

# **Resilience: helping your child to 'bounce back'**

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## **What is Resilience?**

Resilience is the ability to cope and 'bounce back' after encountering negative events, difficult situations or adversity and to return to almost the same level of emotional wellbeing. It is also the capacity to respond adaptively to difficult circumstances and still thrive. Young people who encounter difficult or challenging situations can learn from them and become stronger.

Young people will always need the personal skills and attitudes to help them to bounce back. Everyone encounters everyday challenges such as making mistakes, falling out with a friend, moving to a new school or losing in a sports competition. Many young people will also face more serious challenges such as adapting to a step-family, the illness or death of a family member, or being bullied. Resilience helps young people to navigate through life and is an important aspect of adolescent development. When young people are resilient they are able to cope reasonably well with difficult situations and things that go wrong and then 'bounce back'.

Levels of resilience vary throughout a person's life and someone who is resilient in one type of adverse or challenging situation may not be as resilient in another situation. Some young people also face more challenges than others because of a learning difficulty or disability or a more anxious personality. The more challenges a young person has in their life, the harder it is for them to be resilient. However it's important for all young people to learn the personal skills that will help them to be resilient.

## **Resilience is more than just 'coping'**

When someone is resilient they are also more prepared to seek new experiences and opportunities and take reasonable risks to achieve their goals. Risk-taking may mean some setbacks and rejections but it also creates more opportunities for successes and greater self-confidence.

## **What helps children and young people develop resilience?**

Resilience for young people is built on the foundation of strong positive relationships with their parents, other caring adults in their life, their teachers and their friends and classmates. Helping your child be connected to a good school and to be

involved in positive community groups and experiences such as sporting teams, and art/drama/dance groups also increases their opportunities to develop resilience and a sense of belonging. You can also help your child to become more resilient by providing them with opportunities to learn and practise the following skills, attitudes and behaviours:

- *Social Skills* such as the skills needed to make and keep friends, successfully resolve conflict and cooperate and work well in a team or group
- *Behaviour that reflects empathy and pro-social values* such as being respectful, kind, fair, honest and cooperative. Such behaviour includes not mistreating or bullying others, showing care and concern to people who need support, being friendly and not excluding people because of their differences.
- *Self-respect* which develops from setting high standards for their own behaviour and believing that they matter and should be treated respectfully by others. When people self-respect they also self-protect and avoid behaviours and situations that present a risk to their safety and wellbeing such as engaging in unsafe practices when using the internet and mobile phones. It will also help them to be less vulnerable to be bullied.
- *Skills for managing strong feelings* such as anxiety, fear and anger. This also includes being able to turn a bad mood into a better one
- *Optimistic thinking skills* such as:
  - *positive tracking* which means focusing more on the positives and things that go well and trying to find the positives (however small) in negative situations
  - *expecting things to mostly work out well* and having the confidence to persevere when faced with obstacles
  - *using an optimistic explanatory style* which means believing that unwelcome situations are *temporary* (and will probably improve with effort and/or time) and also *specific* (and don't have to flow over into all aspects of your life)
- *Helpful thinking skills* which are based on the type of thinking which is both grounded in facts and reality and also helps you to stay calm so problems can be more readily solved.

- *A sense of humour i.e.* finding something funny, even if only small, in an adverse situation to help keep things in perspective
- *Goal setting Skills* such as making plans, being organised and self-disciplined, being prepared to work hard and being resourceful.
- *A sense of personal competence* which can be fostered by helping your child to identify their specific strengths and limitations, by encouraging them to set goals that require them to use and develop those strengths and by supporting them to undertake responsibilities such as minding younger siblings, teaching others, organising activities that also benefit others and undertaking part-time jobs.

**Some key messages to communicate to your child to help them become more resilient**

- Life is mainly good, but now and then everyone has a difficult or unhappy time. That's a normal part of life.
- Things nearly always get better even though sometimes they may take a bit longer to improve than you would like. Stay hopeful and work on the problem if you can
- You will feel better and have more ideas about what you might do if you talk to someone you trust about what's worrying or upsetting you.
- No-one is perfect. All of us make mistakes and finds out there are some things we can't do well.
- If you can find something positive or funny in a difficult situation, no matter how small, it can help you to cope better
- Take fair responsibility for the thing you have done or not done that contributed to a difficult or unhappy situation. Don't over-blame yourself because circumstances, bad luck or what others did may have contributed too.
- If a situation can't be changed, you just have to accept it and live with it. Don't make yourself miserable by exaggerating how bad something is or by assuming that the worst possible picture is the one that will happen.
- When something goes wrong it will usually only affect one part of your life. Concentrate more for a while on the things in your life that are still going well.
- Everyone gets scared at times but not always about the same things. Facing your fears will help you to grow stronger.
- Don't let yourself be 'hijacked' by your feelings so that you are no longer in charge of yourself. Find a way to calm yourself down so you can think of the best way to deal with how you are feeling.
- You can change a bad mood into a good mood if you try. For example you

could:

- rethink the problem in a more helpful way
- go for a vigorous walk or undertake some other form of exercise
- do something kind for someone else
- go over some good memories by looking through photographs
- watch a funny TV show or DVD or read something funny

### **Other approaches you can take to develop resilience in your child**

- Don't over-protect your child from the normal challenges that young people have at different ages. Don't do things for them without checking to see if they are capable of doing it for themselves.
- Encourage your child to talk about what's troubling them and help them to find solutions. Encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and what they are thinking about the problem. Show them that you understand and then help them think about the positives and negatives of different solutions.
- Gently dispute their self-defeating or unhelpful talk (e.g. *I can't do this, I'm hopeless*).
- Don't fight all of your child's battles for them. They need to experience some difficult times and deal with them so they can learn how to bounce back.
- Model effective solving of problems that are age appropriate for your child by talking 'out loud'. Review different solutions to your 'problem' and the possible good or bad consequences of the different solutions.
- When your child is upset about an unwelcome or distressing situation, help them to keep things in perspective by asking them: *Does this really matter as much as you think it does? Are you getting upset over very little? On a scale from 1 to 10, how bad is this really?*
- Let your child see and hear you using positive tracking, showing appreciation to others for the support they give them, saying 'things will get better soon' and expecting that good outcomes are possible

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