks bottle for me' and actually it's those types of things as well.

Tom Haines 00:18:05

Yeah, it's a small thing that makes a big difference.

Daniel Thompson 00:18:09

The final thing around resilience as well is a bit around a challenge mindset and so talk to me a bit more about what that is and how that can be applied in resilience.

Tom Haines 00:18:24

So a challenge mindset is another almost part of this triangle building resilience and it's worth just reinforcing the fact that it's not just personal characteristics. It's not just the environment. It's not just a challenge mindset but it's all three of those things that need to be developed but it's really about how athletes react to stressors. It's not the stressors themselves as much' how does the athlete react to the stressor? do they see it as an insurmountable problem that is completely ruins the day or do they actually see it as 'do you know what let's get to the solution part of this problem quickly, let's problem solve our way out of this.' It's almost that kind of mindset of we're going to face these challenges or we're going to look at it as a threat that we need to avoid. So this comes down to really kind of weighing up an athlete's coping skills.

Okay, These hurdles come up in front of me. Am I going to look at that as a real threat to what I want to achieve or actually am I going to look at that as a bit of a challenge that I need to get past and part of this is going back to that kind of personal qualities of a realistic optimism, and it also feeds back into this kind of self-awareness when something crops up for you that's not going away and within sport this is constant, the athlete that has this smooth journey they will face some hardship at some point but it's that self-awareness when something crops up for me do I approach it as a challenge as just a hurdle? It's not the world, or do I actually approach it as a threat and why the sky is falling in because if you create it as a threat it's a very negative aspect of the brain, a negative way to look at these things. You will face hurdles, life is full of hurdles and sports certainly prepares us for life. Are you looking at what self-taught crops up for you? What are your feelings that rock up? What is your behaviour when some sort of hurdle crops up. Are you trying to avoid that again? Or are you actually thinking what I can take positives out this? I can reflect on this, at a later date and go out in this situation isn't that bad? I dealt with a similar situation before and all I did was problem solve that positivity. That for

me is what a challenge mindset is. It's how positive are you when you come to hurdles? Is it the end of the world or actually is it not in the world and you can just move on to the solution quite quickly.

Daniel Thompson 00:21:08

Yeah, and that point you mentioned at the end was quite important really, about how athletes face changes positively and they believe that they can overcome them and how athletes can use previous experiences. and they need training in that space to understand those type of situations and problems that could occur and what they can do to overcome them.

Tom Haines 00:21:41

Yeah, that's so important because when we talked about resilience being kind of time and context specific it is but a lot of these athletes have dealt with hardship, dealt with hurdles, whether it's at dealing with school, work, whether it's within a boat, you can draw upon your past experiences and reflect 'I did that then I can do that.' I got over that then I can get over that now and I think that's really what I think that's and those reflecting skills are so important. So when you train, when you race, it's not just about the outcome. It's about that process. What did you do in that training environment in that hard session that you can then reflect on. And then during the next day, a week later or actually when you're on the start line of another race and I've done all these hard things I've done all this good stuff. I've demonstrated resilience in these specific points or this context then can do that now, so yes although it's context dependent. I think it's really important to draw upon our past experience where we have been resilient and then bringing it to that current hurdle.

Daniel Thompson 00:22:55

Yes, absolutely and we will spend some time talking about how coaches build resilience within their coaching and potentially how parents can help their child to develop resilience. So of all the things that we talked about at the moment and almost considering that scenario that you posed at the beginning, what sort of things would you say a parent could do to help their child develop resilience?

Tom Haines 00:23:26

The first point I'm going to say is as parents we need to model resilience ourselves. So a resilient parent sits back and lets their child express themselves in their boat. Let's their child problem solves, and if there is a problem that comes up in your life as parents and it's one of these daily hurdles, and we all face these as parents then we're going to be optimistic, we're going to demonstrate that optimism. Yeah, the problems can be solved, we can get around problems. We can be positive. We can move the solution part of the problem very quickly. So the first one is to I guess model resilience itself. So don't look at threats, instead have that kind of challenge mindset and have that optimism, use those psych skills yourself and if you can model resilience, then your child will pick up on that. This is how to behave if I'm faced with a problem. The sky hasn't fallen in, we can get through this. I think that's the first one.

