Building Resilience in Young Children

1. **INTRODUCTION TO RESILIENCE**

What is Resilience?

Life can involve many stressful situations that can challenge each of us as individuals. When life throws these challenges our way we use resilience to get through them in a healthy and positive way. Resilience is the ability to steer through serious life challenges and find ways to bounce back and to thrive. Situations such as relationship difficulties, sudden changes, hectic schedules or feelings of solution can be overwhelming to both parents and children so it is important that parents help to build their children’s resistance to these situations. Children learn behaviour by observing their parents, for this reason it is also important that parents demonstrate positive coping mechanisms with everyday stress and therefore teach their children how to do the same.

Why is it important to develop resilience and how can you build resilience?

People who respond to hardships and stressful situations with resilience are often:

* Healthier and live longer
* Happier in their relationships
* More successful in school and work
* Less likely to get depressed

The things that support healthy development in young children also aid their resilience, such as:

* A secure bond with a caring adult
* Relationships with positive role models
* Opportunities to learn skills
* Opportunities to participate in meaningful activities

1. **WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW TO BUILD RESILIENCE?**

Inner Strengths and Outside Supports

We need both outside supports and inner strengths to build our resilience. Outside supports and inner strengths works together to develop our resilience

Inner strengths include:

* Self control
* Thinking skills
* Confidence
* Positive outlook
* Responsibility and participate

Outside supports include:

* Caring relationships
* Positive role models in families and communities
* Community resources such as community centres, parent-child drop-in centres, faith groups, or support programs for children with special needs

1. **BUILDING CARING RELATIONSHIPS**

Children perform their best in environments where they feel loved, understood, accepted and protected from harm. Feeling wanted and loved helps us get through the hard times in live and builds our resilience. When children develop a strong attachment to a caring person it allows them to feel safe and secure and gives them the confidence to go out and explore the world on their own. Caring relationships allow children to learn to regulate their: bodies, feelings, attention thoughts and behaviour. By building positive relationships between children and their parents, children then have the ability to have caring, positive relationships with other people in their lives.

Tips to building caring relationships

* Give attention and affection
* Play with your children
* Comfort your children
* Listen with interest
* Show empathy
* Reduce TV time – experts recommend that children under 2 years should not watch any TV
* Help your children identify and express their feelings
* Read or tell your children stories

1. **BEING A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL**

Young children observe and copy the behaviour of others, especially the behaviour of their parents who they spend the majority of their time around. When parents are positive role models by handling difficult situations with resilience and staying calm and flexible when dealing with life’s challenges, they are showing their children positive ways to handle stress and build their own resilience.

Tips for being a positive role model

* Take care of your health – show children the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise, these reduce daily stress
* Show understanding, compassion and kindness
* Take three deep breaths when you’re stressed
* Be in charge of your emotions
* Be patient

* Let go of being perfect Stop and re-think
* Take responsibility for your own feelings and actions
* Use humour
* Stay positive
* Reach out for support
* Reach out to help others

1. **GATHERING COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

We can teach our children that everyone needs help sometimes by feeling comfortable in seeking help from others in our community. While some people feel that asking for help makes us look weak it is a really a sign of strength and mental health. Reaching out to friends, family and faith or cultural groups is part of building resilience. Teach your children how to reach out by,

* Telling your children it is OK to ask for help
* Create a ‘Help Signal’ with your children
* Read or tell stories about how others reach out to give or get a helping hand

1. **DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL AND BUILDING SELF-REGULATION**

Self regulation is how we adjust our feelings, actions, attention, thoughts and bodies so that we can handle different situations without getting overwhelmed – Self control is an inner strength that plays an important part in developing our self regulation. Children learn to self regulate through their daily interactions with caring adults. There are simple ways that you can develop your child’s self-control skills –

* Make sure your children get enough sleep and eat healthy food
* Practice deep breathing to calm yourself down and focus your attention. You can use the following ideas to help children 3 years and older learn deep breathing – pretend to blow up a balloon in their bellies, imagine breathing in their favourite smell, blow bubbles together, hold younger children “belly to belly” and do deep breathing
* Help your children picture something pleasant
* Help your children practice waiting – learning to develop patience is an essential life skill. You can help children 2 years and older practice waiting by teaching them rhymes, praise your child for waiting, or play waiting games
* Encourage your children to keep on trying even when it is hard or frustrating
* Let your children know it’s OK to have strong feelings, but not OK to hurt others
* Help your children learn to stop and think before they act
* Read or tell children stories

1. **DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS**

Why are thinking skills important?

