

THE SEL BUZZ



Building Resilience in Children

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All children are capable of working through challenges and coping with stress. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stress, adversity, failure, challenges, or even trauma. It's not something that children either have or do not have; it is a skill that kids develop as they grow. Resilient children are more likely to take healthy risks because they don't fear falling short of expectations. They are curious, brave, and trusting of their instincts. They know their limits and they push themselves to step outside of their comfort zones. This helps them reach their long-term goals and solve problems independently.

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All children encounter stresses of varying degrees as they grow. Despite best efforts, parents cannot protect children from obstacles. They get sick, move to new neighborhoods, encounter unkind behavior, take tests, cope with grief, lose friends, and deal with divorce, to name a few. These obstacles might seem minor to an adult, but they feel large and all-consuming to children. Resilience helps children navigate stressful situations and events. When children have the skills and the confidence to confront and work through their problems, they learn that they can bounce back on their own and they internalize the message that they are strong and capable.

Strategies for Building Resilience

Parents can help kids build resilience and confront uncertainty by teaching them to solve problems independently. While the gut reaction of the parent might be to jump in and help so that the child avoids dealing with discomfort, this actually weakens resilience. Kids need to experience discomfort so that they can learn to work through it and develop their own problem-solving skills. Without this skill set in place, kids will experience anxiety and shut down in the face of adversity.

- **Build a Strong Emotional Connection:** Spend one-on-one time with your children. Coping skills develop within the context of caring relationships, so it's important to spend one-on-one time with your children. When children know they have the unconditional support of a parent, family member, or even a teacher, they feel empowered to seek guidance and make attempts to work through difficult situations. Positive connections also allow adults to model coping and problem-solving skills to children.
- **Promote Healthy Risk-Taking:** In a world where playgrounds are made "safe" with bouncy floor materials and helicopter or lawn mower parenting, it's important to encourage kids to take healthy risks. What is a healthy risk? Something that pushes a child to go outside of their comfort zone, but results in very little harm if they are unsuccessful. Examples include trying a new sport, participating in the school play, or striking up a conversation with a new peer. When children avoid risk, they internalize the message that they aren't strong enough to handle challenges. When children embrace risks, they learn that when they push themselves they are capable and even if they fail, they will not break.



- **Resist the Urge to Fix It and Ask Questions Instead:** When kids come to parents to solve their problems, the natural response is to jump to providing a solution. A better strategy is to ask questions and have your child generate solutions. Children build confidence in their ability to problems solve and take pride and ownership in their solutions when their ideas are their own.
 - **Teach Problem-Solving Skills:** The goal is not to promote rugged self-reliance. We all need help sometimes, and it's important for children to know they have help. By brainstorming solutions, parents engage in the process of solving problems. Encourage children to come up with a list of ideas and weigh the pros and cons of each
 - **Label Emotions:** When stress kicks in, emotions run hot. Teach your kids that all feelings are important and that labeling their feelings can help them make sense of what they're experiencing. Tell them it's okay to feel all emotions and that feelings usually pass.
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Strategies to Build Resilience

- **Demonstrate Coping Skills:** Deep breathing exercises help children relax and calm themselves when they experience stress or frustration. This enables them to remain calm and process the situation clearly.
- **Embrace Mistakes—Theirs and Yours:** Failure-avoiders lack resilience. In fact, failure-avoiders tend to be highly anxious. When parents focus on end results, children may get caught up in the pass/fail cycle. They either succeed or they don't. This causes risk avoidance. Embracing mistakes (your own included) helps promote a growth mindset and gives children the message that mistakes help them learn. It can be helpful to talk about a mistake you made and how you recovered from it.
- **Promote the Bright Side—Every Experience Has One:** Optimism and resiliency go hand in hand. Some kids may appear more naturally optimistic than others, but optimism can be nurtured. If you have a mini pessimist on your hands, acknowledge the feelings that lead to pessimistic thinking and teach your child to reframe his thoughts to find the positive.
- **Model Resiliency:** The best way to teach resilience is to model it. We all encounter stressful situations. Use coping and calming strategies. Deep breathing can be an effective way to work through stress. Always label your emotions and talk through your problem-solving process.
- **Go Outside:** Exercise helps strengthen the brain and make it more resilient to stress and adversity. While team sports are the most popular method of consistent exercise for kids, all kids really need is time spent outdoors engaging in a physical activity. If team sports don't appeal to your child, encourage them or introduce them to bicycling, playing tag, or even just swinging at the playground. These are all great ways for kids to engage in free play that also builds resilience.

Resilience helps kids navigate the obstacles they encounter as they grow. It's not possible to avoid stress, but being resilient is one of the best ways to cope with it.

Resources

BOOKS FOR PARENTS:

"PARENT'S GUIDE TO BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN AND TEENS" BY KENNETH R. GINSBURG

"HOW TO RAISE AN ADULT: BREAK FREE OF THE OVERPARENTING TRAP AND PREPARE YOUR KID FOR SUCCESS" BY JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS

"UNSELFIE - WHY EMPATHETIC KIDS SUCCEED IN OUR ALL-ABOUT ME WORLD" BY MICHELE BORBA

"MAKING GRATEFUL KIDS - THE SCIENCE OF BUILDING CHARACTER" BY JEFFREY FROH AND GIACOMO BONO

"NURTURING RESILIENCE IN OUR CHILDREN" BY ROBERT BROOKS AND SAM GOLDSTEIN

"THE GIFT OF FAILURE" BY JESSICA LAHEY

WEBSITES:

[HTTPS://WWW.APA.ORG/TOPICS/RESILIENCE/GUIDE-PARENTS-TEACHERS](https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers)

[HTTPS://DEVELOPINGCHILD.HARVARD.EDU/SCIENCE/KEY-CONCEPTS/RESILIENCE/](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/)