

# GRS Supervisor Professional Development Program

## Building Resilience in Research Students



Graduate Research School  
2018

# Building Resilience

- Normal for Higher Degree by Research students to encounter problems in candidature
- Some will independently navigate the ups and downs of research
- Others will need more support from supervisors, GRS, other UWA services, social networks & family

For Supervision of students with pre-existing or emerging mental health issues:

- GRS Research Students and Mental Health Workshop
- UWA [Safety, Health and Wellbeing](#) Workshops
- UWA Counselling and Psychological Services
- UWA Medical Centre
- Mental Health Emergency on Campus

# Workshop Overview



**Dr Jo Edmondston** Graduate Education Officer, GRS

Research resilience

Normalising research stress – metaphors

GRS approaches to common resilience issues (Jo)

**Dr Krys Haq** Graduate Education Officer, GRS

Supervisor Student Alignment Toolkit

Clutch-Starting Stalled Research Students

**Dr John Terry** UWA Medical Centre

Presentation of PhD and MPhil students to UWA Medical Centre

# Reflecting on Stresses of Research

Internationalisation

Feedback &  
Self perception

Costs  
Funds

Team  
supervision

Academic  
Careers

Academic  
expectations

Completion  
times

Cost  
of  
living

Biological  
clocks

?  
Millennial  
traits

# Resilience

- ability to cope with adversity and overcome challenging circumstances
- interplay between
  - internal disposition
  - relationships
  - external experiences
- developing resilience is a personal journey

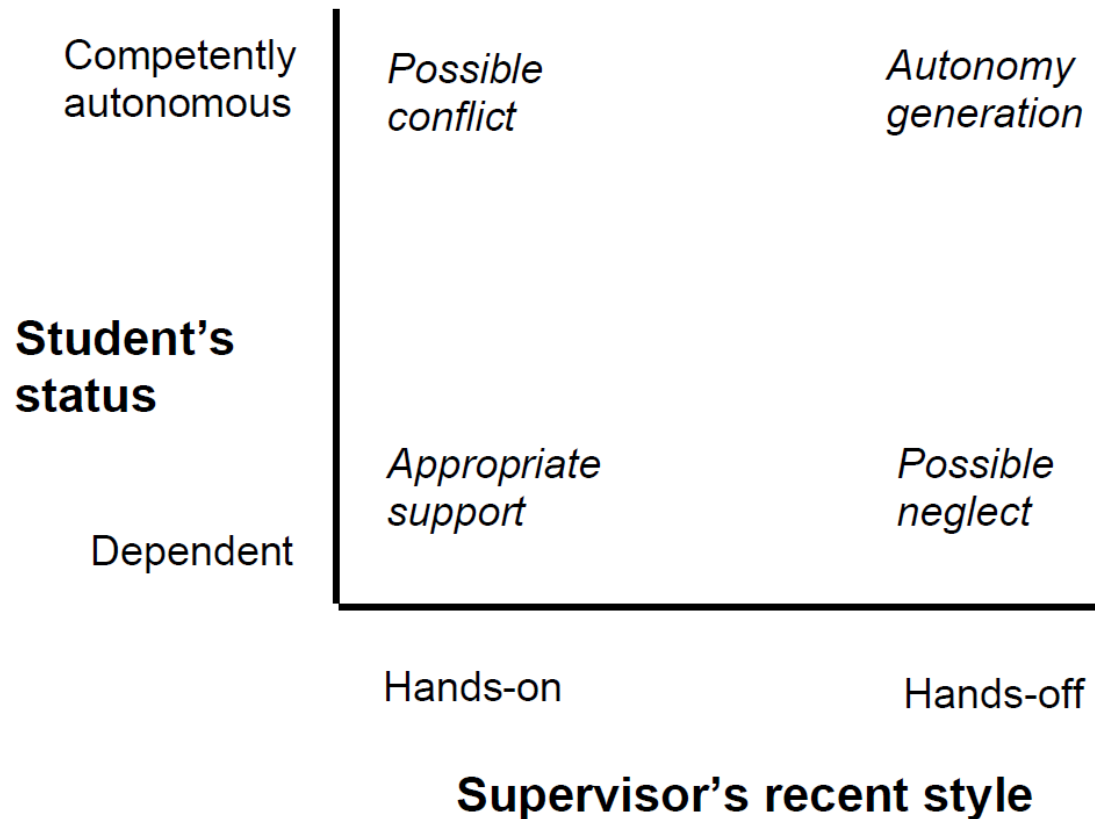
# Metaphors may be useful for candidature