The second one I would say is to reflect on the bigger picture of what your child is trying to achieve. The key here is it's your child's journey. Let them experience paddling and whatever sport your child eventually eventually sticks with and within school let them find out. If we give them autonomy to get through the problem then they will learn that skill of resilience and understand your role. And this is really difficult. I have mentioned it a couple times. I'm a sport parent and we're not a coach. So we need to really sit back and resist fixing and again resist this snow plowing of problems out of your child's way. So one of the questions that often crops up is the concept that does resilience require adversity or stress in order to practise resilience? Yes. It does. You're never going to develop resilience if it's been absolutely smooth plain sailing so think about as coaches are we creating a safe space within your sessions where 'Are we actually going to almost stress test the athletes?' Put them in an environment where it's hard but with that support, and it's the same with parents. we're not just immediately running up to our child with a bottle to give them the bottle, have they got their bottle. It's up to you to take your bottle there. Is your child packing their own kit back? Things like that. Are they preparing their own food to take the regattas? What kind of ownership are they providing or taking on for their races and for their training because ultimately it's their journey. we're gonna try and facilitate that and what we're not going to do is snow plough all the hurdles out the way as what that could create. is a potential of being a problem they're being a hurdle. When they're senior athletes and they've never had to deal

with that problem. No, it was snow ploughed out the way when they were younger. It's really difficult for parents because we feel it's our role to make things as smooth and make things as easy as possible for the children. You've just got to sit your hands. It's difficult, really difficult.

Daniel Thompson 00:27:10

Yeah. and I think that's where parents can potentially ask those open questions a bit more. One thing a coach told me that was really useful in the past for a parent that was struggling with that scenario you were saying was trying to almost coach them through it and always just getting rid of those obstacles for them, and instead what he suggested the parent to do was take that step back let them deal with that problem. And you've probably as a parent would see that problem before that problem occurs. And just letting that happen and ask those open questions, what are you going to do about it? To get the paddler to think a bit more.

Tom Haines 00:28:06

To go back to the scenario, you get that phone call. I left my paddle at home, a great question back is 'What are you gonna do about it?' Yeah. I'm phoning you, Yeah, but what are you gonna do about it? what could you do? To solve this problem and it will get solved. Yeah, the easy option is to jump in the car and drive over but is that a high challenge, high support environment, but as soon as that challenge has come across it's been snow ploughed out the way.

So yes. Yeah absolutely not easy and it really does come down to that kind and you mentioned it down about that conversations you have with your child, is that a facilitative conversation of what could you have done that? what can you do? How can you fix this and it kind of creates that problem solving mentality for the child but it also creates that kind of self-reflection of those questions of post-race on the way back home in the car. what thought showed up for you? How do you feel then and are those kind of questions that promote that self-awareness? So yeah in being a sport player is not easy as a lot of stuff exactly as you say Daniel when you go you can foresee the future, they've left the water bottle, they've got in, without something and all they've had a late night and they've go a training session but you've got to let that play out because it's these early opportunities to learn about problem solving

and get those resilience skills. That will pay forward not just in sport but in every aspect of life.

Daniel Thompson 00:29:58

That's some great tips for parents and equally I know we've talked a little bit around and the bits around how coaches can build resilience within that a coaching and the environment when you talk a bit about the environment, that's the type of environment where coaches providing high support and high challenge and how it's important to let paddlers to train those instances and circumstances where they could have a challenge to enable them to problem solve. and a lot of coaches try to add stressors into the environment and instil pressure. Can you talk to me around what things coaches can do there around how they can add those stressors into the environment and how this can look?

Tom Haines 00:30:48

The example often appeared in the literature is that kind of stress testing and stress testing is about putting a little bit of controlled pressure on an athlete and look to do some sort of performance and it might be actually we're in this environment where we're going to do these drills that are hard and what you might not do them, but it's okay as long as we try as long as we then reflect afterwards about actually are you not able to do that drill but it's not just the coach testing these athletes and then going that's a shame you weren't successful in that. It's because that's just one half of it and having a high challenge environment without that support is not a good environment. Now that higher challenge environment, yeah, it's only going to learn if that learning comes off it that kind of support. So, we're going to stress test the athletes. then we're going to have a decent amount of feedback, a decent amount of reflecting time to go. And do you know what, that happened for you. This thought showed up, this behaviour was apparent then these are the skills that we can develop to help you deal with that. So, a high challenge environment or high challenge high support isn't just an environment that is unrelenting, you have to have that support so you can do stress testing, you can be successful. So we might not apologies for doing hard stuff for doing skills and drills that are tough that actually might not be successful at first point. But it's the environment where failure is fine, it's okay to fail. We're going to try and experiment stuff. We're going to be out of our

