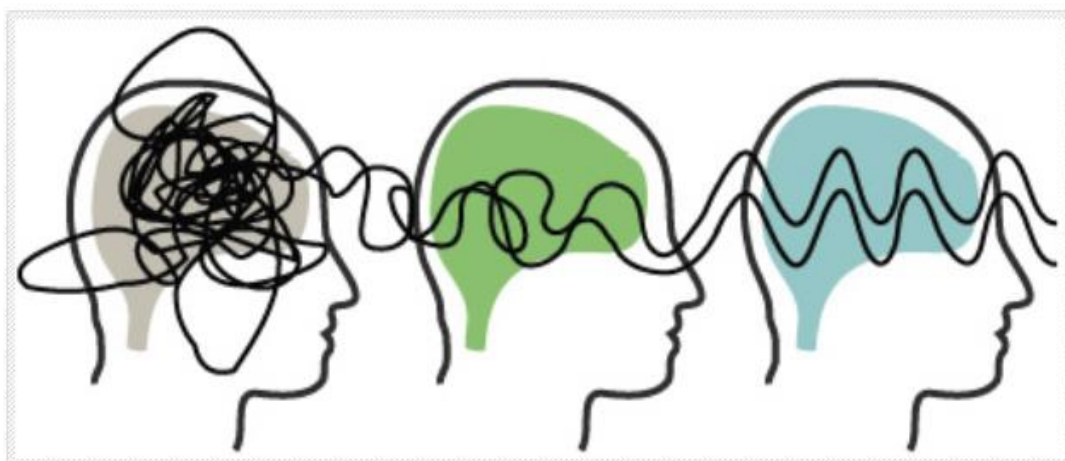


Building Resilience and Looking After Yourself

A toolkit for parents/carers to help build resilience and to build ideas to look after yourself.



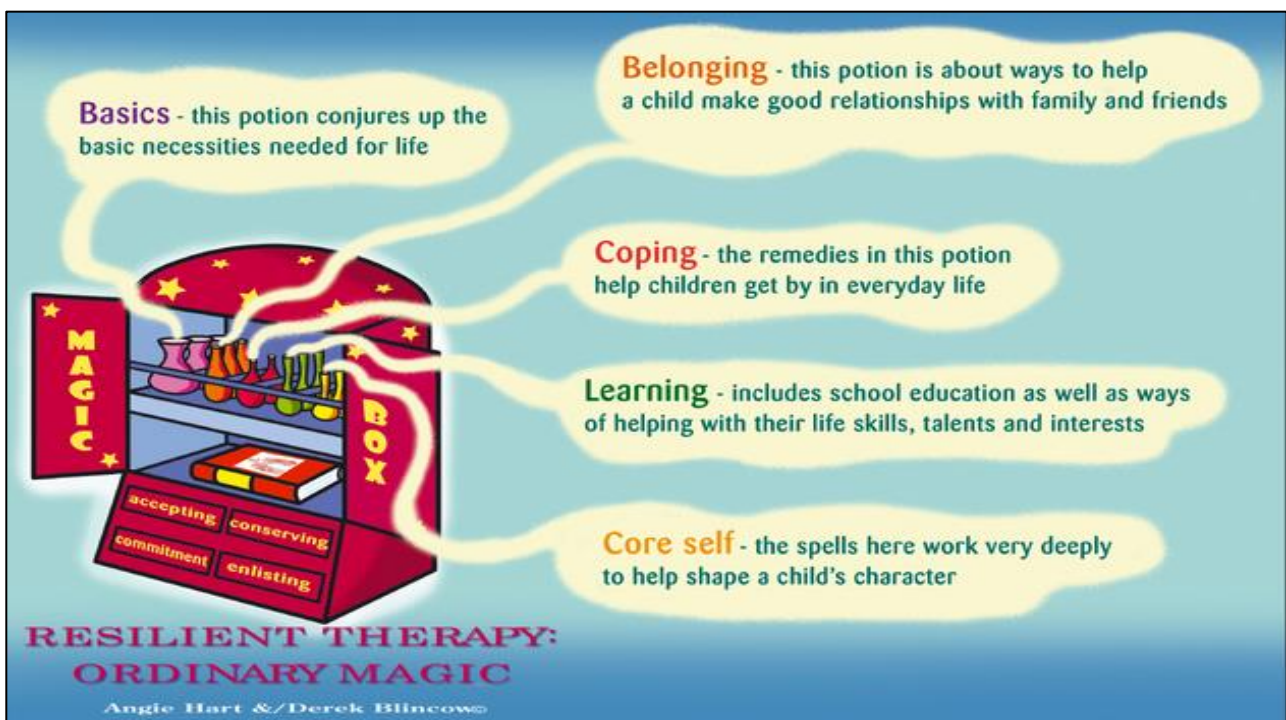
This toolkit provides an overview of what resilience is. There are also some ideas for building and maintaining your own resilience. This toolkit emphasises how important it is to look after yourself as a parent or carer of a child with a disability and/or developmental difficulty. There are three testimonies from parents/carers of children with a disability and/or developmental delay.