- The marathon
- The mountain climb
- The sail around the world
- The roller coaster

# Supervision metaphors may also be useful....reassure candidates are not undertaking their research on their own

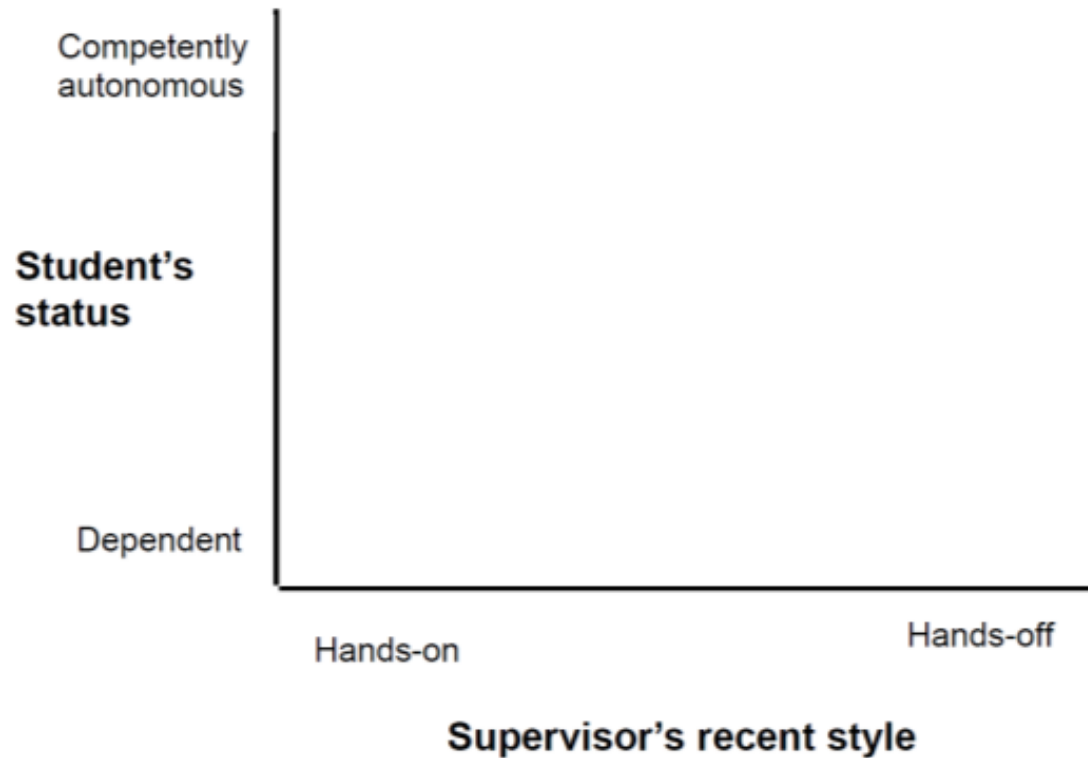
- Cooking together
- Gardening together
- Dancing together
- Navigating a maze together

