

Family School Liaison Program

Horizon School Division No.67

Newsletter - February 2011



Building Resilience in Children:

What do most parents want for their children? High on their list are happiness, success in school, satisfaction with their lives, and solid friendships. In order to reach these goals, our children need inner strength to deal competently with the many challenges and demands they encounter. We call this capacity to cope and feel competent resilience.

Although the word resilience is typically applied to youngsters who have overcome stress and hardship, it is a vital quality for every child. Even children fortunate enough not to face significant adversity or trauma.

The Mindset of a Resilient Child

Resilient children are hopeful and possess high self worth. They feel special and appreciated. They have learned to set realistic goals and expectations. They have developed the ability to solve problems and make decisions, and thus are more likely to view mistakes, hardships, and obstacles as challenges to confront rather than as stressors to avoid.

Resilient children are aware of their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, but they also recognize their strong points and talents. They have developed effective interpersonal skills with peers and adults, and are able to seek out assistance and nurturance in appropriate ways. They focus on the aspects of their lives over which they have control rather than those over which they have little or no influence.

There is no one proven golden path to the future. Each child travels through life on a unique road that is shaped by a variety of factors, including his or her inborn

temperament, educational experiences, family style, and values as well as the broader society or culture.

However, there are some guidelines applicable to any road child travels. Some of them may seem like simple common sense. However, even those that appear obvious require continuous thought and reflection so we don't lose sight of what is truly important in our parenting behaviours. Dr. Ginsburg provides 7 C's to raising resilient children:

Competence

Competence describes the feeling of knowing that you can handle a situation effectively. We can help the development of competence by:

- Helping children focus on individual strengths
- Empowering children to make decisions
- Being careful that your desire to protect your child doesn't mistakenly send a message that you don't think he or she is competent to handle things
- Recognizing the competencies of siblings individually and avoiding comparisons

Confidence

A child's belief in his or her own abilities is derived from competence. Build confidence by:

- Focusing on the best in each child so that he or she can see that
- Clearly expressing the best qualities, such as fairness, integrity, persistence, and kindness
- Recognizing when he or she has done well
- Praising honestly about specific achievements; not diffusing praise that may lack authenticity
- Not pushing the child to take on more than he or she can realistically handle

Connection

Developing close ties to family and community creates a solid sense of security that helps lead to strong values and prevents alternative destructive paths to love and attention. You can help your child connect with others by:

- Building a sense of physical safety and

emotional security within your home

- Allowing the expression of all emotions, so that kids will feel comfortable reaching out during difficult times
- Addressing conflict openly in the family to resolve problems
- Creating a common area where the family can share time (not necessarily TV time)
- Fostering healthy relationships that will reinforce positive messages

Character

Children need to develop a solid set of morals and values to determine right from wrong and to demonstrate a caring attitude toward others. To strengthen your child's character, start by:

- Demonstrating how behaviours affect others
- Helping your child recognize himself or herself as a caring person
- Demonstrating the importance of community
- Encouraging the development of spirituality
- Avoiding racist or hateful statements or stereotypes

Contribution

Children need to realize that the world is a better place because they are in it. Understanding the importance of personal contribution can serve as a source of purpose and motivation. Teach your children how to contribute by:

- Communicating to children that many people in the world do not have what they need
- Stressing the importance of serving others by modeling generosity
- Creating opportunities for each child to contribute in some specific way

Coping

Learning to cope effectively with stress will help your child be better prepared to overcome life's challenges. Positive coping lessons include:

- Modeling positive coping strategies on a consistent basis
- Guiding your child to develop positive and effective coping strategies

- Realizing that telling him or her to stop the negative behavior will not be effective
- Understanding that many risky behaviours are attempts to alleviate the stress and pain in kids' daily lives
- Not condemning your child for negative behaviours and, potentially, increasing his or her sense of shame

Control

Children who realize that they can control the outcomes of their decisions are more likely to realize that they have the ability to bounce back. Your child's understanding that he or she can make a difference further promotes competence and confidence. You can try to empower your child by:

- Helping your child to understand that life's events are not purely random and that most things that happen are the result of another individual's choices and actions
- Learning that discipline is about teaching, not punishing or controlling; using discipline to help your child to understand that his actions produce certain consequences

Skills Parents Can Model

Children look to parents' examples on how to handle new or difficult situations. The following tips can provide parents with skills to model resilience to their children.

