Resilience Booster: Parent TIP TOOL

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.

Parenting is hard work.

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.

Pass it on– share your experiences with others, on social media, and with us. Email us at oses@apa.org or tweet #resiliencebooster.

Warm and nurturing relationships between children and the adults in their lives are the most important factor in developing resilience and overcoming potential negative effects of daily stress.

APA Office on Children Youth and Families in collaboration with the Office on Socioeconomic Status

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.

Structure

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:

Establish and stick to family routines

- ✓ 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.

Foster a close, warm relationship

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.

Model and discuss problem solving

✓ Share how you resolve problems, large and small, from what to make for dinner to how to make sure the bills are paid.

✓ Play games that ask your child to come up with solutions.

✓ When your child has a question or a problem, instead of offering suggestions immediately, start with questions, such as, "What do you think might work?" Help him think through his ideas before offering suggestions of your own, and discuss them too.

Build strong communications skills. Both understanding and using language are important for successful interactions. Communication skills, including a strong vocabulary and correct language use are strongly linked to academic success.

✓ Make up family stories in which family members take turns adding something.

✓ Talk to your child about your day, and ask about her day.

✓ Read together, every day if possible, from birth. As your child begins to read, take turns reading to each other.

✓ Sing and dance together.

In the Neighborhood and Community

Your neighborhood provides your child with his first exploration into the world. Although you cannot control all of the factors in your neighborhood, you can build and take advantage of resources that support resilience.

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/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 & Parks** often have free or low-cost admission fees and special activities for children and youth.

✓ **Community groups organized around issues or activities** – 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 can my child care 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 can my school 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

References

Blair, C. & Raver, C.C. (2012). Child development in the context of adversity. American Psychologist, 67(4), 309-318. DOI:10.1037/a0027493.

Malhomes, V. & King, R.B. (Eds.) (2012). The Oxford Handbook of Poverty and Child Development. New York: Oxford University Press.

McLoyd, V.C. (1998). Socioeconomic disadvantage and child development. American Psychologist, 53(2), 185-204.

Thompson, R.A. (2014). Stress and child development. The Future of Children, 24(1), 41-59.

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/