

Philosophical counselling as a tool for strengthening personal resilience: an exploratory study

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Abstract: The article discusses philosophical counselling as a tool for developing personal resilience and examines its impact on coping with life challenges. In recent decades, people have faced numerous global changes, including pandemics, natural disasters, and economic shifts, making the issue of personal resilience more critical than ever. Personal resilience is defined as the ability to cope, recover, and grow from crises, consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. The paper presents philosophical counselling as a unique approach to enhancing personal resilience, differing from other therapeutic approaches such as psychotherapy. Philosophical counselling focuses on the analysis of ethical and moral issues, aiming to empower self-awareness and foster critical thinking and mental flexibility. The article explores key philosophical approaches, such as Stoicism, Socratic philosophy, and Existentialism, which reinforce a sense of self-control, finding meaning in life, and mental adaptability. This study examines the impact of a philosophical counselling workshop on three dimensions of personal resilience: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. The findings show significant improvement in these areas, particularly in the manageability dimension. The results support the notion that philosophical counselling can contribute to strengthening personal resilience, primarily by enhancing the ability to understand life situations and give them meaning.

Key-words: philosophical counseling; personal resilience; comprehensibility; manageability; meaningfulness;

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Introduction

In recent decades, the world has been grappling with a wide range of severe global challenges, such as pandemics, natural disasters, wars, and rapid social and economic changes. The COVID-19 pandemic, which erupted in 2020, exposed human vulnerability and the fragility of social systems in the face of uncertainty, social isolation, and collective loss. Additionally, events like climate change, earthquakes, floods, and large-scale fires have become routine in various parts of the world, causing not only physical destruction but also prolonged psychological trauma. These situations increase mental and emotional stress across entire populations, making the need for developing personal resilience more critical than ever.

Personal resilience refers to an individual's ability to cope with crises, recover from hardships, and adapt to and grow from changes. It is a complex capability, derived from cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, that allows a person to function positively in challenging life situations and respond effectively. Against the backdrop of ongoing challenges, the search for methods and tools that enhance personal resilience has expanded, and traditional methods of psychological support and treatment do not always provide a complete solution. In recent years, philosophical counselling has gained recognition as a unique and effective approach to improving personal resilience. Unlike classic therapeutic approaches such as psychotherapy, philosophical counselling focuses on existential, ethical, and moral issues from a philosophical perspective. The philosophical counsellor helps individuals examine their principles and beliefs, confront moral and life dilemmas, and increase their self-awareness regarding the meaning of their lives and values. In doing so, philosophical counselling offers tools for critical and value-oriented thinking, which support the development of mental resilience and the ability to adapt to challenging situations.

Philosophical approaches such as Stoicism, Socratic philosophy, and Existentialism contribute to enhancing personal resilience by strengthening a sense of self-control, searching for meaning in times of uncertainty, and encouraging mental flexibility in the face of life's challenges. For example, Stoicism, which emphasizes the importance of controlling what is within our power and focusing on inner calm, allows

individuals to develop emotional stability in stressful situations. Furthermore, critical thinking, derived from the Socratic approach, helps individuals confront internal contradictions and develop a more flexible worldview. The goal of this study is to examine the effectiveness of philosophical counselling as a tool for developing personal resilience through a philosophical counselling workshop model.

The research focuses on evaluating the impact of the workshops on three dimensions of personal resilience: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness.

Definitions

To discuss the subject of philosophical counselling and personal resilience, we must first define these two concepts. These terms have various definitions, and in this article, we will refer to the following definitions:

Personal Resilience

Personal resilience describes an individual's ability to cope with difficulties, recover from them, and adapt to changes and stressful situations. It includes a set of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural abilities that enable a person to function positively even in challenging life circumstances and to grow from these experiences. Personal resilience is a multi-dimensional concept that includes several key aspects, such as adaptability to changes (Masten 2001), emotional control (Connor and Davidson 2003), optimism (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000), and a sense of self-efficacy (Connor and Davidson 2003).

