



RESILIENT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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Children of all ages can quickly and effectively be taught strategies that build lifelong resilience.

A child's resilience arises from the abilities, skills, and attributes that allow them to adapt to life's challenges and hardships, such as growing up in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood or facing a learning difference or an attentional disorder. Some children facing adversity adapt and even thrive, when others growing up in similar circumstances do not. Research into childhood resilience during the past six decades has

identified key characteristics of resilient children. Importantly the protective factors that resilient children show suggest skills children and teens can learn and hone that help them meet the challenges they face daily and improve their relationships and mental health and wellness. Fortunately, many protective factors that lead to resilience can be taught.



INTERVENTIONS DESIGNED TO BUILD CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE

There are several effective interventions for increasing resilience in youth using cognitive behavioral strategies to teach children to change their thoughts and behaviors to cope with life stressors. The Penn Resilience Program is a group-based intervention for late elementary and middle school students that teaches strategies to strengthen assertiveness, social problem-solving, and decision-making skills. Students learn strategies through skits, cartoons, role plays and group discussions. Randomized trials found the Penn Resilience Program prevented anxiety and depressive diagnoses amongst children ages 9-14 and led to reductions in behavioral problems. The Resilience Builder Program® is another group intervention that seeks to improve social competence and increase resilience. Children engage in lessons and hands-on activities that help them learn to be proactive, manage difficult emotions, and improve mental flexibility. A randomized trial of 5th grade students who took part in the Resilience Builder Program® at economically marginalized schools found gains in resilience including children's sense of mastery, academic engagement, study skills, motivation, interpersonal skills, and sense of relatedness. Merrell's Strong Kids/Teens Program is also a school-based intervention used to promote social connections and resilience in students by helping them learn to understand emotions, manage anger, and relieve stress, amongst other skills. Jovenes Fuertes is a culturally adapted version of the Strong Teens program, for Latino teens who are English language learners. Students who took part in the Jovenes Fuertes program had improvements in social emotional resiliency. These interventions incorporate strategies from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to teach youth skills to manage

difficult emotions and become more resilient. First, children learn that emotions are natural, normal, and harmless. Most emotional states, including unpleasant ones, are temporary and do not last forever. Occasionally, we may experience a "false alarm" - an unpleasant feeling in the absence of a real stressor. We may try to rid ourselves of these unpleasant emotions in ways that make us feel better in the short term, but these are not helpful in the long term. For example, a child who becomes frustrated with a difficult school assignment may experience relief in the short term if they stop working. However, in the long term, it is much more helpful for them to tolerate their frustration and continue to work on the assignment. In this way, they can become more resilient as they learn to experience challenging emotions, rather than avoiding them.





FACTORS THAT HELP SOME CHILDREN FACING ADVERSITY ADAPT AND EVEN THRIVE

- **Being Proactive** - in finding ways to think flexibly and solve problems. Even in extraordinary circumstances, there may still be ways to make things better. Children can learn ways to make things better and not feel like a victim.
- **Peer Connections** - to at least one good friend means children are less likely to be bullied and more likely to develop positive, reciprocal relationships.
- **Caregiver Attachment** - be it family members or other caregivers or trusted adults who understand them and can meet their needs help children learn to be aware of the impact of their words and actions and how these affect the other person and understand what they may need to say or do differently.
- **Emotion Regulation**- Regulating our emotions and behaviors is critical to sustaining relationships, participating in school, and achieving goals.
- **Self-Control** - Active ways to calm ourselves include challenging our unhelpful inner dialogue, practicing diaphragmatic breathing and muscle relaxation, and developing ways to visualize coping with situations.
- **Hobbies and Interests** - Children and teens can learn to find activities and characteristics that they value, which motivates them to engage in life.
- **Inner-Strength** - Naming their strengths reminds them that while they may not excel in certain areas, they have other talents that they can develop.

- **Family** - Parents can strengthen a child's community and engaging in proactive parenting. In tandem, families and caregivers provide firm and clear child rearing, with warmth and understanding.
- **Community** - Strengthening the support around children and teens allows them to lean on others when needed and help others. Teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and others encourage them to do their best.

BELIEVE
IN
YOURSELF



Children's resilience can also be bolstered by developing a proactive, problem-solving approach to life - by taking the initiative to solve or prevent challenges rather than waiting to react to them. Youth learn about ways individuals behave when facing stressful situations: proactive responses, reactive responses, and passive responses. For example, a child who has a conflict with a peer may react with aggression, passively ignore the situation, or proactively collaborate with the peer and come to an agreement. Being able to set goals, solve problems, and think optimistically helps children make adaptive choices when faced with stressful situations.

Children learn about negative ways of thinking that may lead to increased levels of stress and problematic coping behaviors and are then taught to develop more balanced and optimistic ways of thinking. For example, a student who avoids studying or skips a test because they assume they will fail will be taught both to recognize this thought and think more optimistically. When they think more realistically, they may be more motivated to prepare, and as a result, will likely be more successful. The good news is that the protective factors of resilience can be taught and enhanced to strengthen children and teens' ability to adapt to life's challenges.



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BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN

THE POWER OF GROWTH MINDSETS,
GRATITUDE, AND OPTIMISM

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Parents are instrumental in helping children navigate life's challenges by helping cultivate a growth mindset.

Fostering resilience is essential for children, as it equips them with the ability to navigate life's challenges with adaptability across mental, emotional, and behavioral domains.

Parents are instrumental in cultivating this resilience. We will delve into how parents can foster growth mindsets, gratitude, and optimism to aid in building resilience in children.





