

Counselling Connection:

Resiliency

For more information on Resiliency , contact Paula Knox, School Counsellor.

Promoting Resiliency In Children

Traumatic events, abuse, witnessing domestic violence, or being in a natural disaster, can cause children to have strong, upsetting feelings and can disrupt healthy development. Our bodies are built to help us in times of stress, however humans can be affected by life's setbacks in different ways and for different reasons. Resiliency is the ability of a child to recover or bounce back after experiencing a potentially traumatic event. Some people are able to navigate their way through challenging times easier than others. Research shows that there are skills we can learn to help us become more resilient. When these skills are modeled by caregivers and practiced by children, resiliency can be increased. Children and adolescents who are able to develop resiliency can increase their chances of optimal physical and mental health, positive relationships, and experience more success in school and jobs.

**“I survived because
the fire inside me
burned brighter than
the fire around me”**

Josh Graham



Abilities/Skills Associated With Increased Resiliency

(Taken from: <http://www.reachinginreachingout.com>)

1. Taking Charge of Emotions (This skill requires us to stay calm when under pressure)

- The goal is to accept, acknowledge, label and express emotions in healthy ways.
- *How* we handle our emotions influences our interactions with others and our problem solving abilities.

Caregivers can:

- Help children label their feelings and use creative ways to process them. For example, a child could draw how he or she is feeling, use feeling cards to identify feelings, beat a drum to show feelings, etc.
- Model deep breathing when feeling emotionally charged, and encourage children to do the same. Breathing in and out through the belly creates an immediate calming affect.

2. Controlling Impulses (This skill requires us to **stop** and decide if we are going to act on our desire to take action right away. Sometimes our immediate reactions might create more problems).

- Stopping ourselves when we want to act takes conscious self-observation and control.
- Impulse control is also the ability to delay gratification and be able to resist getting something right now.

Caregivers can:

- Model how to attend to thoughts that are telling you to act, and verbally express what you'll do instead.
- Share times when you have worked hard over time to receive or accomplish something.
- Provide positive feedback for children/adolescents when they don't act on a negative impulse, or when they wait to get something they really want.

Practice with skills one and two allow children to learn that they can have control over how they react to stressful events. They do not need to feel defeated by the emotions they experience.

“If you teach kids to be optimistic, they will have success in any world” Martin Seligman

3. Analyzing Cause Of The Problem/Appropriate Solutions (This skill requires us to think accurately about causes of problems in our lives).

- Our judgments might be impaired with faulty thinking styles, which limits our ability to find healthy solutions.
- Resilient thinking involves flexible thinking (some problems result from *our* actions and others do not).

Caregivers can:

- Work with child to identify the problem and come up with appropriate solutions together.
- Allow the child to come up with ideas that will create confidence to help push through the challenging situation.

This skill will contribute to a child/adolescent feeling that they have options, and are capable of navigating their way through the negative life event.

4. Maintaining Realistic Optimism (This skill requires us to view situations as they are, and develop hope that things will get better).

- Recognizing that stressful feelings are not permanent allows us to feel less overwhelmed.
- How we think about negative situations can help to maintain a sense of optimism for the future.

Caregivers can:

- Challenge “always” and “never” thinking. (For example, if a child says, “I’m always getting into trouble,” a caregiver can remind child of times when he or she has been successful).
- Discuss past difficult situations and the difference in how the child feels now, compared to immediately following the event.

This skill encourages positive thinking, which will help to create more optimistic feelings about a better future.

5. Having Empathy For Others (This skill requires us to understand the feelings and needs of another person).

Caregivers can:

- Model support and understanding towards a child’s feelings.
- Help a child name feelings and the situation associated with the feeling.
- Model how to recognize others’ feelings and encourage child/adolescent to recognize why the person might feel that way.
- Promote random acts of kindness to positively influence others’ feelings.

Research shows that understanding others and being understood contribute to resiliency.

6. Believing In Your Own Competence (This skill requires us to develop beliefs that we have what it takes to tackle problems).

- Children can learn that they are effective contributors and make a difference in the world.

Caregivers can:

- Offer choices to children/adolescents so that they can feel a sense of ownership and empowerment.
- Allow young people’s voices/opinions to be heard and validated.
- Give consistent praise for positive choices and the character traits that are modeled.

When children believe they can succeed and can play an active role in how things turn out, the likelihood that they will keep trying (resilience) increases.

7. Reaching Out (This skill requires us to engage in new opportunities, learn from our mistakes, and ask for help when needed).

- People who view mistakes as learning opportunities are more likely to take risks.

Caregivers can:

- Normalize that mistakes are part of being human and communicate that no one is perfect.
- Remind child about the many successes he or she has had so far in life.
- Model that it is okay to seek support, this is a strength and not a weakness.
- **This skill will contribute to a child/adolescent feeling that they have options, and are capable of navigating their way through the negative life event.**

Children learn resiliency skills by watching their caregivers. You can play a positive role in providing support and leadership!