What is Resilience?

‘Resilience’ is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. Resilience refers to one's ability to “bounce back” from difficult situations. When faced with a difficult life event, for example, the sudden loss of a loved one, work stressors or relationship problems, resilient individuals are able to successfully cope with, or adapt to, the associated stress. Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress; resilience means they are better at adapting well in the face of this adversity.

Resilience is not something that we have, it is something that we build up. Therefore, our resilience can be tested and damaged. We have to work to maintain our resilience.

Resilience Framework for a child



Above is a resilience framework for a child, which covers 5 topics including: the basics, belonging, coping, learning and the core self. The framework includes a set of ideas and practice that promotes resilience. Although this framework suggests ways to support your child, perhaps there are ideas in here that would be relevant for yourself too.

Building Your Own Resilience

There are numerous transitions that your child will go through during their lifetime. But, YOU yourself will also go through numerous transitions. Building your own resilience and staying strong as parents and carers is really important. But it can be hard to do. If your child does not progress in ways important to you, it does not mean you are a failure.



Looking after yourself...!



WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU
LEMONS,
MAKE LEMONADE

Although there are inspiring
quotes throughout this
toolkit...

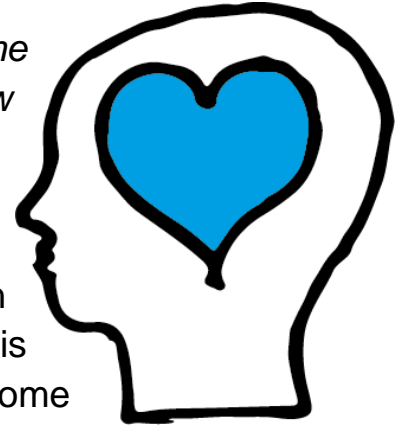
When life gives you
lemons, squeeze them
in people's eyes.

It's okay to feel like
this sometimes!

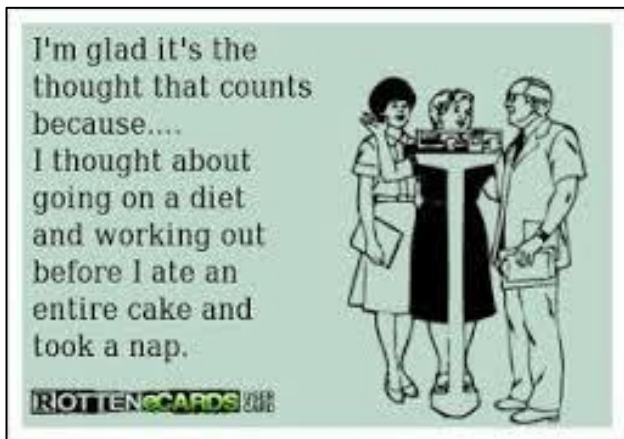
Although this may sound obvious, it is really important to look after yourself. How you look after yourself can be as individual as you. Everyone may have different ways which work for them – ways which work really well for them but would be useless to someone else. It can be hard to find the time to look after yourself, when you are just trying to make it through the day, but even if this is 5 minutes to yourself a day that you look after yourself this can be so powerful to help not only you but your whole family.

Compassion Circle

What is one thing that is going well for you at the moment? Can you think of one thing, no matter how small, that you already do to take care of yourself? This might be an aspect of your physical self, your creative self, your emotional self, your social self. As parents/carers, you may regularly support others in your life (your children, partner, family, at work), but it is so important to keep something for you; keep some compassion for yourself.



Take Action Today



It's not just the thought that counts...

...we all need to commit to some kind of action, for yourselves, to take care of yourselves a little bit better than you are doing now. Whoever said "it's the thought that counts" was just trying to make you feel better!