Philosophical Counselling

Philosophical counselling is an old profession that has started to gain more recognition in different countries in recent years (Schuster 1999) (Hațegan, *Philosophical Counseling: A New Profession in Romania* 2022) (Nagaraj and Ramakrishnan 2022) (Hațegan 2021). Philosophical counselling is a field that utilizes philosophical approaches to help individuals understand and examine the meaning of their lives, confront existential dilemmas, and define their principles and values. Unlike psychotherapy, which focuses on treating emotional and mental issues, philosophical counselling deals with the ethical, moral, and conceptual

aspects of human life. The counselling process assists individuals in identifying their belief systems and re-examining the personal meaning of their lives, while striving to develop thought patterns that promote mental well-being and value-oriented behavior (Schuster, 1999; Lahav, 2011).

Among the key approaches in philosophical counselling is Gerd Achenbach's dialogical approach. This approach emphasizes questioning and examining the individual's personal ideas without directing them toward a specific solution. It allows individuals the freedom to delve into their thoughts and reach personal insights (Schuster, 1999). Another approach is Ran Lahav's method, which focuses on using classic philosophical concepts to help individuals re-examine their life principles and focus on perspectives that promote well-being and personal growth (Lahav 2011). Another approach is the Socratic Method, influenced by Socrates' own style of dialogue. In this approach, the counsellor serves as a guide who asks sophisticated, directed questions to reveal contradictions or deeper understandings. This approach helps individuals formulate an independent understanding of their values and beliefs while encouraging critical thinking and personal empowerment (Schuster 1999) (Sulavikova 2014). Additionally, the existentialist approach focuses on examining existential issues such as freedom, responsibility, and the possibility of growing through facing questions about death and meaning. This approach encourages individuals to view their lives as a space in which they can find personal values and purpose, even in complex situations (Marinoff 1999).

Philosophical Counselling and Resilience

The connection between philosophical counselling and personal resilience lies in the ability of philosophical counselling to strengthen an individual's mental fortitude and help them cope with challenges and difficult life situations. Philosophical counselling assists individuals in examining their values, asking deep questions about their lives, and gaining a better understanding of their place in the world, thereby enhancing their personal resilience (Raabe 2001). By exploring the meaning of life and defining a personal value system, individuals can develop a sense of self-control and self-efficacy, which are key components of personal resilience (Connor and Davidson 2003).

A central approach in philosophical counselling that contributes to strengthening resilience is the Socratic Method, which encourages

individuals to think critically and challenge their foundational beliefs. This process can improve cognitive flexibility and foster a sense of inner stability in the face of challenges, as individuals learn to become more consciously aware of their beliefs and values (Schuster 1999). Additionally, existentialist approaches within philosophical counselling help individuals confront existential issues like freedom and responsibility, enhancing their ability to adapt to uncertainty—a fundamental aspect of personal resilience (Marinoff 1999). Through these processes, philosophical counselling not only helps individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves but also enables them to build an internal framework of strength, based on self-acceptance and self-worth. This, in turn, enhances their resilience when facing complex and challenging life situations (Masten, 2001; Lahav, 2011). Previous studies have shown that philosophical counselling can play a role in maintaining physical and spiritual well-being (Martin 2001) and that it is important for supporting individuals dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Schuster 2002) and help people with palliative care (Schuchter 2020).

According to Owen (2023), the connection between philosophical counselling and personal resilience is rooted in the insights of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, particularly those of the Stoics and Epicureans, who developed ethical systems designed to enhance an individual's ability to thrive in the face of adversity. These approaches, focusing on the cultivation of self-control, moral judgment, and critical thinking, were viewed by ancient philosophers as tools for achieving *eudaimonia*—a flourishing and fulfilling life, even when confronted with life's challenges. Owen highlights that these approaches align with contemporary psychological research on resilience, which emphasizes the importance of cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation as means of adapting to changing life circumstances.

Possible Philosophical Approaches for Using Philosophical Counselling to Enhance Resilience

Using philosophical counselling to enhance personal resilience involves incorporating several philosophical approaches that provide tools for deep thinking and the development of mental fortitude. These

approaches help individuals understand and cope with life's challenges in a way that promotes personal growth and resilience-building.

