

Ashland Brainy Resilience Project Toolkit

CARE GIVER GUIDE



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MESSAGE TO CAREGIVERS

This toolkit project is designed to help families promote unique skills in their children. They are **RESILIENCY SKILLS**. Resiliency is the ability to recover from or adjust to difficult life experiences and change.

It's using inner resources to cope with stress in a healthy way to "bounce back" to go on with life.

How Does Resiliency Work?

Children are born wired to explore and engage in the world around them. With calm, nurturing adults around, children learn how to get and give love and get their needs met..

Their brains read: "I am safe", "I am capable of handling the world", and "I am important".

This helps them deal with tougher situations such as moving away from friends, school challenges or losing a pet or loved one. These can cause "rocks" in the road of life.

Adult supports help exercise children's brains to build resilience.

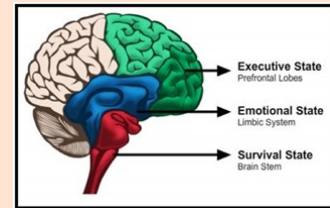
Main brain areas:

MID-BRAIN ---- emotions center

HIGHER-BRAIN ---executive thinking, problem-solving

LOWER BRAIN --- survival/safety ---fight, flight or freeze

Successful thinking requires a calm emotions center to signal the higher brain to check out the threat and if no immediate danger, then figure ways to deal with the "rock" problem in the road of life.



From infancy on, handling obstacles builds these resiliency skills that ALL children need:

- Handling emotions with healthy responses
- Focused attention
- Kindness and empathy toward others
- Wise choices
- Feelings of self-confidence and capability



Resiliency skills give children and youth the POWER to deal with bullies, protect themselves from dangerous people or situations, to deal with social relationships, to be good learners and to thrive in many life situations.



Hazards of Hard Experiences

For some children, there are boulders in their life path.



These can include health issues with hurtful medical procedures, a natural disaster, separation from a family member, being hurt physically or emotionally from someone you love or regularly being ignored or rejected by your parent.

Without help, these children can develop faulty brain pathways.

Instead of coordination between the three brain areas, brain activity goes rapidly to the lower brain (safety area). Child energy is focused on survival. Fear and distrust takes over.

They struggle to handle strong feelings and judge events accurately. These children can be very immature and may operate like a child half their age. Because they are driven to fight, flight or freeze, their reactions to the world can be negative and explosive or they retreat into themselves.



Over time without adult support, negative feelings of self-worth and incompetence can grow.

The GOOD NEWS is that children's brain connections can be rewired!

The **Ashland Brainy Resilience Project Toolkit** can help ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH – even those from hard experiences create better brain connections to prep for the many challenges of life.

ANYONE can do them ---with VERY LITTLE TIME!

How Do the Tools Work?

The tools build PRIVATE SPEECH or SELF-TALK messages + COPING & CALMING SKILLS. The simple materials, when used in the suggested ways, do the following:

- A. Give a child's brain reliable strong self-descriptions ex: "I can manage this", "I can do it if I try"
- B. Help a child know WHAT to do with feelings and avoid loss of control over feelings
- C. Help a child's brain go from feeling to healthy action

****The tools are a concrete learning coach of how to think and act.**

Once learned and used REGULARLY, the tools won't be needed. Children will naturally use the methods!

Brainy Resilience Tools:

There is something for EVERYONE in the family. The ONLY REQUIREMENT TO USE A PLAYFUL/POSITIVE ATTITUDE!!!

Strengths Keeper

Calming Toolkit

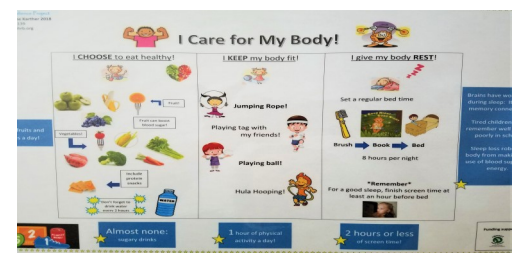
Ashland Brainy Resilience Game

Wipe Away the Feelings

Beach Ball Focus



I Care for My Body Placemat



HOW DO PARENTS BUILD RESILIENT BRAIN CONNECTIONS?

