

**Commentary...**

# Five strategies for parenting for resilience

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Correspondent

Parents who want their children to grow up to be strong independent adults must learn to parent for resilience. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stressful events and hardship—a kind of emotional toughness that enables a child to handle their sadness and emotional pain in a healthy way so that a challenging situation does not overwhelm them. A child who practices the foundational skills for resilience improves the odds that as an adult they will be able to stand up to whatever challenges they face.

Resilience is something a child must develop over time; it cannot be awarded like a gold star. The proving ground for resilience is the neighborhood, schoolyard, classroom, and home where a child must learn to cope with taunting, being ignored, being picked on, being excluded, and being bullied. As children attempt to navigate this proving ground, they will often feel sad, upset, hurt, mad or disappointed. Unable to tolerate their children's painful emotions, parents may be tempted to swoop in to end their children's ordeal. However, children who learn to depend upon adults for them may never acquire the self-confidence and skills they need to stand up for themselves.

Parents can learn to tolerate their children's emotional pain by practicing new strategies to support their children and help them grow into resilient adults. Here are five strategies offered by Ruth Wyatt, MA, LCSW at Good Therapy ([www.goodtherapy.org](http://www.goodtherapy.org)):

- **Empathy:** Let your child know that you understand their feelings, even when their own behavior caused hurt to another; let them see that you can accept and handle their feelings, that you are not overwhelmed by them, no matter what they are. As Mr. Rogers put it, "Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone."

- **Meaning Making:** Ask questions about a difficult event (rather than offering advice or an opinion); this will help your child make sense of what happened, which in turn will enable them to feel less frightened, upset, or overwhelmed by the situation.

- **Problem Solving:** Brainstorm possible solutions to a problem or conflict. Role-play the most promising solutions so that your child can decide which one is most viable. Alternatively, speculate with your child about how they

would feel if they were to employ each strategy.

- **Tolerating Uncertainty:** Help your child learn to manage situations outside of their control (e.g., serious illness of a parent) by offering hope and reassurance.

- **Modeling Resilience:** Ensure that personal insecurities don't interfere with your own ability to model resilience by examining habitual responses to failure, loss, disappointment, and uncertainty. Courageous parents turn toward the source of their distress, rather than away, and by desensitizing themselves to their emotional pain they learn to respond adaptively to stress and hardship.

Parents who wish to increase resilience should model their behavior after those who already demonstrate considerable resilience in their lives. Resilient individuals cope with failure by viewing misfortune as an invitation to act compassionately towards those who are dealing with similar difficulties, by viewing failure as an opportunity to demonstrate courage in the face of adversity, and by maintaining a realistic view of their setbacks (no building

mountains out of molehills).

Resilient individuals manage loss by accepting change as part of life (e.g., children grow up and leave home, parents age and die). Resilient people rebound from disappointment by drawing strength and motivation from memories of past successes and by remaining optimistic that over time their actions will lead to success.

Rather than clinging to a memory of the way things used to be, resilient individuals address uncertainty by acknowledging a change of circumstance (e.g., an elderly person may no longer be able to drive safely). Resilient people practice regular self-care. Resilient individuals surround themselves with a network of supportive individuals; when they find themselves struggling they seek help and

understanding.

Parents can play an active role in helping their children practice resilience. However, children only learn to bounce back from adversity through direct experience, requiring parents to learn to tolerate their children's upset feelings and restrain themselves from stepping in to manage their children's problems for them. Parents best support the growth of their children's resilience through acts of empathy, meaning-making, problem-solving, tolerating uncertainty and modeling resilience.

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## SUDOKU SOLUTION

for puzzle on page 19

4	8	5	6	9	3	2	7	1
2	1	6	8	7	4	5	3	9
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8	7	2	9	4	6	1	5	3
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5	6	1	3	8	7	9	2	4

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