Focus on what matters

Although these questions may appear to be huge. It can be good to ask ourselves some questions that might not always be easy to answer.

What really matters to you, deep in your heart?

What do you want to do with your time on this planet?

What sort of person do you want to be?

What personal strengths or qualities do you want to develop?

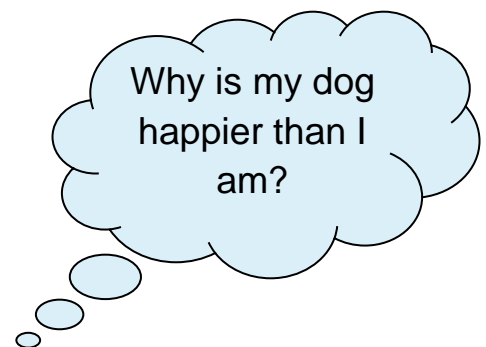


Mindfulness

‘Mindfulness’ is a mental state achieved by focusing your awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Mindfulness is used as a therapeutic technique and is a type of meditation. Practising mindfulness can include focusing on our breathing and focusing on our 5 senses. Awareness of what we can *smell, hear, see, taste and feel* is one way that we can practise being mindful. The aim of mindfulness is to relax the body and mind and to help reduce stress.



What goes on in our minds is not our design and not our fault. Thoughts are just thoughts and not you or reality. Humans are beings that think about the future, the kind of person we want to be and how we want to feel rather than by living day by day. Rather than using our thinking and attention to cope with unpleasant emotions our brain hijacks us and pulls us into our threat system (our anger, our anxiety) and we dwell and ruminate which causes a vicious circle. Our thoughts are important, this background chatter is often what drives us and guides us. We need to be honest with ourselves about what's going on. Mindfulness helps us to become aware of our thoughts and feelings in a way that can be soothing for us.



Mindfulness script:

Here is a mindfulness script that you could try. Perhaps you could take this one step further... and read this script together with your child or young person.

Start by finding a safe, comfortable and quiet place where you know you will not be disturbed. Let your eyes slowly soften until they are fully closed. You may notice how your body is becoming aware of its surroundings. Try to relax into your body and into your surroundings. To just be in the present moment.

Allow your breath to find its own natural rhythm. Mindfulness is a hard skill to learn but we can start today. Bring your full attention to your breathing. Now, notice how your body expands when you breathe in and deflates when you breathe out. Become aware of your bodily sensations as you breathe.

Breathe in for the count of 4, 1...2...3...4 and out for 4, 1...2...3...4. Repeat this for as many times as you would like. All the while focusing on only your breathing. If your mind wanders off, this is okay, it is natural, just bring your focus back to the here-and-now and your breathing.

Now we are going to focus on our body. Body scans can be a good way to bring us into the present and focus on the here and now. First, focus on your toes, how do they feel? Are they in contact with a rug, your mattress, the floor? Work your way up to your lower legs, what sensations can you feel here? Now, bringing your attention further up your legs to your hips, your waist, your hands and then your arms. Now to where we were focusing on our breathing. Notice how your lungs know exactly what to do, bring your focus to the breath. Now further up still, to your neck, your face and now your head. Enjoy the feeling of having completed your body scan.

Now slowly, allow your mind to wander. Let your mind think about anything that it wants to. Bring your attention back to your breathing. Focus on the natural rhythm of your breathe. Slowly start to open your eyes, when you're ready come back to fully alert and awake. The breath is always with you and is your tool to bring you into the present.

Written by Molly Batchelor BSc

Self-help Apps

Using self-help apps can be really useful and a viable source of support. The NHS have published apps on their digital library. There is a specific category for mental health, some of which include:

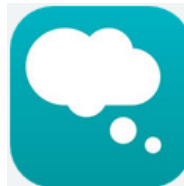
Big White Wall



Blue ice



Catch it



Be Mindful



Chill Panda



Other ones to try include:

