

From Labels to Light: Resilience, Faith, and Transformation

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Abstract

Children and adolescents with special needs are often burdened with labels such as “failure,” “intellectually deficient,” or “hopeless case,” which can diminish their identity and self-worth. Drawing from over a decade of experience as a special educator and educational psychologist, this paper explores how diagnoses, though clinically necessary, do not define an individual’s potential. Instead, resilience, faith, timely psychological intervention, and consistent support systems play transformative roles in fostering holistic development. Historical figures such as Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, and Louis Braille exemplify how limitations need not determine destiny. In the context of rising mental health concerns and suicide rates among youth, this article emphasises early intervention, parental involvement, and professional guidance. Transformation is presented as a nonlinear yet attainable journey that requires perseverance, faith, and structured therapeutic support. Ultimately, individuals are empowered not merely to cope with adversity but to convert setbacks into purpose and lasting impact.

Keywords: Resilience, Special education, Mental health intervention, Faith-based empowerment

The Weight of Labels and Identity

‘Failure,’ ‘intellectually deficient,’ ‘hopeless case,’ ‘emotionally stunted,’ ‘socially awkward,’ and ‘behaviourally immature’ are some profound labels; I’ve encountered recurrently for over a decade as a special educator/educational psychologist for children and adolescents with special needs. I’ve witnessed closely how these labels have shrunk

their overall identity and well-being, including that of their kith and kin. Yes, as professionals, we categorise individuals after meeting the criteria of a said disorder or disability. However, do these diagnoses diminish their actual potential? Definitely not; this is where the notions of ‘resilience’ and ‘faith’ step in. For with God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37), and along with the desired mediation of mental health professionals, resilience is built and holistic success is attainable. Lori Gottlieb once said ‘You are stronger than you think. You have gotten through every bad day in your life, and you are undefeated.’ ‘We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

In history, if the likes of Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, Louis Braille, and many more renowned personalities had embraced their ‘disability’ as their ‘sole identity,’ the world wouldn’t have visionaries who pioneered extraordinary inventions that transcend human understanding. It is highly unlikely to achieve such tremendous feats utterly by themselves. Many beautiful souls, in the form of assistants, therapists, and well-wishers, impacted, nurtured and curated their self-actualisation.

The Urgency of Mental Health Intervention

In recent times, the morbidity rate related to children, adolescents, and young adults committing suicide due to academic pressure or limitations has increased tremendously. Academic pressure is strongly associated with depressive symptoms and self-harm among adolescents in England, confirming that scholastic stress is a significant predictor of mental health crises (Guo et al., 2026). In India, educational stress is particularly acute. Reports document frequent suicides among students preparing for competitive exams (IIT-JEE, NEET), especially in coaching hubs like Kota (Naikare & Mehta, 2025). These cases illustrate how academic limitations and pressure can escalate into life-threatening outcomes. Suicide remains one of the leading causes of death among adolescents worldwide.

There is a higher emphasis on the adolescent age group as it is a vulnerable developmental period often characterised by distress, irritability, and increased susceptibility to mental disorders (Patton & Viner, 2007). This scenario can be attributed to diminished emotional insight, adaptability, and flexibility in facing adversity, as well as to a failure to intervene in time due to social ignominy. A 2026 study found

that academic pressure directly increases suicide risk, and indirectly through depression and weakened school cohesion. This highlights how stress from performance expectations can erode resilience and emotional adaptability (Li et al., 2026).

Even today, consultation with a mental health professional is not favoured and is considered taboo. While one has the courage to mutilate and self-harm, why doesn't one risk pausing or possess the fortitude to rise from the ashes with professional expertise? One conscious decision reshapes numerous lives positively.

The Transformative Role of Mental Health Professionals

Psychologists, educators, therapists, and every other mental health professional specialise in optimising the potential of others. They cruise through life, empowering several beings while facing their own tumultuous battles. Skilful training heightens wisdom and prowess to analyse problems from different perspectives, plan individualised intervention, and determine possible solutions, interim or permanent, based on the challenge at hand. Mental Health Professionals are messengers in disguise who transforms and renews identities. 'Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven' (Matthew 5:16).

Having worked with clients having an array of learning difficulties, including dyslexia, dyscalculia, mild to moderate autism, ADHD, emotional and behavioural issues, IQ-related issues, etc., for over a decade, I confidently attest to the fact that no client presented with the same condition. 'Disability' or 'limitation' manifests uniquely in each individual, and experience has shown that employing an eclectic, multi-modal therapeutic approach is far more effective. Consistent, individualistic, intensive, and unfailing psychological and educational intervention, along with parental support, warranted countless clients overcoming their limitations. An eclectic perspective in psychotherapy intentionally combines techniques from multiple modalities to meet the unique needs of each client, and this approach is empirically supported as more flexible and adaptable than rigid adherence to a single school of thought (Arkowitz, 1992). Overwhelmed parents testified to the same with gratitude. Teachers and school officials have also been surprised by their holistic progress. 'All things are possible to those who believe' (Mark 9:23).