comfort zones. So of course we're going to fail, that's not a problem. It's not seen as a weakness, failing if it is seen as a weakness failing then they'll avoid that environment. And what we really want is young athletes come to Paddle UK and say 'Okay, this is awesome. I'm doing some hard stuff. I'm really pushing myself. I'm really challenging myself. And I failed most of the time.' But that was fine because it is all part of that process to become a great paddler, to become the best paddler you can be and we can't just do that with high challenge, we have to have that support. It comes down to coaches being open to feedback. It comes down to a really good sort of partnership between the coach and paddler, we want athletes to come to Paddle UK and onto talent camps with a real positive mindset. This is going to be really hard. I'm going to find out some stuff about myself during this session because I'm gonna be pushed and I like being pushed because it's gonna make me a better athlete. I'm gonna be very happy because I'm going to be supported in that journey. So on the way back from camp, the conversation with your child's gonna be 'How was that it?' was really hard but it was great because yeah, I spent most of my time upside down or I'm not smiling. But that's the whole point. We need to embrace that challenge and break that failure because it's through failure that we're really learn as paddlers.

Daniel Thompson 00:34:08

Absolutely and as you mentioned, it's that feedback process which is really really key. And so when we're coaches do add those stressors into the environment in order to manipulate the environment to increase challenge there and it's not working for the paddler then post session that's when they can have those conversations in a debrief and understand what the coaches are trying to do.

I found that really difficult that stage So that's it responsible be exactly what you said that

Tom Haines 00:34:47

That's good thing and it's almost as if you're a coach and you do a session and you plan your session and everyone does the drill perfectly the first time around you've got to think is that drill hard enough? Absolutely. Yeah, the reflected point for the coach might be I need to push that on. So I want to push these athletes to failure, not failure in an emotional breakdown but failure as in they can't do the skill because

perhaps it needs practice because it's a hard skill and that takes a lot of finesse by the coaches, it's not easy. You don't want skills that are impossible. They have to have a reasonable chance of succeeding, but also a reasonable chance of failing in it so we can then go back and learn that skill because it's a hard skill. Yeah. I'd love athletes come back and Camp, physically exhausted but buzzing because of what they learn.

Daniel Thompson 00:35:43

I'm going to draw this podcast to a close shortly. We talked about parents in this podcast, how they can help develop resilience within their child but what would your top tip be for parents?

Tom Haines 00:36:01

I think the first point is to model resilience yourself, you'll have your own resilience. And as soon as you kind of understand about how resilient you are in certain situations, then a bit of self-awareness. I'll give you an example very often here, and it's not untrue with myself and DIY, I'm not very resilient with DIY and my children can see that if I really wanted to model resilience to my child then I'd be able to do some DIY and not lose it. When things don't go well, but actually go, do you know what I can fix this. That's a model resilience. And I would say be a parent first and you have an opportunity here to watch your children put a number on Race challenge themselves. So I would say be a fan.

And not a coach be a fan of your child racing watch them racing love watching and racing and there's no need to talk about outcomes with your child. I would say on the way home. They know where they came and how they did. Just praise effort and be a fan of them racing and understand the high challenge and high support. I think that's really important and that support is allowing them to friend failure in a good thing if they're learning from their failure is a great thing and probably the kind of tie up point for me is really does require some stressor and just be careful with what you snow plough out the way for your child. Think about, is it important that I fix this or is this a great opportunity for my child to fix this themselves what we're learning? Are they going to come out of this if they work through the problem rather than what learning are they not if I just fix it for difficult. And it is difficult they might not thank you. Stray away. But when they come across that problem the next time or similar

problem, they will have learned I can do this. I can fix this it's not from I don't need the phone or that they don't need to know about it. I can just crack on with it.

Daniel Thompson 00:38:14

That's an excellent point to finish up on there and for people to really consider and if your parent of a young paddler and stuff and you have those thoughts in your head of 'Can I just let them work for that problem'.

Tom Haines 00:38:28

Yeah let it play out and let's see how it goes.

Daniel Thompson 00:38:33

Yeah, thanks a lot Tom. It's been a fascinating conversation today and we'll be keen to have you back at some point in future to talk about some other topics.

Okay, so this podcast is available on the awarding body page and also on our Talent Parent Programme webpage on the podcast section of the Paddle UK website. It's also available to listen to on Spotify, Podbean or Apple podcast channels.