

# RESILIENCE

NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS – VOLUME 3

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## What is resilience?

Our parental instincts drive us to protect our children. Given a choice we would bubble wrap them. But we cannot. We can, however, prepare them to navigate the world. We can support them to develop the character strengths and human connections that allow them to thrive in good times and rebound (even grow) in challenging times. In other words, we can build their resilience. Think of resilience as a process of bouncing back — of rising above adversity. And to do so ideally, with lessons that enable you to better manage the next bump in the road.



Life may not come with a map, but everyone will experience twists and turns, from everyday challenges to events with more lasting impact. Each change affects people differently, bringing a unique flood of thoughts, strong emotions, and uncertainty. Yet people adapt well over time to life-changing situations and stressful situations—in part thanks to resilience. While these adverse events, much like rough river waters, are certainly painful and difficult, they do not have to determine the outcome of your life. There are many aspects of your life you can control, modify, and grow with. That is the role of resilience.



Becoming more resilient not only helps you get through difficult circumstances, but it also empowers you to grow and even improve your life along the way.

Some people are more likely to be resilient in the face of adversity. But resilience is not something with which you are born. Instead, it is something that can be built and nurtured as a part of development. Psychologists describe resilience as “**ordinary magic.**” Resilience is not about extraordinary events or heroic measures. Rather, resilience is built when we are offered meaningful support and love from others.



# What resilience is not?

Being resilient does not mean that a person will not have trouble or distress. People who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives commonly experience emotional pain and stress. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.

While certain factors might make some individuals more resilient than others, resilience is not necessarily a personality trait that only some people possess. On the contrary, resilience involves behaviours, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop. The ability to learn resilience is one reason research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. One example is the response of many Americans to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and individuals' efforts to rebuild their lives after tragedy.

*'Like building a muscle, increasing your resilience takes time and intentionality. Focusing on four core components—connection, wellness, healthy thinking, and meaning—can empower you to withstand and learn from difficult and traumatic experiences.'*

We tend to idealize childhood as a carefree time, but youth alone offer no shield against the emotional hurts, challenges, and traumas many children face. Children can be asked to deal with problems ranging from adapting to a new classroom or online schooling to bullying by peers or even struggles at home. Add to that the uncertainties that are part of growing up in a complex world, and childhood can be anything but carefree. The ability to thrive despite these challenges arises from the skills of resilience.

## **The good news is that resilience skills can be learned.**

Building resilience—the ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, threats, or even significant sources of stress—can help our children manage stress and feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. However, being resilient does not mean that children will not have trouble or distress.

### **1. Resilience and preschool children**

Young children will only recently have mastered the skills of walking and talking, and they may not be able to express their anxieties and fears. Although you may think they are too young to understand what is happening, even young children can absorb frightening events from the news or from conversations they overhear.

*‘Watch your children for signs of fear and sadness they may not be able to put into words.’*

Have your children become extra clingy or needing more hugs than usual?

Have your children started old habits after you thought they had outgrown the behavior?

Are they suddenly more irritable?

They may be feeling the pressure of what is going on in the world around them.

- *Use play to help your children express their fears and encourage them to use art or pretend games to express what they may not be able to put into words.*
- *Use family time like a security blanket for your children: wrap them up in family closeness and make sure they have lots of family time.*
- *During times of stress and change, spend more time with your children playing games, reading to them, or just holding them close*





## **2. Building Resilience in primary school children**

Primary school children may be starting to form new friend groups and participate in new activities as they come into their own. As they start to study subjects about the world outside of their homes, they look to teachers as well as to parents to make them feel safe and to help sort it all out.

- *Make sure your child has a place where they can feel safe, whether that is home or school (ideally, both would feel safe).*
- *Talk to your children.*
- *When they have questions, answer them honestly and with reassurance that includes simple statements that let them know you are taking actions to keep them safe and are there to take care of them.*
- *Listen to their concerns and fears when they address them with you and let them know you are there for them.*
- *When there is a situation outside of the home that is frightening, limit the amount of news your children watch or listen to.*

There is always the possibility that they misinterpret what they see or hear on the news. You do not need to hide what is happening in the world from your children, but neither do they have to be exposed to constant stories that fuel their fears. Check in on their understanding of what they have been exposed to.