Headspace



Woebot



Mindfulness



Calm



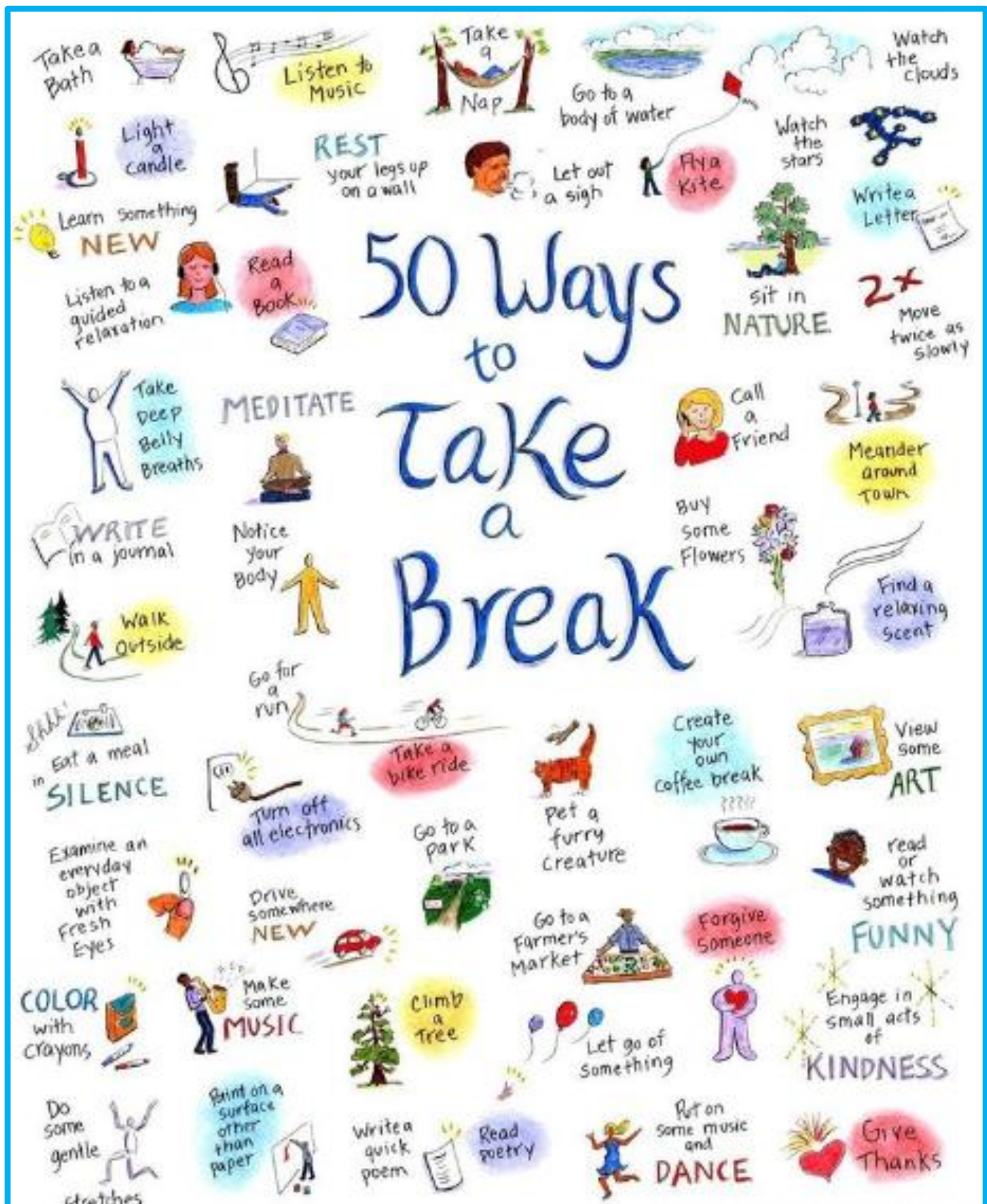
Link to NHS website:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>

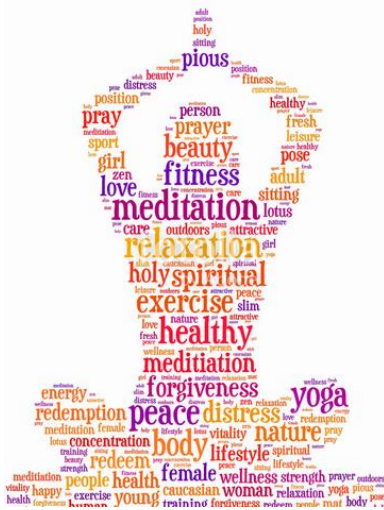
Further there are specific apps for learning disability:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/learning-disabilities/>

Take a breath... take a break... remember you're only human!



Find something for YOU!