Transformation Is a Process

Learning, healing, and coping mechanisms are non-linear. Thus, a thorough understanding, including genetic, environmental and other possible contributing factors, is crucial for major ‘transformation’ to occur. ‘Positive Transformation’ is an expedition; it is a laborious, time-consuming process. It involves a relentless pursuit of motivation, hard work, positive reinforcement and therapy to observe a tiny glimpse of change or progress. Some days the voyage feels light, and a few absolutely daunting, but the key is for the individual to never give up and trust the process, for a breakthrough is imminent and within reach under expert direction. ‘Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God’ (Philippians 4:6). Those who trusted the process and laboured through it tirelessly, blossomed into renewed, powerful and successful individuals.

The Role of Resilience and Faith

An eagle, unlike other birds, doesn’t succumb to obstacles or hindrances but weathers the storm and rises above turbulent altitudes. Its unwavering persistence, determination, vision, and focus strengthen it to persevere despite its odds. Likewise, we should embody the attitude of an eagle and strive and soar above our momentary afflictions. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:31). Resilient individuals are endowed with power and discernment to catapult setbacks, shortcomings, and transient pain into purpose.

Grapes are compressed to make wine, diamonds form under extreme pressure, olives are squeezed to release oil, and seeds germinate in absolute darkness before they shoot out. Likewise, when faced with hardship or adversity, we shouldn’t throw in the towel but embrace the process and develop in character and strength. ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’ (Philippians 4:19).

We are tried, tested, isolated and pruned during our season of wilderness in order to bear much fruit during the season of deliverance and breakthrough. ‘He changes a wilderness into a pool of water and a dry land into springs of water’ (Psalms 107:35). Every failure, setback is a divine redirection towards something more significant. Continue transfiguring and rebuilding as there’s light at the end of every tunnel. We become empowered the moment we view failure as a stepping

stone to success. Life can be juxtaposed with multiple facets of trials, but with the weapons of ‘resilience’ and ‘faith’, we can combat each layer triumphantly.

Reframing Failure

Persist, persevere, strive and soar like an eagle; for victory and affluence are inherited by those who never quit. ‘And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you’ (1 Peter 5:10). Self-actualisation is undeniably feasible under the tutelage of a professional, along with supernatural endurance. Empowered individuals are equipped to create rippling effects impacting generations and carving their own niche in history. Research emphasises that children with disabilities experience self-actualisation differently, requiring tailored support. A study on the self-actualisation of children in difficult life situations highlights that pedagogical tools and inclusion practices can create effective conditions for vulnerable children to achieve self-actualisation (Popova, 2023).

Our mind is a battlefield constantly oppressed, tormented, and defeated by numerous internal and external voices, leading to doubt, confusion, discouragement and disbelief in our potential and strength. Learn to strain down the opinions like a sieve. ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me’ (John 10:27). Resist the negative comments and speak life over yourself and others. ‘Life and death are in the power of the tongue’ (Proverbs 18:21). Never diminish your existence, but arise and shine towards your victory march. ‘Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you’ (Isaiah 60:1).

Be encouraged, if God has chosen us to be an instrument for his glory, and all of us have a purpose. Believe in yourself, life is purposeful, hold tight, for at the appointed time, breakthrough surely unfolds. ‘When the time is right, I, the Lord will make it happen.’ (Isaiah 60:22). Embark on your radiant mission today; minister to numerous hopeless souls and keep shining your light. ‘For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope’ (Jeremiah 29:11).

Conclusion

Labels may describe a condition, but they must never confine a person’s identity. Over years of clinical and educational practice, it has

become evident that disability manifests uniquely in every individual and that potential often lies dormant beneath layers of discouragement and stigma. With individualized intervention, parental involvement, institutional collaboration, resilience, and faith, transformation is not only possible but probable. The journey is seldom linear; it requires endurance, structured support, and unwavering belief in progress, however incremental. Mental health professionals serve as facilitators of renewal, guiding individuals to reconstruct identity beyond diagnosis. When failure is reframed as redirection and adversity as refinement, individuals begin to soar beyond perceived limitations. Empowered individuals then create ripple effects that influence families, institutions, and future generations. Ultimately, resilience fortified by faith and professional guidance enables individuals not merely to survive adversity but to transfigure it into enduring strength, purpose, and legacy.

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