

Raising Resilient Children



What is resilience? It is important to understand what it really means in order to help our children become resilient.

Resilience is the ability to handle tough situations, and to bounce back. Some people think resilience is a trait that you are born with. This is not true. It is something that can be learned over time. While resilience is considered a developmental process that all children go through, youth with severe emotional disturbances (SED) may need additional help to learn this skill.

Some people find it easy to deal with their problems while others may struggle with them. Some may experience a few hard times in their lives while others have many. Then there are some who have to deal with difficult situations on a daily basis. Whatever the case, your child can learn the skills needed to become more resilient.

Children don't become resilient on their own. They need the help of family, friends, and other adults who understand resiliency, as well as outside (professional) help. One way to help children become resilient is to recognize their strengths, and to help them build on those strengths. It is also important for children to have positive, supportive people in their lives.

Children who have the following abilities will be better prepared to deal with life's extreme events, as well as daily disappointments and setbacks.

- ★ compassion/empathy
- ★ responsibility
- ★ problem-solving
- ★ self-discipline
- ★ self-esteem
- ★ self-confidence
- ★ faith in self
- ★ patience with self and others

In order for children to develop these abilities, they need to:

- ★ feel supported
- ★ feel protected from the outside world
- ★ have a sense of humor
- ★ be flexible
- ★ have someone in their life who they know will love them ... **no matter what they do!**

Children do not need all of these qualities in order to become resilient. A combination of some of these traits works well. Learning to be resilient is **not** easy and cannot be done without the help of supportive adults. It is the adults' responsibility to teach these important skills **AND** to help the child practice using them.

How can we teach resiliency? Children learn a lot by watching how adults behave and react to difficult situations. Think about the way you react when you are in a tough situation. The following are examples of instances that your child might come across. How would you want **your child** to handle them? What would **you** do?

Your child comes home from school and is extremely upset because he/she was not invited to a classmate's birthday party.

Do you ...

- ★ have a “temper tantrum”?
- ★ call the child’s parents to tell them how upset you are?
- ★ get angry and say awful things about the child having the party?



Do you ...

- ★ give your child a hug and say you love him/her?
- ★ tell him/her that you can see he/she is upset?
- ★ ask if he/she wants to talk about how he/she is feeling?
- ★ suggest the two of you do something special together?

Your child will begin to understand how to deal with disappointments when you support your child’s feelings, and work with him/her to build coping skills.

What would you do if your child needed to go to the school nurse for medications each day, or visit the school counselor or a therapist during school time? What would you say to your child if he/she doesn’t want to go because he/she will look “different” to his/her classmates?

When your child **has to** take medicine or get any therapies during the school day, could you:

- ★ talk with the school staff to work out a different schedule?
- ★ tell your child’s doctor how he/she feels? There may be another medication that your child can take once a day, or only when he/she is at home.
- ★ talk with your child to help him/her feel better about needing these services?

Remember, talk with your child at his/her level of understanding. Try to put yourself in your child’s shoes. This can help you to understand how they feel and why they are upset. Most importantly, let your child know:

- ★ you love him/her
- ★ he/she is capable of working through any situation
- ★ he/she is smart, good at . . ., good with . . ., etc.
- ★ you will be there to help him/her deal with tough situations.



For more information on Resiliency and other topics of importance related to children’s behavioral health and mental health, contact Maine Parent Federation by telephone at 1-800-870-7746 (Statewide), 207-623-2144, or by email at parentconnect@mpf.org.

Resource: Grotberg, Edith H., Ph.D., The International Resilience Project (1995). ‘A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human Spirit’. From: *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections*. The Netherlands, Bernard Van Leer Foundation. Researched through: www.resilnet.uiuc.edu.

June 2008