The Socratic Approach

The Socratic approach, based on Socrates' method of questioning, allows individuals to examine their fundamental beliefs through a dialogue in which the counsellor asks targeted and challenging questions. Socratic questioning helps uncover internal contradictions and deepens self-awareness, while also strengthening cognitive flexibility and the ability to face personal challenges (Schuster 1999). This process encourages individuals to develop a profound understanding of themselves and to build inner strength when dealing with uncertainty and crises, which are important components of personal resilience (Marinoff 1999).

The Stoic Approach

The Stoic approach emphasizes the importance of self-control and focusing only on things that are within one's control. This approach strengthens personal resilience by encouraging individuals to distinguish between things they can control, such as their reactions and emotions, and things they cannot control, such as external circumstances. By adopting this mindset, individuals learn to remain calm and maintain emotional balance in the face of stress and adversity (Robertson 2019).

The Existentialist Approach

The existentialist approach focuses on questions of life's meaning, freedom, and personal choice. It encourages individuals to take responsibility for their decisions and find personal values that can provide them with a sense of meaning, even in situations of uncertainty and crisis (Frankl 1984). This approach strengthens resilience by giving individuals the tools to cope with uncertainty and feelings of isolation or emptiness, while focusing on finding personal meaning (Lahav 2011).

The Philosophical Mindfulness Approach

The mindfulness approach, which originates from Eastern traditions but has gained popularity in the West, combines philosophical and psychological tools. This approach helps individuals become aware of their experiences in a mindful and non-judgmental way, which allows them to handle stressful emotions and feelings in a way that enhances mental resilience (Raabe 2001). Philosophical mindfulness contributes to creating emotional distance and healthier functioning in stressful situations (Repetti 2023).

A Model for Developing Emotional Resilience Through Philosophical Counselling

The following model aims to develop emotional resilience through philosophical counselling. The model is inspired by the C4 model (Hațegan, Involving Philosophical Practice in Solving Life Situations. The Action of 4C 2018), but with a focus on philosophical strategies. It is based on four main stages: Identification and Understanding, Philosophical Inquiry, Application and Experimentation, and Integration and Internalization. Each stage offers tools and processes designed to support the strengthening of emotional resilience using philosophical principles from various frameworks.

Identification and Understanding

At this stage, the Socratic dialogue serves as a tool for self-awareness, where the individual identifies their emotional state and the central thought patterns that challenge them. The goal is to help the individual understand the factors that emotionally affect them and rethink what emotional resilience means to them. For example, a question like "What are the most significant emotional challenges in your life?" helps bring to awareness the core perceptions shaping their emotional world.

Philosophical Inquiry

In this stage, philosophical approaches such as Stoicism, Existentialism, and Buddhism are offered, each with principles tailored to developing emotional resilience. The approach is selected based on the individual's needs: for example, Stoicism offers tools such as acceptance of things beyond control and rational coping, while Existentialism focuses on finding meaning and taking responsibility, and Buddhism contributes with a focus on compassion and self-awareness (Marinoff, 1999; Raabe, 2001).

Application and Experimentation

In this stage, the individual applies the chosen philosophical principles in their life. For example, the practice of "Pre-meditation Malorum" from Stoicism prepares them for challenging scenarios through visualization, which strengthens their ability to face them. Meditation practices from Buddhism or reflective writing from Existentialism allow the individual to transform insights into practical exercises, helping them

develop a sense of calm and self-confidence when dealing with stress (Robertson, 2019; Frankl, 1984).

Integration and Internalization

At this stage, the individual integrates the insights into their daily life through concluding discussions, reading, and participating in philosophical groups. This is a stage of deepening understanding and maintaining practice, enabling them to internalize the philosophical tools learned as part of their everyday routine. This allows them to continuously strengthen their emotional resilience according to their personal aspirations and needs (Lahav, 2011; Schuster, 1999).

A Workshop Model for Strengthening Resilience Through Philosophical Counselling

Two workshops were developed with the goal of helping to enhance personal resilience: one consisting of four sessions and another lasting an hour and a half. The hour-and-a-half workshop is the one examined and studied in this article.

