

**Dr Angela Smith at the Hertfordshire primary headteachers' conference:
developing your everyday resilience**



“Everyone has a talent, and mine was working with psychopaths”. As the second female in forensics, Dr Angela Smith faced challenges as soon as she chose her career path.

When an average day involves running anger management groups for bank robbers, one feels their resilience is pretty high. After high levels of strain however, Angela found she had reached burn out. She said, “I thought I was really resilient – how could I be resilient and have burn out? I knew I had to change the way I worked”.

As a keynote speaker at the primary headteachers' conference in September, Angela talked about the science of resilience and her own experiences. She explained the nature of resilience and its roots in ruptures and repair: “What happens to you growing up (ruptures) affects your resilience, but how you react (repair) affects this even more.”

She related this to the classroom: “If you shout and tell the quiet child to speak up often enough, they learn to become shy. Shyness decreases resilience, quietness does not”.

She outlined the phases we go through when a situation arises that requires resilience: a cycle of negativity, followed by survival mode – overeating, for example. This is followed by resignation and then adaptation – “Most of what happens to us is out of our control, but what is in our control is the way we react”. When adaptation begins, recovery is not far behind and this is where change starts being made.

She spoke about these phases as moving from working against reality and with reality, as we start to accept what has happened and what needs to be done; “as headteachers it's a difficult thing for you to manage if you have moved to working with reality and you are working with teachers who have not moved to reality”, she said, “as managers move up, empathy can and often does decrease...but by not avoiding change, your empathy starts to increase.”

She reminded headteachers: “Everything you do, every day will be increasing or decreasing your resilience, which constantly changes throughout the day. When you become comfortable being uncomfortable, you've cracked resilience.”