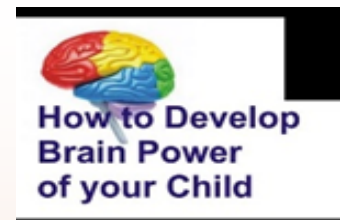


CORE CONCEPTS — *Day to day family living can build resiliency*

- ⇒ **Opportunities for Helping** — have children help younger children and other family members. In the community, let them hold a door for a senior citizen, do a fundraiser walk, etc. Doing for others builds empathy, compassion and understanding which is cement for healthy relationships.
- ⇒ **Choices** — Children learn to connect actions with consequences when they make choices. Toddlers can choose their socks or pants, preschoolers can choose snack food and teens can choose the best way to respond to peer pressure.
- ⇒ **Regular Active Movement** — Regular body movement promotes better brain connections for learning and problem-solving. Promotes calmness and emotional health.
- ⇒ **Caregiver-Child Connections** — Talking, playing, working together—without cellphones or tech toys — builds strong adult-child bonds so children feel important, safe and secure knowing an adult is there for them.
- ⇒ **Family Routines** — Brains seek regular, repeated experiences. Predictable daily activities for eating, sleeping, working, etc. free children to focus on exploring and learning about the world and their place in it.



WHERE TO START?



- ⇒ ALWAYS SPOTLIGHT **strengths** & build on these.
A daily deposit of strengths in a child's memory bank give
the courage to meet life challenges.
(Use our *Strengths Keeper* tool to store these. Make it a bedtime ritual to end the day positively!)
- ⇒ Use DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE—this shifts a judgment statement to a teaching statement of what the child does right ---EX:
Instead of “good job”---SAY ---- “You got all your stuff packed.”
Instead of “nice picture ---SAY --“You used many colors in interesting ways.”

Word about Children with Labels

A label or diagnosis (autism, ADHD) does not define a child nor limit their potential. They are children first! Labels help families and professionals know to make adaptations to help these children's brains work optimally. For ex: a child with autism can be helped to calm and focus with a weighted vest or blanket.

ADULT SELF-CARE

Taking care of **YOU** is important. Parenting demands high energy and multiple skills PLUS a huge amount of *time* for the children in your care. Many caregivers put the children first and then are worn out each day.

Stress levels can rise before you know it. Frustration and self-defeating thoughts can creep in with the best of caregivers.

RE-ENERGIZE with your own *STRENGTHS* inventory.

Review what went RIGHT each day and go to bed with that.

Also steal time for some calming, pleasant activities just for you. Here are ideas:

- Listen to music, sing as you work, dance
- Text or call a friend
- Step outside and breathe in fresh air or garden
- Journal happy thoughts or dream vacation
- Yoga
- Play with a pet
- Lie down for a 10 min. power nap

And swap child sitting with a friend and get a massage, trip to beauty salon or gym, or treat yourself at a restaurant.



Don't forget —BODY CARE for YOU & THE CHILDREN:

YES—changing habits is SO HARD to DO!!

Try little changes & a step -by -step approach. MAKE IT CREATIVE!

- ♦ **Nutritious meals and snacks** -protein snacks 2x per day for growing children (Make it fun —start with adding a “1- spoon taste test of a new veggie to dinner or creating a “cracker sandwich with meat or cheese and a slice of veggie)
- ♦ **Water/liquids often** -children need every 2 hours to keep up focus & energy (Ask child to take 2 sips of water before drinking juice or pop. Then increase)
- ♦ **Physical exercise** (outdoors and in) (Start with 5 –10 min and increase gradually)
- ♦ **Sleep** - provides brain time to do memory work for learning & handling problems
- ♦ **Limit tech hours** (Plan tech playtimes. AVOID long periods—especially before homework or bedtime. Give OTHER good play options such as legos or pirate pretend play)



Your FANTASTIC ELASTIC BRAIN

By JoAnn Deak, Ph.D. Illustrated by Sarah Ackerley

Cerebrum

The largest part of your brain. It helps you think and speak.
(suh-REE-bruhm)

Hippocampus

At the center of your brain, it works like a file cabinet to help you store and find memories.
(hip-uh-KAM-pus)

"The human brain weighs about 3 pounds."

"Urghhh, it feels like a lot more!"

"The energy used by the brain is enough to light a 25 watt light bulb."

"It's lit! I must be thinking stuff!"

(PFC) Prefrontal Cortex

The part of your brain behind your forehead. It lets you make plans and decisions. (PFC, for short)

(SAIR-uh-bel-uhm) Cerebellum

A small part at the back of the brain that helps your muscles to coordinate your movement and your balance, so that you can walk, ride a bike, or play tag.

(uh-MIG-duh-luh)

Amygdala

A tightly-packed group of cells deep within the center of the brain that controls your emotions.



Excited



Happy



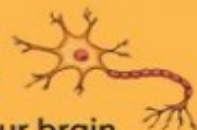
Sad

"The human brain is made up of about 85% water."

"Mmmm, I'm really thirsty right now."