Structure of the Emotional Resilience Development Workshop – 4 Sessions

Session 1: Identification and Understanding

Objective: To identify significant emotional factors in the participants' lives and examine their perceptions regarding emotional resilience. *Session Outline:*

- Opening Discussion: Introduction to the concept of emotional resilience and its connection to improving quality of life.
- Socratic Dialogue: Participants engage in open-ended questions such as, "What are the most significant emotional challenges in your life?" and "What emotional thinking patterns do you recognize in yourself?"
- Exploration of Personal Perceptions: Each participant explores their understanding of the concept of "emotional resilience" and the meaning they attribute to it. Insights are recorded to assist participants in the following stages of the process.

Session 2: Philosophical Inquiry. Objective: To expose participants to various philosophical approaches and help they choose one that suits their emotional resilience development.

Session Outline:

- Presentation of Philosophical Approaches: A brief overview of relevant approaches such as Stoicism, Existentialism, and Buddhism, including their core principles and applicability to daily emotional situations.
- Group Discussion: Participants discuss questions like, "How can Stoic principles support you in emotional coping?" or "How do you connect to the ideas of mindfulness and compassion?"
- Selection of an Approach: Each participant selects a philosophical approach that resonates with them and helps form a framework for emotional support.

Session 3: Application and Experimentation

Objective: To practice the selected philosophical principles in real emotional situations. *Session Outline:*

- Philosophical Exercises: Participants apply philosophical principles through practical exercises according to their chosen approach:
 - Stoicism: Simulating difficult situations and mental preparation using the exercise *Pre-meditatio Malorum*.
 - Existentialism: Reflective writing on personal values and how they help in dealing with crises.
 - Buddhism: Guided meditation or mindfulness practice, where participants become more aware of their emotions and mental state.
- Case Analysis: Discussion of cases from participants' lives or inspired by historical or literary figures to see how applying philosophical principles improves emotional resilience.

Session 4: Integration and Internalization

Objective: To internalize the insights gained and integrate them into daily life. *Session Outline:*

- Final Discussion: Participants share the insights and tools they've learned, focusing on the key takeaways from the workshop.
- Independent Practice (Homework): Participants receive recommendations for daily practice, such as reading philosophical texts, applying self-counseling techniques, or joining philosophical discussion groups.
- Follow-up Plan: Guidance for continued personal development of emotional resilience, including referrals to additional resources and recommendations for follow-up meetings if needed.

One-Hour-and-a-Half Emotional Resilience Development Workshop

Introduction (10 minutes)

Objective: To introduce the workshop's goals and the four stages of the model and familiarize participants with the basic concepts of emotional resilience and philosophical counselling.

Session Outline: Brief introduction to the topic, emphasizing the importance of emotional resilience, and explanation of philosophical approaches that can help with emotional coping. Participants receive a summary of the core principles of each key philosophical approach.

Stage 1: Identification and Understanding (20 minutes)

Objective: To help participants identify the main emotional challenges in their lives and the thinking patterns associated with them. *Session Outline:*

- *Socratic Dialogue Activity (10 minutes):* Participants are asked to answer open-ended questions such as, "What are your main emotional challenges?" and "When do you feel most emotionally vulnerable?" Each participant identifies and summarizes their answers in writing.
- *Group Discussion (10 minutes):* Participants optionally share key findings and reflect on the meaning of emotional resilience in their lives.

Stage 2: Philosophical Inquiry (20 minutes)

Objective: To introduce participants to relevant philosophical approaches and help them choose one that fits them.

Session Outline:

- *Presentation of Philosophical Approaches (10 minutes):* A concise explanation of Stoicism, Existentialism, and Buddhism, discussing how each approach offers different ways to strengthen emotional resilience.
- *Discussion and Guidance for Personal Choice (10 minutes):* Participants select an approach that resonates with them and imagine how applying it might help. A brief group discussion follows, where participants can share how these approaches relate to their emotional situations.

Stage 3: Application and Experimentation (20 minutes)

Objective: To practice the chosen philosophical principles in real situations. *Session Outline:*

- *Short Practical Exercise (10 minutes):* Participants choose a practical exercise according to the selected approach. For example, those who chose Stoicism will perform an exercise simulating a future challenge (*Pre-meditatio Malorum*), while those who chose Buddhism can engage in a short, guided meditation.
- *Personal Reflection (10 minutes):* Participants write a reflection on their experience during the exercise and whether it contributed to their sense of resilience.

