

Fostering Resiliency: Learning to “Struggle Well” in the Face of Adversity

Resilience is an important aspect of mental well-being. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stress, adversity, failure, challenges or even trauma. Resiliency enables individuals to effectively cope with, or adapt to, stress and challenging situations. An important aspect of resiliency is growing from the adverse experience and being able to move forward with strength and the ability to be more equipped to deal with future challenges. Children and teenagers are not exempt from stressors and hardships. Focusing on young people’s strengths and helping to nurture resilient traits can help reduce the effects of significant adversity on their health and well-being. Identifying a youth’s “social resources” is also a key concept of resiliency. Several studies highlight the idea that resilience is more than individual traits. Environmental interactions with school, family, community and culture are also important ingredients.

According to the Mayo Clinic and the American Psychological Association, resilience won’t make a person’s problems go away, but it can help to channel one’s inner strength and mobilize coping skills. When we lack resilience, we might be more prone to dwell on problems, feel victimized, become overwhelmed or turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, like substance abuse. The good news is resilience can be nurtured and skills to help a young person become more resilient can be taught. When kids have the skills and confidence to work through their problems, they learn that they are strong and capable of managing difficult issues. It is important to remember that resiliency isn’t about “toughing it out” or managing stress and problems alone. In fact, being able to reach out for help and ask others for support is a key characteristic in being resilient. According to Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, “the single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult”. Building positive relationships, teaching social and emotional skills, fostering positive emotions, identifying strengths and building a sense of meaning and purpose are positive steps in building resilient youth. In a book titled, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, the American Academy of Pediatrics focus on the 7 C’s that they note as essential building blocks of resilience:

1. **Competence:** When we notice what young people are doing right and give them opportunities to develop important skills, they feel competent. We undermine competence when we don’t allow young people to recover themselves after a fall.
2. **Confidence:** Young people need confidence to be able to navigate the world, think outside the box, and recover from challenges.
3. **Connection:** Connections with other people, schools, and communities offer young people the security that allows them to stand on their own and develop creative solutions.
4. **Character:** Young people need a clear sense of right and wrong and a commitment to integrity.

The world breaks
everyone and
afterward many are
strong in the
broken places.

~ E. Hemmingway

5. **Contribution:** Young people who contribute to the well-being of others will receive gratitude rather than condemnation. They will learn that contributing feels good and may therefore more easily turn to others and do so without shame.
6. **Coping:** Young people who possess a variety of healthy coping strategies will be less likely to turn to dangerous quick fixes when stressed.
7. **Control:** Young people who understand privileges and respect are earned through demonstrated responsibility will learn to make wise choices and feel a sense of control.

It should be noted that developing resilience is a personal journey. An approach to building resiliency that works for one child might not work for someone else. Turning to someone for guidance such as a psychologist or mental health professional may help youth who feel overwhelmed strengthen resilience and persevere during times of stress and trauma.

References: American Psychological Association; *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*; Harvard University: Center on the Developing Child; Mayo Clinic; The Child Mind Institute;