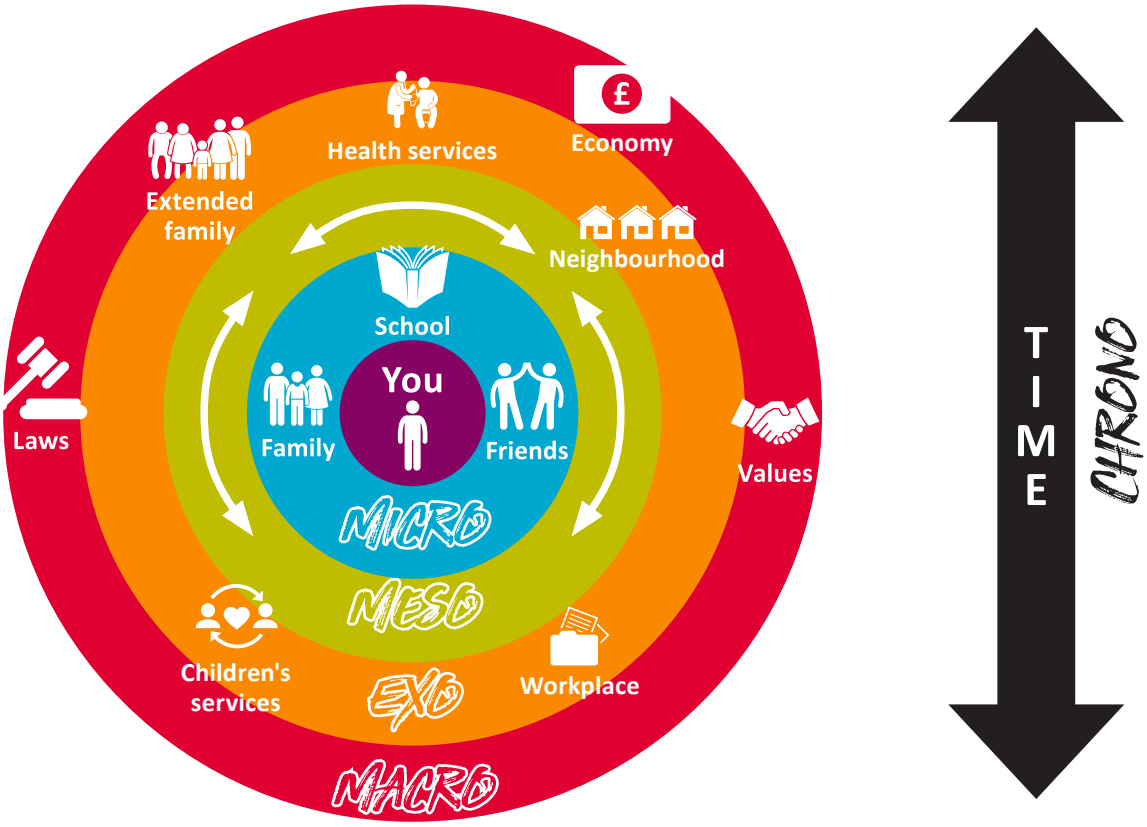
Socio-ecological models

Socio-ecological models were developed to further the understanding of the dynamic interrelations among various personal and environmental factors. The best-known socio-ecological theory is that of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979; see Appendix 2) and his description of the environment (or social-ecology) at five different levels:



Microsystem	Mesosystem	Exosystem	Macrosystem	Chronosystem
The child's immediate environment	Different parts of the child's immediate environment interacting together	People and places that have an indirect impact on the child's life	Government policies and cultural values	The influence of change and constancy in a child's environment

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979; 2005)

These can be a useful tool for analysing a child's or young person's environment and context and helping us decide where to concentrate our effort. Working with a social-ecological approach to resilience means paying attention to the way a child's environment (family, school, community and wider environment) can provide the support and resources needed for their healthy development, and targeting all of these dimensions when intervening.

The work of practitioners can not only positively influence children and young people in the microsystem but can also 'ripple out', making changes at wider system levels. Furthermore, Boingboing use the term 'inequalities imagination' to describe what is required for a practitioner to take proper account of how social, economic and health inequalities in their environment impact on child and family difficulties, and advocate a need to develop a practice understanding of how wider social forces affect the capacities of individuals to change their own lives.