The way we react to certain situations has a lot to do with the way we think about the situation. For this reason, thinking skills play a big part in our ability to regulate our emotions and behaviour. Even as adults we can often jump to conclusions about why difficult situations happen in our lives and often look to blame someone –whether that be ourselves or someone else. By following these three steps we can allow ourselves to respond to stressful situations effectively instead of just simply reacting.

STEP ONE – stop and catch your thoughts

STEP TWO – take three deep breathes

STEP THREE – “Re-think” the situation by asking yourself – how else can I think about this?

Tips for helping children 3 years and older develop thinking skills

* Help your children talk about their thoughts
* Show empathy for your children’s thoughts and feelings
* Gently change your children’s negative thinking – ‘Always’ thinking like “Jack always wants to play with someone else” can be turned around by pointing out times your child played with Jack
* Play thinking games together
* Encourage children to imagine another way to do something
* Read or tell children stories about how others overcome obstacles, get along with others or turn a difficult situation around

1. **BUILDING CONFIDENCE**

We start to develop confidence in our ability to make things happen very early in life. When we have confidence in our abilities, it helps us to respond to problems with resilience. Helping children gain confidence is best done in a caring relationship and is an important part of self-regulation.

Tips for building your children’s confidence

* Encourage your children to keep on trying even when the task is hard or frustrating
* Show your children that “Mistakes are OK”
* Be a “Strengths Detective” – pointing out your children’s strengths is a much better confidence-builder than focusing on their limitations
* Give your children lots of time to just play
* Set children up for success
* Offer choices – simple choices build children’s confidence by giving them the chance to make decisions and have some control
* Help your children be assertive
* Teach your children way to solve problems and resolve conflicts
* Read or tell children stories

1. **DEVELOPING A POSITIVE OUTLOOK**

When children observe their parents modelling a positive outlook, it is more likely they will develop a positive outlook too. A positive outlook can change a challenging situation into a manageable one by making us feel better and building hope. It also protects us from depression and poor health.

Tips for helping children develop a positive outlook

* See the positives – you can help your children bounce back from disappointment by teaching them to look for the positives in their daily life
* Express gratitude and appreciation for what you have big or small – try sharing stories with each other about the simple pleasures of your day or create a family ”gratitude book” together by gluing pictures or drawing things you are grateful for
* Look for beauty in nature – point out a fragrant flower, the feel of a warm breeze or a beautiful sunset. A walk in nature or visit to the park is a great way for children to have positive family time and develop appreciation and respect for their natural world.
* Have a little laugh – humour helps brighten our outlook and is a natural way to connect with others. Children love being silly.
* Nurture your spirituality to find meaning in things that happen – this can help us gain a sense of hope during difficult times. Develop spirituality in family life by spending time in nature, schedule quiet time together, participate in a faith group, create something together, help others in need
* Help children develop “realistic” optimism – positive things happen because of planning, problem solving and effort. Teach them to find ways to turn challenges into opportunities to learn and grow
* Read or tell children stories about others who look for and appreciate the positives in everyday life

1. **ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION**

Giving young children responsibility for small things gives them a way to contribute to family life and feel good about themselves. Encouraging children to take responsibility and actively participate makes them less likely to misbehave due to boredom or to gain attention. It builds self-regulation and increases their self-esteem and confidence.

Tips for encouraging children’s responsibility and participation

* Encourage your children to take responsibility by helping with daily chores
* Encourage your children to think of small ways to help others
* Involve your children when you help others
* Participate in community projects
* Help your children learn about and value their own culture
* Encourage participation in community activities that build your children’s talents and interests (sports, music, art, etc). This helps identify their strengths and gives direction, purpose and enjoyment
* Read or tell children stories about others who help out and get involved in community activities

1. **SUMMARY**

Resilience is the ability to get through serious life challenges and find ways to bounce back to thrive! Together, with the support of other caring family and community members, you can boost your children’s resilience through your everyday interactions and modelling.

Reference: Building Resilience in Young Children-Booklet for parents of children from birth to six years http://www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy\_chld\_dev/pdf/BSRC\_Resilience\_English\_fnl.pdf