

January 2021

Pondering Parenting

Every month SMFCSD's Counselor Wellness Team will share with you stories and guidance based in the 3R's: Routines, Relationships and Regulation, to help your family navigate the everyday puzzles that arise in supporting your learner(s).

Resilience Building

By Nancy Wallin, School Counselor and Wini McMichael, Wellness Coordinator

The Challenge:

Melt downs, disrespectful remarks, slammed doors, short tempers. It can be difficult to keep your cool when your child is stressed and losing control. You, too, are living in this tricky time and might feel like you need someone to give you positive feedback to notice all of your hard work. We see you.

This month, we share tips to help you tap into your own resilience as you help your child grow and develop theirs. Practicing these strategies with your child during calm moments can create a connection of joy with the action—as well as with you—and can support your relationship when negative emotions are overwhelming. These strategies strengthen the innate resilience we all possess and enable us to better navigate the stresses and hardships of our lives.

Regulation:

Stress shortens fuses, increases irritability and undermines our ability to access skills and strengths that, under normal circumstances, we may have in abundance. An agitated adult cannot help their child gain self-control. We first must bring our own nervous system back in balance. Some re-balancing actions can be taken in the heat of the moment and others can be practiced to build up resilience. Try these strategies to help strengthen your resilience:

- Focus on the Positive
 - Use positive self-talk (“*We will survive*” “*Perfect is not the goal here*”).
 - If you have an image in your head of the “perfect parent” and you don’t fit that description (and, by the way, no one does), set it aside and name one or two things you like about your parenting.
 - Focus on the good and give yourself credit, for example, “*I was able to notice and say positive things to my child even though they cried on the hallway floor and I felt like joining them.*”
 - Intentionally notice joyful moments each day and reinforce them by noting them aloud. Recognition of positive experiences is a foundation for resilience.

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- Engage Your Senses in a Moment of Stress
 - Drink water (ice water typically helps.)
 - Listen to the sounds you are hearing in the present moment, for example, car sounds outside, birds chirping, etc.
 - Look for objects in the environment that are a specific color.
 - Push against a wall, table or stable chair
 - Connect
 - Reach out to a supportive friend or family member. Positive relationships are also a foundation of resilience.
 - Call the National Parent Helpline: 1-855-4A-PARENT (1-855-427-2736)

Relationships

These relational strategies can help you to help your child calm down more quickly in a moment of loss of control:

- Safe, Caring Contact
 - Make eye contact if they look for it—they are looking to see if they are accepted in their upset state. Their eyes may be asking: *“Will you still be with me, even through this unpleasant moment?”*
 - Offer safe contact—back rub, hand squeeze. If they refuse it, discontinue.
- Brief, Calming Communication
 - Use fewer words.
 - Make calming sounds.
- Patient, Reflective Listening
 - If your child says words like *“I’m so mad,”* calmly let your child know that you see and hear them, perhaps saying *“You’re feeling really angry”* back to them.
 - Be patient. It takes time for the dysregulated brain to regulate.

The most common factor for developing resilience in children is at least one safe, supportive relationship with an adult. Try these relationship-building strategies:

- Positive Time Together
 - Spend time with your child. Challenge yourself to acknowledge five of your child’s behaviors you appreciate; point them out at the time you see them. Try to offer only the most needed corrections.
 - Provide spontaneous, positive attention in the form of a game or joke-telling session.
 - Watch one of your child’s favorite shows together.
- Empowerment
 - Let your child pick the activity.
 - Express genuine interest in your child’s hobbies by participating in a related activity with them and asking them questions about it so they are the expert.

Routines

Rest. Reset. Restore.

Lack of sleep makes it much more difficult to keep our emotions in check, think clearly and connect with others, including your children. Sleep buffers toxic stress and is critical for learning. If getting a good night's rest is a challenge, try these strategies for improving sleep:

- Control Your Sleep Space
 - Try to keep sleeping spaces, dark, quiet and cool.
 - Only use your bed for sleep or for private time with your partner.
 - If you are unable to fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and distract yourself with something that is not energizing, such as reading (preferably dull, print material). Return to bed when you feel sleepy.
- Healthy Routines
 - Avoid caffeine after 1 pm, alcohol, sugary snacks and large meals.
 - Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Surgeon General of California, recommends a daily bedtime routine for children that includes activities such as a bath, massage, reading books, rocking, prayer, singing and listening to music.
- Get Help
 - Contact your physician if you or your child have insomnia that you are unable to overcome.

Build Resilience with Your Child(ren):

Though we all possess innate resilience, most of us can use some intentional strengthening of our 'resilience muscle.' Routines that are consistent, expected and created with your child will support resilience building during difficult times. Regularly practice self-regulation and other resilience building techniques together such as:

- Mind-Body Connection
 - Practice mindfulness, breathing techniques, breath and movement activities such as yoga.
 - Try wall push-ups when feeling angry.
- Distraction
 - Find objects in the environment that are a specific color or have a specific quality.
- Build Self Control
 - Play "Simon Says."
 - Play 'Try not to Laugh.'
- Gratitude
 - Incorporate family sharing of 3 moments for which each person is grateful as part of a daily routine such as meal-time, bedtime, or (once we are back on campus) on the trip home from school. These moments can be simple, such as hearing a favorite song or seeing a friendly dog.

Additional Resources

Videos:

- [Afirmaciones Positivas](#)
- [Mind Yeti: 19 Guided Meditations for Kids](#) [English](#) [Spanish](#)
- [Guided Meditation from the Monterey Bay Aquarium](#)
- [Conciencia Plena](#)
- [Movement Activities/Videos for Kids, Tweens and Teens](#)
- [Yoga en Español](#)

Articles:

- [Resilience guide for parents and teachers](#) [English](#) [Spanish](#)
- [How to be a Resilient Parent](#)
- [Resilience and Routines for Families During the Pandemic](#)