More detail of Bronfenbrenner's approach and a case example can be found in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2 – Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach

This example of how Bronfenbrenner's approach works in practice draws on Angie Hart and Kim Aumann's more detailed briefing paper for practitioners on systems approaches to using Boingboing's resilience approach in practice (Hart & Aumann 2017). In terms of child development, socio-ecological models explore how dynamic interrelations among various personal and environmental factors influence how a child grows and develops.

In Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) ecological approach, the child's environment is divided into five different levels, with the interactions that take place within and between these levels impacting on the child's development. The **microsystem** emphasises the bi-directional interactions between the child and their immediate environment, such as family, caregivers, peer groups and teachers, which create proximal processes. The more encouraging and nurturing these interactions are, the better the child will be able to grow. Furthermore, the bi-directional nature of these interactions means the child's genetic and biologically influenced personality traits will have an impact on how others in their immediate environment may respond and interact with them.

The **mesosystem** describes how the different parts of a child's microsystem interconnect, such as interactions between parents and teachers or relationships between the child's peers and their family. For instance, if caregivers take an active role with school, going to parent- teacher meetings or promoting positive activities, this will help the child's overall development.

At the **exosystem** level are people and places that are likely to have a large effect, even though the child does not have direct interaction. For instance, a parent's workplace does not directly involve the child but still affects them if their parent loses their job.

The **macrosystem** includes factors such as government policies, cultural values, dominant beliefs, the economy and political systems, which change over successive generations.

The **chronosystem** is about change but also continuity. It refers to life transitions and external environmental or socio-historical events that occur during a child's or cohort of children's development, and change how they interact with the other systems at particular periods in time; such as increased educational opportunities for girls, the timing of a parent's death or physiological changes that occur as the child grows up.

The example below provides an illustration of working across four of the systems within a school context at a particular moment in time for a child who is presenting with angry outbursts in class:

- **Micro:** this level is about people in direct contact with the child interacting with them. For example, the class teacher offers adapted curriculum and new strategies such as 'time-out' cards, responsibility for extra tasks within class, and attendance at after-school club activities.
- **Meso:** this level is about different parts of the microsystem interconnecting. For example, the school's mental health lead supports the class teacher to explore different anger management strategies to try with the child by honing in on the 'understanding boundaries' component on the Resilience Framework. They enlist the child's parent in that task, having explored with them some of the underlying causes of the child's behaviour, which are connected to things going on at home.
- **Exo:** the school mental health lead engages the whole school in development opportunities to increase staff understanding of behaviour issues, increase support skills and work with parents on joined up strategies. The student council considers the issue of behaviour support and offers its perspectives at meetings with senior leaders and at a series of assemblies about the whole school.
- **Macro:** the new Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019) being implemented nationally by Ofsted will affect how schools are evaluated and will likely affect decision making within schools and therefore the school environment. Parents and staff should be supported to lobby on issues such as national education policies that can have an impact on the behaviour approaches applied in their local school, taking actions which may have a favourable result on the school environment and thus the child.

Appendix 3 – Assessing risk from self-harm

The following are areas to cover when assessing risk from self-harm.

Nature and frequency of injury

- Are there any injuries requiring immediate attention?
- Has the young person ingested/taken anything that needs immediate action?
- Establish what self-harming thoughts and behaviours have been considered or carried out and how often?

Other risk-taking behaviours

- Explore other aspects of risk – fast driving, extreme sports, use of drugs/alcohol.

Child protection

- Consider whether there are child protection issues and, if so, discuss and/or refer.

Health

- Ask about physical health issues such as eating, sleeping.
- Ask about mental states such as depression, anxiety.

Underlying issues

- Explore the underlying issues that are troubling the child/young person, which may include family, school, social isolation, bullying, and relationships.

General distress

- Assess current level of distress.
- Ascertain what needs to happen for the child young person to feel better.
- Ask about what current support child/young person is getting.

Future support

- Elicit current strategies that have been used to resist the urge to self-harm or stop it from getting worse.
- Discuss who knows about this situation that may be able to help.
- Discuss contacting parents if that would be helpful.
- Discuss possible onward referral with child or young person.
- Discuss who you will contact and what you will say.