(NER-onz) Neurons

Neurons are everywhere in your brain. They are tiny brain cells that make electrical signals to send messages to other cells in your body telling them what to do.

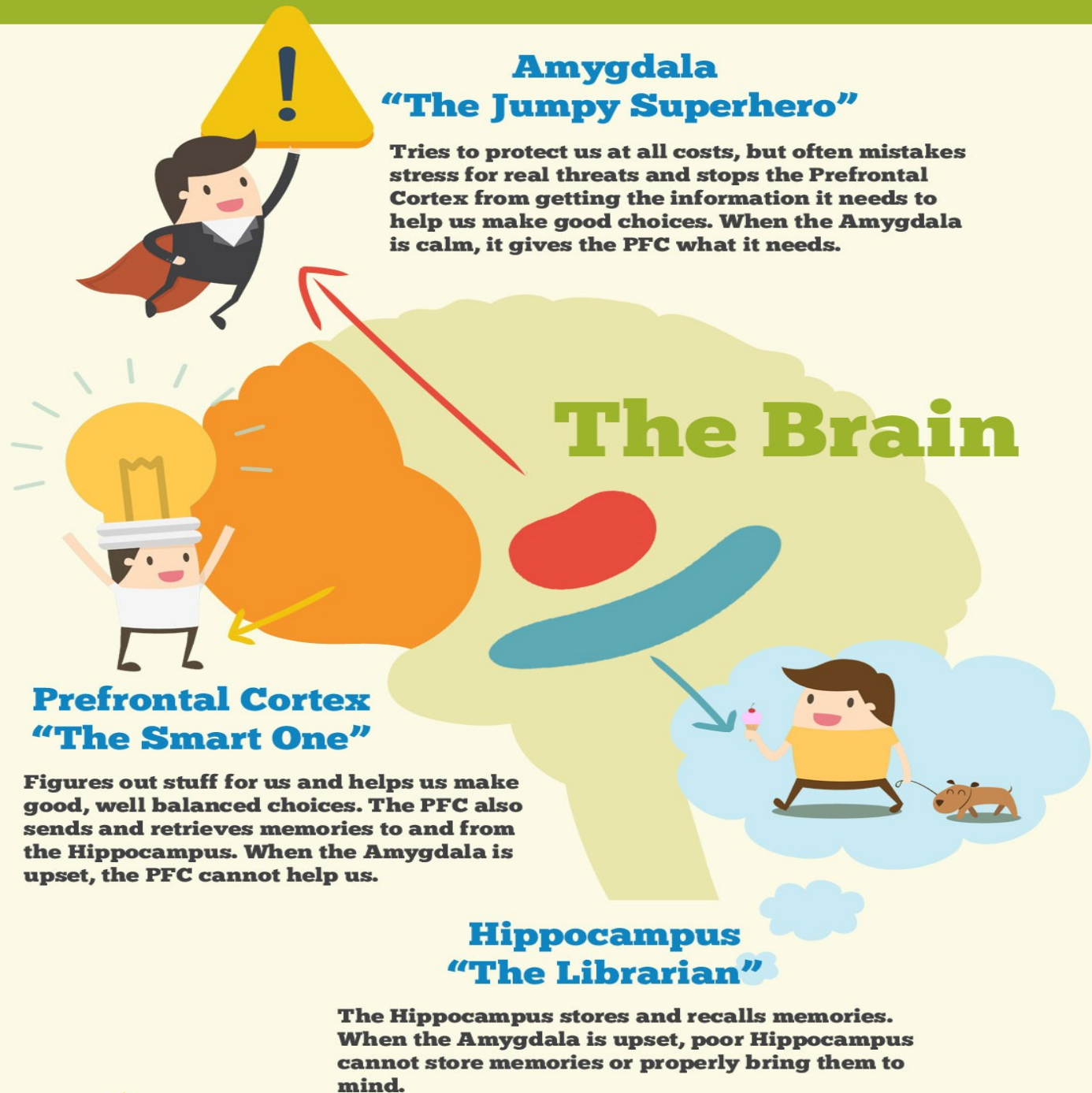


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Mindfulness and the Brain

– How to Explain It to Children



Mindfulness To The Rescue

Mindfulness helps us to calm down, and this, in turn, calms the amygdala so that it allows the information flow to the prefrontal cortex—that part of our brains that helps us make good choices. When we’re calm, we can more easily be mindful and make good choices.



You have brains in your head
You have feet in your shoes
YOU CAN STEER YOURSELF
in **ANY** direction you choose

If things Start happening,
Don't worry, Don't stew,
Just go Right along and
You'll start happening too
-Dr. Seuss



Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting So...
get on your way. Dr. Seuss

PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

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