With the busy life that being a parent brings, it can be really hard to find the time to do something for you. Being a parent of a child with a disability may at times make you feel like you cannot do anything for you. But we thought we would provide a few ideas of some hobbies or activities that you could do for YOU

Is there a local Yoga studio that you could go to? How about the apple app called “Yoga” which offers a range of different yoga routines lasting 8-15 minutes at varying levels of difficulty.

How about your local Parkrun? What is this? It is a 5km run – it’s you against the clock. It is every Saturday at 9am. Visit www.parkrun.org.uk to find your local Parkrun. All those that attend run for their own enjoyment, whether you’re competitive level or a total beginner, Parkrun is for everyone!

Do you like baking? Could you make a promise to yourself that you are going to bake one thing for enjoyment once a month?

Do you like reading? Could you set a time, either once a day, once a week or once a month where you read? Could you make this commitment to yourself? Or perhaps there is a local reading club that you have heard about that you could join.

Do you like dancing? Is there a local dance club or Zumba class that you could go to? Could you go with a friend?

Have you heard of the “GoodGym?” It is where you forget the gym, but get fit by doing good. You meet and run a set distance to a project in the local community. For example, you could run and then help out community work at the local school.



Testimonials

We asked some of our Sparkle families what they thought about resilience and 'looking after yourself'. Here is what some of them had to say:

"I feel it's so important to keep myself feeling strong because If I become poorly who looks after my family?"

Just to have enough time to have an undisturbed bath with a cup of tea is bliss. It recharges my batteries and sets me off again".

"Due to my busy day-to-day life I find it very hard to relax so to enable me to unwind mentally and have some time to myself I like to go for a run. This gives me the chance to feel the air/rain/sun on my face, smell the blossoms, take in the sights of the budding flowers and autumnal colours; watch each season change. I may feel very tired before I put my trainers on but by the time I get back home I truly feel energised and at peace with myself. This enables me to take on whatever challenges lay ahead."

"Having a child with ASD can be challenging at times. Looking beyond the behaviour, understanding the daily challenges he faces and being equally proud of all his little and huge achievements, certainly helps. However, I also recognise the importance of taking time to myself. For me, reading, singing and attending Dads Group provides me with an element of escapism and/or an increased sense of purpose and worth building resilience to keep on supporting my family."



Useful Web links:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH3_64mLCU8
- www.boingboing.org.uk
- YouTube - Angie hart tedxBrighton
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPUzjyAoOK4>
- <https://www.psychom.net/dealing-with-change>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/17944275/peer-support-toolkit-final.pdf>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/>



Further reading:

- Hart, A. and Bincow, D. with Thomas, H. (2007) *Resilient Therapy: Working with children and families*. London: Routledge
- Aumann, K. and Hart, A. (2009) *Helping children with complex needs bounce back: Resilient Therapy for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley

References:

- Gray, C (1991c). *Social stories*. The morning News. November-December, 1991. Jenison, MI: Jenison Public Schools
- Miller, N. B. (1994). *Nobody's perfect: Living and growing with children who have special needs*. Paul H Brookes Publishing Company.
- Clements, J. (2013). Challenging Behaviour.
- Witzel, B. S., & Mercer, C. D. (2003). Using rewards to teach students with disabilities: Implications for motivation. *Remedial and special education*, 24(2), 88-96.
- <http://projects.hsl.wisc.edu/SERVICE/courses/whole-health-for-pain-and-suffering/Script-Mindful-Breathing.pdf>



How to get further support:

- **Helping Hands Service** – A support service for parents/carers of children with a disability or developmental difficulty living in Newport, South Monmouth or South Torfaen. **Contact: 01633 748 023**
- **Your GP.** If you are concerned about your child, please speak to your GP about how they are able to support you/help you access other support
- **Resilience Framework.** Email the author: a.hart@brighton.ac.uk
- **Mind General enquiries.** Enquiries@newportmind.org or phone 01633 258741.
- **Mind Peer Support Groups.** Newport Mind: Contact: Zara.Morrice@newportmind.org

Did you like this toolkit? Why not try one of our other toolkits too?

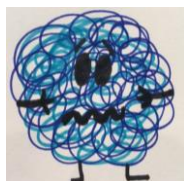
Friendships



School Swimming Lessons



Supporting Children and Young People with Anxiety and Worry



Supporting Siblings



Transition –
A time of change



Developed by Molly Batchelor BSc, Assistant Psychologist with help from Sparkle's parents and carers