# Supervisor Student Alignment Toolkit

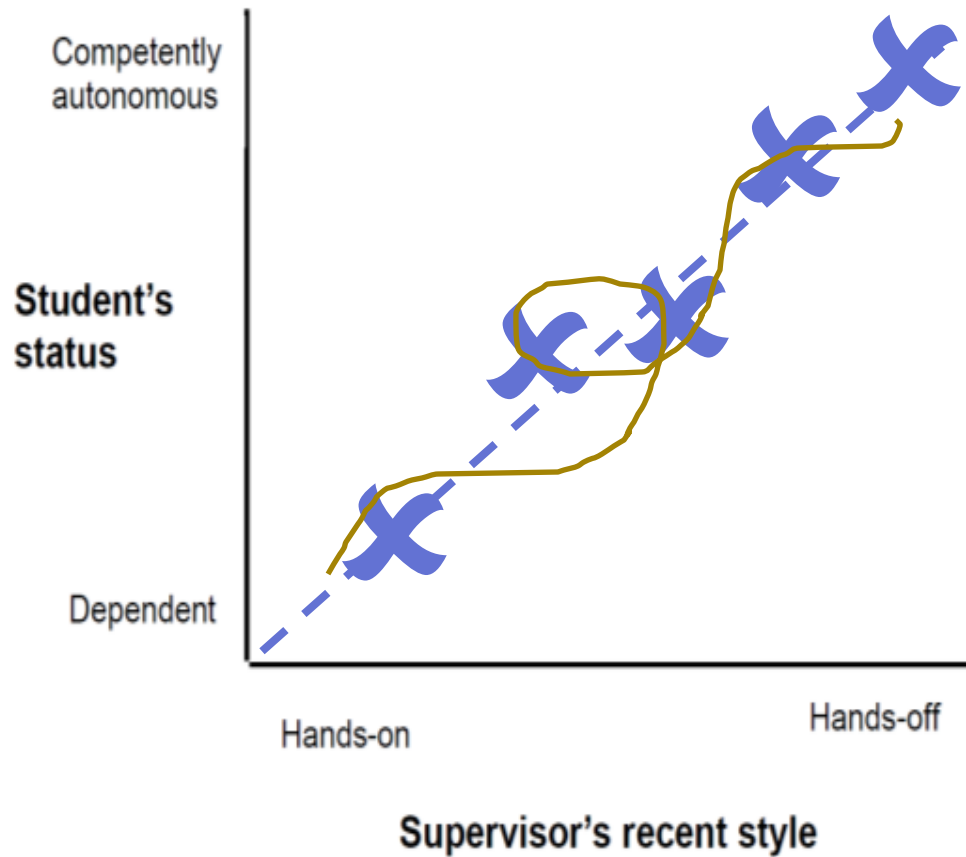




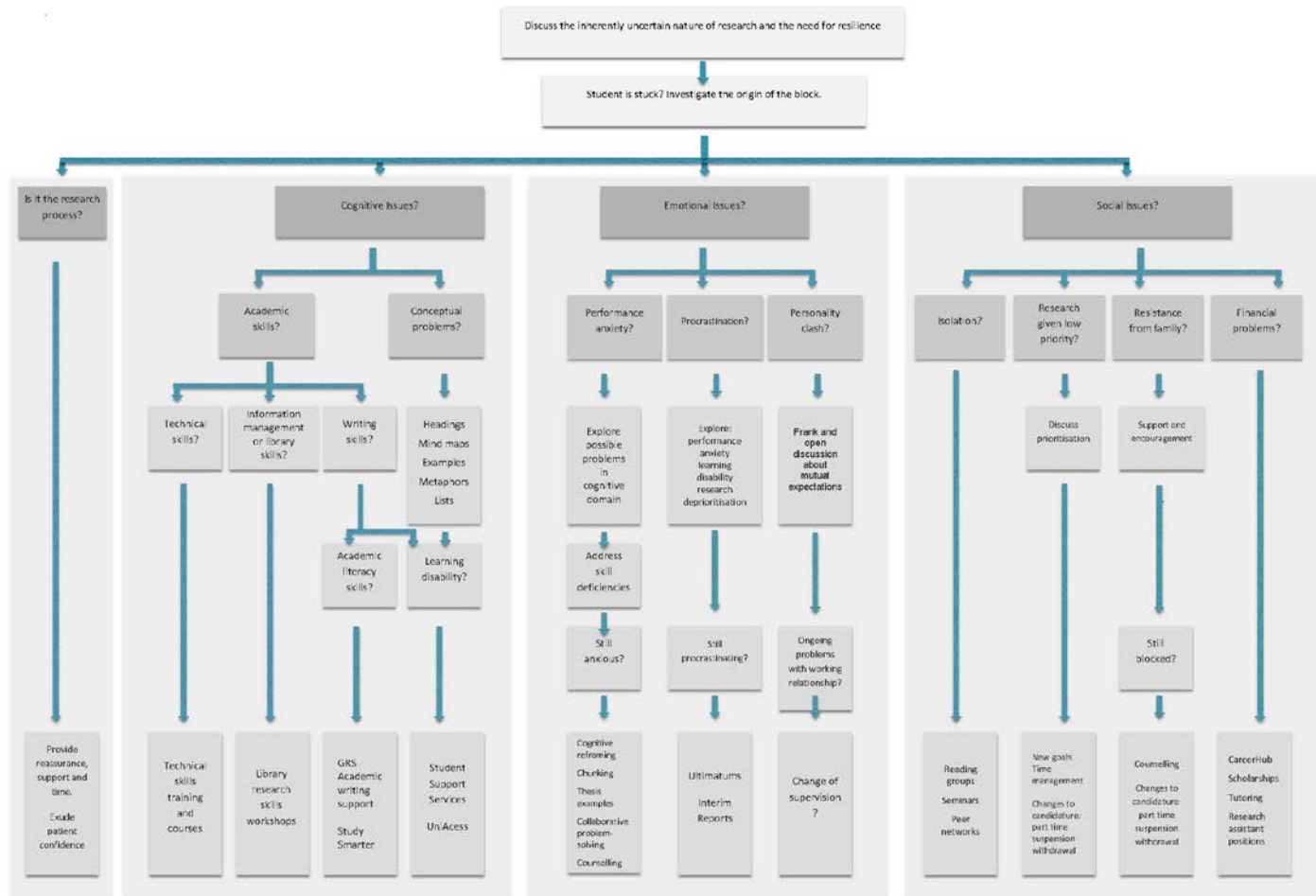
# Supervisor Student Alignment Toolkit



# Supervisor Student Alignment Toolkit



# Clutch-Starting Stalled Research Students



# Strategies by Candidate ‘Types’

## **GRS see some recurring themes with regard to resilience in candidates**

Individual students do not fit neatly into any one of these types, but have their own unique combination of issues.

Developing resilience is a personal journey and different candidates will require different strategies

### **Student type**

- Issues
- ✓ Strategies

## Candidates with high expectations of self, higher prevalence in females

- May question ability to complete course despite evidence to the contrary
- ✓ Refer to Imposter Syndrome  
<http://impostersyndrome.com.au/>
- ✓ Encourage interaction with other candidates to normalise concerns
- ✓ Encourage networking (conferences) to obtain feedback on research from peers (with supervisor support)

## **Successful mid-late career professional, returning to studies**

- May underestimate rigours of course
  - May be resistant to administrative requirements
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- ✓ Discuss research expectations
  - ✓ Discuss GRS administrative requirements early in candidature

**Candidate with burning passion for research subject, often combined with romanticised view of doctoral study**

- May struggle with design and/or analysis of research
  - May be reluctant to complete
- 
- ✓ Discuss research objectivity –thesis is not vehicle for personal message
  - ✓ Discuss realities of research – scope, budget, examiner expectations
  - ✓ Discuss management of candidature

## **Younger candidates with little experience of significant intellectual struggles**

- May struggle with challenges of research – often given particularly difficult research problems
  - May find academic writing feedback particularly difficult
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- ✓ Discussion of research challenges – need for growth mindset



