

THE SEVEN C'S OF RESILIENCE BUILDING WITH TEENAGERS

1. COMPETENCE: *SPECIFIC ABILITIES/SKILLS* TO HANDLE SITUATIONS EFFECTIVELY.

- must be earned the hard way by getting in the game of life, in winning *and especially* in losing
- acquired through *actual experience*
- helps teens learn to trust their judgments, make responsible choices, and face difficult situations

COMPETENCE BUILDING JOBS FOR PARENTS:

- Encourage any/all activities, *structured or not*. Baseball and debate teams are great; so are “useless” rock n’ roll bands and gay/straight alliances
- Say lots about what they do well; say little as possible about what they do poorly
- When pointing out a mistake, stay narrow focused: don’t say “*you always do this*”; instead try “*if you had to do over again, what would you do differently?*”
- Don’t lecture with answers; do force thinking with questions
- Let them make non-lethal mistakes; don’t try to excessively protect them: *bad decisions made well* (by your kid) *are more strengthening than good decisions made poorly* (forced by you)
- Don’t compare them to others (especially to sibs)

2. CONFIDENCE: A BELIEF IN SELF THAT PROJECTS COMPETENCE INTO THE FUTURE

CONFIDENCE BUILDING JOBS FOR PARENTS:

- Expect the best: *not of achievements*, but personal qualities such as fairness, integrity, persistence, and kindness; “*I know you’re better than that decision you made.*”
- Don’t treat them as stupid; do treat as someone who is learning to navigate the world. *Frame mistakes as learning opportunities*
- Praise them *often but honestly* about *specific achievements* (“wins”), and *even more about good efforts that fail* (“losses”)
- Encourage *them* to push *themselves*, don’t push them: say “*What do you have to lose by trying?*” and “*How will you feel if you don’t try?*”
- Avoid shame: frame bad decisions as *symptoms*, not *sins*

3. CONNECTIONS: THE INVISIBLE LIFELINES THAT BUILD RESILIENCE MORE THAN ANY OTHER FACTOR

CONNECTION BUILDING JOBS FOR PARENTS:

- Promote physical safety and emotional security within the home: avoid fear-based parenting (yelling, ridiculing and punishing). Try respect-based methods (e.g. pre-informed consequences)
- Remind them that you are crazy in love with them *especially* in conflict, “love you too much to help you to hurt yourself”
- Be like the mafia: *take their failures as business errors, not personal attacks*
- Allow them to express *all* emotions as long as not abusive: “*I understand that you hate me right now. I feel bad for that, but I love you too much to let you do something that can hurt you.*”
- Model positive conflict resolution: (“*I love you even though we disagree*”) vs negative (avoiding/exploding)
- Use consequences (pre-informed outcomes of decisions) vs. punishments (hurting them for being hurtful)

4. CHARACTER: *WHAT YOU DO WHEN NO ONE'S LOOKING*

CHARACTER BUILDING JOBS FOR PARENTS:

- Show how your kid's behaviors affect other people in good and bad ways as *ripples in the pond*: "you have no idea how happy you made grandmom when you..."
- Allow them to clarify their own values *especially if you disagree*: "How the hell can you be a Giants fan?" vs. "Tell me what you love about the Giants"
- Model the importance of caring for others and *what that does for you*
- Demonstrate the importance of community: emphasize how, for better and for worse, we are all connected, and how character makes that connection better: "*I love helping out your coach. She's an incredible lady to give so much of her time. Look at how she cares about your teammates...*"
- Help them develop a sense of purpose and meaning in life: "*What is this all about, for you?*" Give them *questions, not answers*
- Proactively stand up to hateful prejudice. Be very clear how you see that stuff.
- Show how you think of others' needs when making decisions: talk out loud to yourself in front of your kid: "*I'd love to play golf today, but mom could really use a break.*"
- Share own experiences: "*I once did a nice thing and no one knew about it but me. That felt great. It felt less great the more people found out.*" (the hero's dilemma)

5. CONTRIBUTION: *CHANGING THE WORLD, ONE PEBBLE AT A TIME*

CONTRIBUTION BUILDING JOBS FOR PARENTS:

- Continually reference the “real world” of people in need vs. the “Disney world” many of us take for granted.
- Model generosity with your own time and money
- Show how we really change the world with one pebble at a time: “*That one person we fed today might disagree with you that small acts are pointless.*”
- Create opportunities for each child to contribute in some way. Don’t forget the power of a well-placed bribe (e.g. an incentive for working in the homeless shelter); *extrinsic rewards can shape intrinsic beliefs when accompanied by thought-provoking questions.*

6. COPING SKILLS: *THE MARTIAL ARTS OF RESILIENCE*

COPING SKILLS BUILDING JOBS FOR PARENTS:

- Help them with perspective to distinguish life *horrors* from *frustrations* (i.e. genocide vs. social rejection): “*What is an example of a recent horror in the world? Ok. Now think: Is getting rejected a horror, or a frustration?*”
- Model positive coping strategies by narrating your own process: “*This feels scary right now, but I know the sun will come up; can’t let my fear make my decisions.*”
- Allow some unstructured “wasted” time. Fantasy and playtime build problem solving skills and promote creativity.
- Model the serenity prayer: “*Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*”
- Model/narrate (vs. preach) the importance of exercise, nutrition, and adequate sleep: “*I feel so much better when I...*”

7. CONTROL: *HOPE IN ACTION*

CONTROL BUILDING JOBS FOR PARENTS:

- Show how most things happen as a direct result of someone's actions and choices
- Constantly point out their successes (big and small) to remind them that they can succeed. Kids experience much more failure than success
- Link autonomy with responsibility: *"You can earn use of the car by showing emotional control."*
- Use consequences versus punishment. Be the respectful (vs. angry) cop in conflict

Seven "Cs" from *Building Resilience in Children and Teens* courtesy of The American Academy of Pediatrics

Handout courtesy of Michael Bradley, Ed.D.

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To stay up to date on current teen issues, visit Dr. Bradley at www.docmikebradley.com and/or like him on Facebook.

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