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Parents Page



RESILIENCE BOOSTER

PARENT TIP TOOLS

PARENTING IS HARD WORK. Even with the best resources available, meeting the needs of family members in today's fast-paced society is difficult. The daily stress of making ends meet can take a toll on all family members, including children.

While it may be difficult to change circumstances such as housing, employment, and transportation, there are things parents can do to reduce the effects of stress and to help their children develop resilience. Resilience is the ability to recover from or adjust easily to adversity or change. It is important because it allows us to overcome negative experiences, and it is an ability that, when supported appropriately, develops throughout childhood. There is a large body of research supporting the importance of building resilience to help prevent negative consequences of environmental stressors.

WITHOUT RESILIENCE, children are at risk for poor outcomes in the following areas:

- Cognitive:** Delayed Language Learning ~ Language Learning Difficulties ~ Memory Difficulties ~ Reduced Ability to Focus/Concentrate ~ School Readiness/Academic Failure
- Emotional:** Self-Regulation of Emotion ~ Self-Regulation of Behavior ~ Poor Impulse Control ~ High Emotional Reactivity
- Physical:** Weakened Immune System ~ Changes in Brain Development ~ Obesity ~ Mental Health Problems ~ Chronic Health Issues
- Social:** Aggression ~ Peer Rejection ~ Hostile Perceptions ~ Volatile Relationships

Parents have the power to make an enormous difference in the outcomes of their children's development. Child Development Research has become more sophisticated and provides more in-depth evidence of when, where, and how parents can protect their children from environmental stressors impacting their lives and development.

This guide is organized according to children's environments, where parents might have greater opportunities to help them build resilience. Think of other ways to adopt resiliency practices in your child's daily experience.

IN THE HOME. The home is your child's first environment, and the one where she will spend the most time over the course of childhood. Your home is the most important environment for developing resilience. Key principles to support healthy development in the home include structure and fostering a close, warm relationship.

Children need to know what to expect and what is expected of them. This structure provides a sense of security and comfort. Structure helps to reduce the sense of chaos or disorganization that can be created by stress. To create structure:

- Meal times
- Bed times
- Homework times
- Hygiene routines
- Traditions, such as family game night, weekend walks, or movie night

Create rules and expectations and apply them consistently

- One key to effective parenting and discipline is to let your child know what is expected of him, what to expect if he doesn't do what he is supposed to, and then to follow through, every time.
- While change may be necessary, reduce the chaos of change by maintaining routines and manage expectations about the approaching changes.

WARM RELATIONSHIPS HELP CHILDREN FEEL SECURE, especially when faced with ongoing daily stress. It is possible to maintain a warm, nurturing relationship and strong rules and expectations at the same time. Talk about emotions. Children need to learn how to appropriately express and regulate emotions. They look to parents as models for all sorts of behaviors, including emotion regulation.

- Express your feelings, including anger and sadness: "When accidents happen, I feel frustrated/sad/angry."
- Talk about the emotions expressed in the world around you. Discuss how characters in books or movies feel about what is happening, how siblings, relatives, or classmates feel about events, or how it might feel to experience something new.
- Talk to your child about her emotions, both positive and negative. Talking with children about their feelings helps them recognize those feelings and learn how to regulate them effectively. Model and discuss self-control. The ability to regulate emotions and behavior is essential for succeeding in school, at work, and in social relationships.
- When talking about how you feel, also talk about what you will do to appropriately express or release those feelings.
- Model the behavior you want to see in your child, including responses to anger.
- Play games that support self-control, like musical chairs, or red light/green light.

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY, Get to know your neighbors and form close relationships. Neighbors are an important source of support and social interaction. Relationships with neighbors create the social structure in neighborhoods that foster a sense of belonging and caring, social-monitoring to protect and support each other, and positive feelings about the neighborhood.

Seek out resources within your community. Although community services may be limited where you live, seek out any that are offered, and take advantage of all that you can.

- Libraries offer learning opportunities, entertainment programming, and educational programming in addition to lending books.
- Community Centers, YMCA's and Boys' and Girls' Clubs offer sports programming, social events, entertainment, and educational opportunities at no or low cost, often with lower costs based on income eligibility.
- Churches and Faith Based Institutions often provide child care, before/after school care, and other youth development programs. They can also facilitate your child's relationships with others around pro-social activities.
- Museums and Parks often have free or low-cost admission fees and special activities for children and youth.
- Community groups organized around issues or – If you have questions or concerns about the way things work in your town or city, get involved. The best way to ensure change is to be a part of it.
- VOTE – If you don't have time to take up an issue, you can look for public officials who will address those issues. Find out about the positions on issues important to you of those running for office, and use your vote to seek change.

HOW CHILDCARE CAN HELP, Even when you have limited options for child care, there are important factors you can look for to ensure that this environment will support your child's developing resilience. Basically, the child care environment should mirror the home environment in many ways. Look for child care providers who:

- Help children feel safe, protected, and valued
- Get down on the child's level to interact
- Talk with children respectfully
- Interact frequently and regularly with the children, rather than simply supervising them
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the children's needs and feelings
- Play pre-reading and pre-math games, games that foster imagination and problem-solving, games that practice self-control, and games that discuss and model feelings

HOW SCHOOL CAN HELP, As with child care, you may have few or no options about the schools your child attends. But, there are things you can look for in a teacher or school when considering which teacher to request for the next year, and suggestions you can make to the PTA and School Board for improving the school.

- Positive, sensitive or caring, and respectful teacher attitude
- Teachers who reinforce instances of good behavior and good performance
- Teachers and schools who do not treat children differently or have different expectations of students from different backgrounds or with different test scores
- Classrooms with mixed child ability levels and interaction of children across ability levels
- Options for student participation and activities beyond basic reading and math
- Schools with an emphasis on attendance

Additional Resources and Links

Center for Disease Control and Prevention Child Development Resource

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/>

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

Thirty Million Words Initiative at University of Chicago | <http://tmw.org/>

Zero to Three | <http://www.zerotothree.org/>

Too Small to Fail | <http://toosmall.org/>

PBS Parents | <http://www.pbs.org/parents/>

National Association for the Education of Young Children for Families

<http://families.naeyc.org/>

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