NURTURING A GROWTH MINDSET IS CENTRAL TO BUILDING RESILIENCE

Central to building resilience in children is nurturing a growth mindset. Coined by renowned psychologist Carol Dweck, a growth mindset is the belief that human abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work. In contrast, a fixed mindset is the belief that abilities and intelligence are fixed and do not change even with effort later.

These two mindsets significantly shape how children perceive success and failure in their lives. For instance, when faced with grades below their expectations, a student with a fixed mindset might conclude, "I am not capable enough. I am not smart," which often results in them giving up on that subject. Conversely, a student with a growth mindset views failure as a chance for improvement, reasoning, "Perhaps I did not study enough this time. Maybe I should modify my strategies for better results. Let's consider what changes can be implemented." Repeated experiences through such lenses eventually yield distinct developmental trajectories depending on the mindset embraced.

A photograph of a man with dark dreadlocks and a young boy with curly hair. The man, on the left, is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater and has his hand on the boy's shoulder. Both are smiling and looking at each other. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor space with large windows.

**PARENTS ARE
INSTRUMENTAL
IN FOSTERING
OPTIMISM IN
THEIR CHILDREN**



EXPLAIN TO CHILDREN THAT ABILITIES ARE MALLEABLE AND CAN CHANGE

Parents can cultivate a growth mindset in children by emphasizing effort rather than innate abilities when acknowledging their achievements. For example, researchers captured video footage of parents spontaneously offering person praise (i. e. ,“That’s a really good score. You must be smart at this.”) and process praise (i.e. “I really like the way you did those hard problems. You stuck to them until you figured out how to do them.”) in their homes when their children were between the ages of 1 and 3. Process praise predominantly emphasizing during these formative years was associated with the children’s cultivation of a growth mindset and their propensity to embrace challenges five years later. In another study involving daily phone interviews with parents of 8- to 10-year-olds, findings showed that mothers who frequently employed person praise were associated with their children developing a fixed mindset six months later, irrespective of their mindset at an earlier age. Furthermore, it is helpful to explain to children that abilities are malleable and can change. Children who learn about the principle of neuroplasticity, which states that the brain can change through experience, feel more enjoyment, and are more willing to take on challenges when learning something new.



**CULTIVATING
RESILIENCE EQUIPS
CHILDREN TO MANAGE
CHALLENGES WITH
FLEXIBILITY AND
STRENGTH**

HELP CHILDREN DISCERN THE POSITIVE ASPECTS IN THEIR PRESENT SITUATION

In a scenario where only positive occurrences transpire, achieving happiness would seemingly be straightforward; however, such circumstances are not universally experienced. To bolster children's resilience, it is imperative to instruct them to discern positive aspects within their present circumstances. Robert Emmons, a leading gratitude researcher at the University of California, Davis, posited that gratitude comprises two key elements. Firstly, it entails acknowledging the inherent goodness in the world, recognizing the gifts, kindness, or benefits we have received. Secondly, it involves acknowledging that these positive outcomes are not solely the result of our own efforts but also contributions from external factors.

Parents can proactively foster gratitude in their children by engaging in meaningful conversations. These discussions may include:

- 1.Highlighting children's awareness of receiving or possessing something special.
- 2.Encouraging children to express their positive feelings when they receive something special.
- 3.Prompting children to consider the reasons behind why someone gave them something special or why they received it.
- 4.Guiding children to demonstrate gratitude through actions that extend beyond mere good manners.

Gratitude encourages individuals to focus more on the positive aspects of their lives rather than dwelling on the negatives. Regularly reflecting on things to be thankful for trains children's minds to notice and appreciate the good, even in challenging circumstances. This shift in focus promotes an optimistic outlook on life.



HAVING AN OPTIMISTIC MINDSET MAKES NAVIGATING STRESSFUL SITUATIONS EASIER

Optimism is defined as a generalized tendency to anticipate favorable outcomes in the future, as opposed to unfavorable ones. Consequently, individuals with optimistic outlooks are highly motivated to navigate stressful situations effectively, thereby mitigating the adverse impact of stress on their physical and mental well-being. This capacity serves as a protective factor against psychological distress and promotes resilience and fulfillment amidst challenging circumstances. The experience of positive emotions contributes significantly to the development of various resources—social, physical, intellectual, and psychological—in individuals across all age groups, including children.



Parents play a pivotal role in fostering optimism in their children through supportive communication strategies including:

- Emphasizing neutral and factual elements when discussing challenges.
- Selectively focusing on positive news or aspects of situations.
- Providing examples of others similar to them who have overcome obstacles successfully.
- Reminding them of past achievements, strengths, and future potential.

It is important to note that nurturing optimism in children does not entail dismissing their negative feelings but rather understanding and enhancing their psychological well-being.



**NO RAIN
NO FLOWERS**



FOSTERING A GROWTH MINDSET, EMPHASIZING EFFORT RATHER THAN INNATE ABILITIES

In conclusion, cultivating resilience is crucial for children's development, enabling them to confront life's hurdles with adaptability and strength. Parents play a fundamental role in nurturing resilience by focusing on key components such as growth mindsets, gratitude, and optimism. By fostering a growth mindset, emphasizing effort rather than innate abilities, and teaching the flexibility of skills, parents support children to confront challenges and pursue personal growth.

Additionally, promoting gratitude through proactive communication and reflection instills optimism and a positive outlook, enabling children to discover silver linings even in challenging circumstances. By fostering optimism through supportive communication strategies, parents not only enhance their children's psychological well-being but also equip them with essential tools for navigating life's challenges with resilience and hope. Through these efforts, parents can empower their children to thrive in adversity, molding them into resilient individuals capable of overcoming obstacles with confidence and grace.