### **3. Resilience and middle school children**

Middle school can be an especially challenging time for many children as they struggle to meet extra academic demands and avoid new social pitfalls. They look to teachers and friends as well as to parents to make them feel safe.

*‘Reinforce empathy and help your child keep perspective.’*

If your child falls into the shifting of social groups that form in middle school, help them understand that other children may be feeling just as lonely and confused, and help them to see beyond the current situation. Talk with your child about your own feelings during times of extraordinary stress. Your children may be old enough to appreciate hearing about your own thoughts and feelings, but also the ways in which you cope.

Share how the ways you cope are helpful to you but also find techniques that may benefit your child.





# Here are our ten tips for building resilience in children and teens.

## *1. Make connections.*

Teach your child the importance of engaging and connecting with their peers, including the skill of empathy, and listening to others. Find ways to help children foster connectivity by suggesting they connect to peers in-person or through phone, video chats, and texts. It is also important to build a strong family network. Connecting with others provides social support and strengthens resilience.

## *2. Help your child by having them help others.*

Children who may feel helpless can feel empowered by helping others. Engage your child in age-appropriate volunteer work or ask for assistance yourself with tasks that they can master. At school, brainstorm with children about ways they can help others in their class or in grades below.

## *3. Maintain a daily routine.*

Sticking to a routine can be comforting to children, especially younger children who crave structure in their lives. Work with your child to develop a routine and highlight times that are for schoolwork and play. Particularly during times of distress or transition, you might need to be flexible with some routines. At the same time, schedules and consistency are important to maintain.

## *4. Take a break.*

While some anxiety can motivate us to take positive action, we also need to validate all feelings. Teach your child how to focus on something that they can control or can act on. Help by challenging unrealistic thinking by asking them to examine the chances of the worst-case scenario and what they might tell a friend who has those worries. Be aware of what your child is exposed to that can be troubling, whether it is through the news, online, or overheard conversations.

## ***5. Teach your child self-care.***

Teach your child the importance of basic self-care. This may be making more time to eat properly, exercise, and get sufficient sleep. Make sure your child has time to have fun and participate in activities they enjoy. Caring for oneself and even having fun will help children stay balanced and better deal with stressful times.

## ***6. Move toward your goals.***

Teach your child to set reasonable goals and help them to move toward them one step at a time. Establishing goals will help children focus on a specific task and can help build the resilience to move forward in the face of challenges.

*‘At school, break down large assignments into small, achievable goals for younger children, and for older children, acknowledge accomplishments on the way to larger goals.’*

## ***7. Nurture a positive self-view.***

Help your child remember ways they have successfully managed hardships in the past and help them understand that these past challenges help build the strength to manage future challenges. Help your child learn to trust themselves to solve problems and make appropriate decisions.

*‘At school, help children see how their individual accomplishments contribute to the well-being of the class.’*

## ***8. Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook.***

An optimistic and positive outlook can enable children to see the good things in life and keep going even in the hardest times.

*‘In school, use history to show that life moves forward after adverse events, and the worst things are specific and temporary.’*





## ***9. Look for opportunities for self-discovery.***

Tough times are often when children learn the most about themselves. Help your child look at how whatever they are facing can teach them what I am made of.

*‘At school, consider leading discussions of what each student has learned after facing a tough situation.’*

## ***10. Accept change.***

Change often can be scary for children and teens. Help your child see that change is part of life and new goals can replace goals that have become unattainable. It is important to examine what is going well, and to have a plan of action for what is not going well.

*‘In school, point out how students have changed as they moved up in grade levels and discuss how that change has had an impact on the students.’*

**Developing resilience is a personal journey, and you should use your knowledge of your own children to guide them on their journey. An approach to building resilience that works for you, or your child might not work for someone else.**

**Remember, children need to know that there is an adult in their life who believes in them and loves them unconditionally. Kids will live “up” or “down” to our expectations.**

**There is no simple answer to guarantee resilience in every situation. But we can challenge ourselves to help our children develop the ability to negotiate their own challenges and to be more resilient, more capable, and happier.**