## **International candidates with relatively low living allowances**

- Working to supplement living allowance
- ✓ Discuss prioritisation
- ✓ Consider change of enrolment conditions
- ✓ Explore means of supplementing living allowance that are conducive to full time study (teaching assistant?)

## Candidates with young families

- Parental responsibilities
- ✓ Discuss prioritisation
- ✓ Consider change of enrolment conditions
- ✓ Consider alternate working arrangements

## **International candidates, particularly sponsored students**

- Likely to face additional significant hurdles at various stages in candidature, often out of their control
  - Under additional time pressure and completion pressure (consequences of non-completion)
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- ✓ Pastoral care
  - ✓ Be sensitive to signs of stress
  - ✓ Close management of candidature and completion mindset

## Hard-working, super-organised candidates

- May struggle with research that does not proceed as planned
  - May struggle with supervisory relationship when supervisors do not share management approach
  - Often attempt to work themselves out of a problem rather than think through options
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- ✓ Discussion of unpredictability of research
  - ✓ Management of working hours & annual leave

## Quiet candidates

- Unwilling to discuss problems
- Problems may be evident or hidden from supervisors
- Unassuming and appear to be low-maintenance

- ✓ Regular meetings
- ✓ Scheduling of discrete tasks
- ✓ Referral to independent support
- ✓ Discussion of trust

## **Candidate (or group of candidates) negatively impacted by another candidate**

- Stressed by concerns raised by another candidate
- Concerns may or not be real
  
- ✓ Research group meetings
  
- ✓ Support mediated interactions with broader student body

## **Confident candidates unable/unwilling to acknowledge problems**

- At risk of non-completion due to quality of work or progress
- ✓ Firm supervision – blunt discussions about lack of progress
- ✓ Coordinated and uniform feedback from supervisory team