

# Better Parenting: Kids Who Beat the Odds

## How Parents Can Make the Difference Creating Resilience in Their Kids - Part 1

By Sonia Spackman MA, MFT

A child's natural temperament and genetic make-up are reasons for a child's ability to successfully face challenges and learn from their experiences. However, we can set up ways to develop stress hardy kids by helping them learn how to cope and overcome fear and feel they have what it takes.

Some children that face suffering in their lives have used their *resilience* as a powerful yet reassuring force. This explains why some kids overcome overwhelming misfortune while others become victims of their early experiences.

Join me as we examine the first 6 ways in Part 1 of the 13 ways we as parents or adults can make the difference in a child's life.

**#1 Parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers, counselors and adults in the community can instill a sense of values and responsibility in order for kids to make good choices in life.**

Even in a healthy family a child can draw added strength from a favorite aunt, coach or teacher. However, most kids find it hard to reach out to adults. Children mostly learn from their parents. If we can reach out in the community we teach kids that the world can be a safe and friendly place. If we show good judgment choosing friends this can help kids find the people who will enrich their lives also.

**#2 As adults we need to understand**

**how to teach kids to negotiate out of the dark tunnel to a brighter day to solve problems, or teach them to know where to turn for help.**

Otherwise kids can get lost or crash. A resilient child knows he has some control over his own life. If a mistake or a situation frustrates him he needs to feel he can learn from it and make better decisions.

Many kids who fold under pressure or turn out to be violent lack someone at home, in school or their community. A common fact among the school shooters and kids who take their life - is a feeling of isolation. The more you are isolated, the more impossible life is.

You might smile at a passing child; even ask how they are doing. It doesn't take much to be an encouragement.

**#3 Let your child experience hardship and adversity to become stronger.**

An example might be a child who is caringly supported through, but not protected from: news of natural disasters, deaths or illnesses of loved ones can become stronger children (and adults). The school counselor and/or the school librarian have books on many subjects for children. Other kid's stories can be helpful for children going through the same or similar situations. Children who have had the good fortune of escaping trauma in their childhood need #4 below more than the kids who

have had hard challenges.

**#4 Teach Child to "hang in there" and not give up.**

Parents must be willing to let their children fall and pick themselves up. Making mistakes while young is essential to a child's ability to overcome larger problems later in life. Parents must resist the urge to intervene or rescue their child. Skinned knees and B-minuses are character building.

As part of a long-term study little children were asked to build towers with wooden blocks. When the tower fell some kids rebuilt it. When one thing didn't work they tried a different way. Years later the researchers discovered that the persistent kids became successful adults.

Provide enough challenge so your child can grow, but also succeed. A good teacher plans lessons so a child can master one thing before going on to a more difficult challenge. They don't teach a child to swim by throwing him into the deep end of the pool; they start at the shallow end first.

**#5 Use praise sparingly and encourage your child often.**

Too much praise robs the child of the ability to appreciate a job well done for themselves. When kids are glowingly praised for everything they do - they are robbed of the real feedback and become mistrustful of adults and doubtful about their own abilities. Parents do not need to fear their kids

will have low self-esteem--over praising often backfires. Kids understand more than we realize.

**#6 Model calmness and trust in your child's abilities to solve problems**

Let kids solve their own problems when a parents' help is not truly needed. Put kids in situations where they need to explore, to structure their own time, have friends over without a lot of supervision, to be out of their comfort zone. Let your city kid walk in the woods with a friend in the country. Teach your child to be independent, but to ask for help when needed. Kids feel empowered and act from a place of strength and confidence when they are in control of their own lot in life - but can ask for help when they need it.

In closing, resilience can be an elusive quality but children who have it can weather the tsunami in Japan, wars and terrorism and emotionally survive it with heroic stories from their human spirit. We can shelter our American children from it or we can refocus on what is important, helping our kids to understand that sometimes things bad happen to good people and life goes on.

*Resources Same Goldstein, Ph.D, Robert Brooks, Ph.D., Raising Resilient Children, Robert Sullivan, What Makes a Child Resilient? Denise Allen, OT, Lori Day Consulting, Claire Safran, Kids Who Beat the Odds. soniaspackman@msn.com*

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