Stage 4: Integration and Internalization (15 minutes)

Objective: To internalize the insights gained and incorporate them into daily life. *Session Outline:*

- *Final Discussion (7 minutes):* Participants share their key takeaways and receive suggestions for continued independent practice, such as further reading or mindfulness exercises.
- *Follow-up Plan (8 minutes):* Participants receive tools for ongoing development, including recommendations for philosophical literature or reflective writing and mindfulness exercises

The workshop is designed to provide participants with initial tools for coping with emotional challenges using selected philosophical approaches in a short, focused time frame. Each stage presents part of the model's goals and helps develop emotional resilience skills through a combination of personal practice and group discussion.

Preliminary Study to Evaluate the Workshop

Methodology .Antonovsky's questionnaire (1993) measures the sense of coherence through three main dimensions:

- **Comprehensibility:** Questions that measure the extent to which one understands and can predict the world around them. For example, questions such as "Has it ever happened that you were surprised by the behavior of people you know well?" reflect this dimension.
- **Manageability:** Questions that examine the feeling of one's ability to cope with difficulties and the extent to which respondents feel they have the necessary resources. For example, the question "To what

extent do you feel that there is little meaning in the things you are involved with in everyday life?" addresses this dimension.

- **Meaningfulness:** Questions that measure the level of emotional involvement and personal commitment to life events. For example, questions like "Have you had goals and objectives in your life so far?" belong to this dimension.

Scoring: A high score on the questionnaire indicates a stronger sense of coherence, which is interpreted as higher mental resilience. In other words, the higher the respondents rate their answers (typically 5-7), the higher their level of mental resilience and sense of coherence.

Participants. The study participants were 12 educators and teachers, aged 31 to 70, divided into two groups: participants who attended the resilience workshop (n=6) and participants who did not attend the workshop (n=6). All participants held academic degrees (either a bachelor's or master's) and were involved in teaching, mentoring, or other educational work.

Research Tools. The study used a shortened version of Antonovsky's resilience questionnaire (1993). The questionnaire includes 13 questions divided into three dimensions:

- **Comprehensibility:** The ability to understand emotional situations.
- **Manageability:** The ability to manage and control emotions.
- **Meaningfulness:** The sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Participants were asked to rate their answers to each question on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents the lowest extent (e.g., "rarely") and 7 represents the highest extent (e.g., "often"). The questionnaire was administered before and after the workshop.

Study Procedure. The study took place over two weeks, during which the experimental group attended the one-and-a-half-hour resilience workshop. After the workshop, participants completed the questionnaire again. The data were analyzed to compare the averages between the pre-workshop and post-workshop measurements to examine whether there was improvement in resilience measures.

Analysis of Results

The study employed a paired t-test to assess whether the score changes between the first and second measurements were statistically

significant. In cases where the data were not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used.

Results

Question	Before Score	After Score	Dimension
Has it ever happened that you were surprised by the behavior of people you know well?	6	7	Comprehensibility
Have people you trusted ever disappointed you?	4	5	Comprehensibility
Do you feel you are sometimes treated unfairly?	3	4	Comprehensibility
Do you often have confused emotions and thoughts?	4	5	Comprehensibility
After events happen, do you often realize you exaggerated or minimized their importance?	5	6	Comprehensibility
Do you feel like you don't care what happens around you?	5	6	Meaningfulness
Do your daily activities give you deep satisfaction and enjoyment?	5	6	Meaningfulness
Many people, even those with strong characters, sometimes feel miserable.	7	8	Meaningfulness
To what extent do you feel that there is little meaning in the things you are involved with?	4	5	Meaningfulness
Have you had goals and objectives in your life so far?	7	8	Manageability

Do you often find yourself in unfamiliar situations and unsure of what to do?	6	7	Manageability
Do you experience emotions you would prefer not to feel?	6	7	Manageability
To what extent do you have emotions you're not sure you can control?	6	7	Manageability

Explanation of Results

The table shows the change in scores before and after the intervention in each dimension:

- *Comprehensibility*: On average, scores improved from 4.6 before the intervention to 5.4 after the intervention.
- *Manageability*: The most significant improvement was in the manageability dimension, where the average score increased from 6.25 to 7.
- *Meaningfulness*: Scores in the meaningfulness dimension also improved, with the average increasing from 5.25 to 6.25.