- **Be empathetic.** In the parenting relationship, empathy is the capacity of parents ability to put themselves inside the shoes of their youngsters and to see the world through their eyes. Empathy does not imply that you agree with everything your children do, but rather that you attempt to appreciate and validate their point of view. It is easier to be empathetic when our kids do what we ask them to do, are successful in their activities, and are warm and responsive. It is more difficult when we are upset, angry, or disappointed in them, but that is when it matters most.
- **Communicate effectively and listen actively.** Communication is not simply how we speak to others. It involves actively listening to our children, understanding and validating what they are attempting to say and responding in ways that avoid power struggles by not interrupting them, by not telling them how they should be feeling, by not putting them down and by not using absolutes such as "always" and "never" in a demeaning way: "You never help out. You always show disrespect."
- **Change "negative scripts."** Every parent

can offer firsthand examples of when he or she repeatedly told or nagged a child to do or not do something with little if any positive response on the child's part. If something we have said or done for a reasonable amount of time does not work, then we must change our "script" if our children are to change theirs. This does not imply "giving in to" or "spoiling" children; rather it serves to teach youngsters that there are alternative ways of solving problems.

- **Love our children in ways that help them feel special and appreciated.** A basic guidepost for building resilience is the presence of at least one adult (hopefully several) who believe in the worth of the child. Such adults need not necessarily be parents. They are individuals who in their interactions with a child convey love and acceptance and help that child feel special; someone with whom a child can identify, and from whom they can draw strength.
- **Accept our children for who they are and helping them set realistic expectations and goals.** To do this, parents have to understand and accept their child's unique temperament. Acceptance does not mean letting children do whatever they want or not setting limits on their behavior. However, when children feel accepted, it is easier for them to respond to requests and limits because they experience these in an atmosphere of love and support.
- **Help our children experience success by identifying and reinforcing their "islands of competence."** True self-worth, hope, and resilience are based on children experiencing success in areas of their lives that they and others deem to be important. Each child has different interests and talents that take time to develop. We need to promote our children's strengths rather than overemphasizing their weaknesses.
- **Help children recognize that mistakes are experiences from which to learn.** Resilient children tend to view mistakes as opportunities for learning while those who are not hopeful often experience mistakes as an indication that they are failures. Parents need to set and evaluate realistic expectations; emphasize that mistakes are not only accepted, but also expected; communicate that their children are accepted and loved even when they make mistakes; and serve as models for dealing with mistakes and setbacks.
- **Develop responsibility, compassion and a social conscience by providing children**

with opportunities to contribute. We often try to reinforce responsibility simply by giving children chores to do at home. However, almost every child from a very young age appears motivated to help others. Children need opportunities to make a positive difference in their world. Involving them in a charitable work, such as walks for hunger or food drives, fosters self-esteem and a social conscience.

- **Teach our children to solve problems and make decisions.** Resilient children define problems, consider different solutions, attempt what they judge to be the most appropriate solutions, and learn from the outcome. To reinforce this problem-solving attitude, parents must be careful not to always tell children what to do but rather try to engage them in thinking about possible solutions. When children develop their own plans of action with the guidance of parents, their sense of ownership and control is reinforced.
- **Discipline in a way that promotes self-discipline and self-worth.** This means being consistent, but not rigid; knowing your children's capabilities and not pushing them for unrealistic expectations, relying when possible on natural, logical consequences rather than arbitrary, punitive measures; and remembering that positive feedback and encouragement are often the most powerful form of discipline.

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. The following websites provide more tips, information, and resources that you can use to help your children develop resilience and build confidence.

Resources

<http://www.kidsnowcanada.org/10-tips-building-resilient-kids>
http://www.familytlc.net/resilient_children_preteen.html
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/pages/Building-Resilience-in-Children.aspx>
<http://www.galbraithfamilylaw.com/Articles/building-resilience-in-children.html>
http://knowledgex.camh.net/amhspecialists/promotion/Pages/building_resilience.aspx