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*Commentary by Principal, Te Kura o Tititea Mount Aspiring College Nicola Jacobsen*

## **Helping or harming? Choosing your way through life's challenges**

Resilience is something we all have to find within ourselves at different times in our lives.

It's not a fixed trait we are born with, nor does it look the same for everyone. Each of us responds differently to the many challenges life throws at us.

The reassuring thing is that resilience is something we can all build. It's a skill we can learn, strengthen, and practise over time.

Resilience researcher, bestselling author, and keynote speaker Lucy Hone encourages us to take a pragmatic approach to resilience, an approach grounded in what actually helps us navigate difficult moments, rather than what we think we should feel or do.

All of us will experience loss, grief, and moments where we wonder if things will ever feel different, and might ask ourselves, 'Will I ever get through this?' — a question that is also the title of Lucy's latest book.

In her TED talk, which has been viewed over 2.7 million times, Lucy shares three practical tips for building our resilience. The one that resonates most with me is a simple but powerful question: 'Is what I am doing helping me or harming me?'

Lucy illustrates this through her own experience of profound loss - the loss of a child. She describes sitting late at night, pouring over photos of her daughter, and becoming increasingly upset. In that moment, she asked herself whether her behaviour was helping or harming her. She realised it was not helping, and chose instead to go to sleep.

'Is this helping or harming me?' is a question we can all turn to regardless of the type of challenge we are facing. It gives us a way to work through difficulty, rather than feeling stuck in it.

At Mount Aspiring College, resilience — or ihi — is one of our core values. We think about it in terms of students growing their resilience through their determination and commitment to do their very best.

Our young people grow their resilience in many ways: by persisting with their learning, supporting others, helping friends and whānau through tough times, and making thoughtful choices about what matters most, especially during challenging times.

When Lucy spoke in Wānaka recently, I asked her how we can best help the young people in our lives when they are navigating tough times.

Her response was that we need to show them that we are real, and not perfect.

When we model the messiness of life, rather than putting on a front, we help the young people around us to understand that showing vulnerability and asking for help is okay.

It's also important that young people understand there is no 'right way' to grieve or navigate difficulties. A resilient person experiences a full range of emotions, including the difficult ones, but doesn't get stuck in just one.

When we keep things real, we help protect young people from isolation. Our behaviour reminds them that they are not alone in what they are feeling.

Resilience is not about having the perfect response to life's challenges. It's about recognising that while we cannot avoid hardship, we can choose how we respond.

It's about continuing to move through difficult moments in the best way we can, and being there for one another along the way.