The results indicate that the intervention to enhance personal resilience was highly effective. All dimensions (comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness) showed improvements, with manageability displaying the most notable improvement. This enhancement in these dimensions reflects an overall improvement in the participants' sense of coherence, which in turn indicates a strengthened personal resilience.

Discussions

The study aimed to examine the effectiveness of philosophical counselling as a tool for developing personal resilience, focusing on key philosophical approaches such as Socratic, Stoic, and Existentialist philosophies. The results of the preliminary study indicate that the workshop based on philosophical counselling contributed to improving the personal resilience measures among participants. Significant improvements were observed in the "manageability" dimension, which

measures the ability to manage emotions and cope with stress. Furthermore, the "comprehensibility" and "meaningfulness" dimensions also showed improvements, suggesting that participants experienced an enhanced ability to understand situations in their lives and ascribe meaning to them. These findings align with the existing literature on personal resilience and philosophical counselling. For instance, the study by Connor and Davidson (2003) highlights that personal resilience includes elements such as emotional control, a sense of self-efficacy, and optimism—components that were reinforced through the philosophical counselling workshop. Additionally, the findings reflect Masten's (2001) theory of resilience as "ordinary magic," which suggests that individuals can develop resilience through life experiences and external support, such as that provided through philosophical counselling.

The Socratic approach, widely used in the workshop, emphasizes the importance of questioning and developing critical thinking to reveal internal contradictions and deepen self-awareness (Schuster 1999). This approach helped participants develop cognitive flexibility and strengthen their ability to cope with uncertainty—a key factor in personal resilience. Moreover, the use of Stoic principles, such as emotional control and focusing on what is within one's control, contributed to a sense of emotional balance and inner peace among the participants (Robertson 2019). These findings are consistent with previous research on the capacity of philosophy to improve mental well-being. Lahav (2011) suggests that philosophical counselling can serve as a "quest for wisdom"—a process through which individuals gain tools to confront complex life dilemmas and find new meaning in their lives. Similarly, Marinoff (1999) supports this view by emphasizing the use of classical philosophical concepts to guide individuals toward emotional growth and an improved sense of personal resilience. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on personal resilience by presenting a practical model for using philosophical approaches in workshops that can be expanded and adapted for various audiences. However, it is important to note that the study has limitations due to the small sample size and the absence of a larger control group.

Additionally, the study was conducted on a sample of educators and teachers, so it remains to be seen whether these findings apply to other population groups. This study suggests that philosophical counselling can

be an effective tool for developing personal resilience by strengthening emotional control, a sense of meaning, and cognitive flexibility. Approaches such as Socratic, Stoic, and Existentialist philosophies provide a conceptual framework that helps individuals cope with personal challenges and grow from them. Based on these findings, it is recommended to expand the use of philosophical counselling in therapeutic and educational settings to improve individuals' mental resilience. Future research should include larger samples and examine the long-term effects of philosophical counselling on personal resilience.

Conclusions

The article addresses philosophical counselling as a tool for strengthening personal resilience, particularly in the challenging reality of recent decades, characterized by pandemics, natural disasters, and rapid economic and social changes. It highlights the urgent need for developing personal resilience—the ability of individuals to cope with crises, recover from them, and adapt to stressful situations.

The paper proposes philosophical counselling as an alternative to traditional therapeutic approaches. Unlike psychotherapy, philosophical counselling focuses on existential and ethical issues, helping individuals develop critical thinking, enhance self-awareness, and improve their ability to handle dilemmas and challenges. Philosophical approaches such as Stoicism, Socratic philosophy, and Existentialism help increase a sense of self-control, find meaning in life, and foster mental flexibility in times of uncertainty.

This study examined the impact of a philosophical counselling workshop on three dimensions of personal resilience: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. The findings showed improvement in all dimensions, with a particularly notable improvement in the manageability dimension, which refers to the ability to manage emotions and cope with stress.

The article concludes that philosophical counselling can contribute to the development of personal resilience, enhancing emotional control and the ability to cope with stress and challenges.

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