

Resilience

Reviewed by SickKids Staff | Last updated: August 26th 2022

Resilience is a learned skill. Resilient children are able to cope with stress, particularly after a traumatic life event or stressor.

Key points

- Resilience is the ability to cope with and adapt to, stress brought on by a difficult life event or situation.
- Some children develop resilience through natural process, while others require assistance.
- Parents and caregivers play a key role in the development and nurturing of resilience in children.

What is resilience?

Resilience is often referred to as one's ability to "bounce back" from adversity when faced with a difficult life event or stressor. But resilience is about more than bouncing back. It is also the ability to incorporate adaptive strategies to successfully adapt to and navigate the stressor. Whenever we face adversity, we are changed or impacted by it and things will be different.



Resilience in children

Developmental psychologists agree that some children develop resilience through natural process, while others need extra support to access that capacity for resilience. However, this doesn't mean that those who require a little help will be less resilient over time compared to their counterparts. Parents and caregivers need to remember that cultivating resilience is dependent on many factors and can take some time. It is also important to remember that a

child's expression of sadness and/or emotional distress, particularly following a traumatic event, is normal.

Helping your child become more resilient

A common characteristic shared among resilient individuals is the ability to seek support from family, friends, caregivers and even community-based programs when they are distressed. For children, it's a parent or caregiver, who is often relied on to provide comfort and support during times of need. Therefore, parents and caregivers often play a key role in developing resilience in their children.

Encourage your child to learn more about themselves

Facing a difficult situation head-on can be an exercise in self-discovery, especially for young children. Encourage your child to talk openly about their experience, particularly what it is they learned about their ability to cope with stress. Parents and caregivers can model this by expressing their emotions and sharing difficult experiences. Doing this can encourage your child to express their own emotions and experiences. This will help your child get the support they need from others, as well as help them to process difficult situations and life events in a healthy way.

Teach your child about self-care

Lead by example when teaching your child about the benefits of taking care of one's self. This includes eating properly, exercising, taking time to rest and doing something nice for one's self. Avoid over-scheduling your child with activities, chores or tasks. Instead, try to facilitate a balanced schedule of work, fun and rest.

Teach your child about the inevitability of change

Change can be a daunting reality for children and adults alike. Teaching your child from an early age about life's uncertainties will enable them to roll with the punches a little easier. Change, too, is a great opportunity to sit down with your child and set some new, attainable goals.

Label and validate feelings

Labelling and validating your child's experience can be soothing, comforting and settling for them. When your child is calmer, you can then engage in problem-solving and develop strategies to cope. Parents and caregivers can take the "validation shortcut" by replacing 'but' with 'because' when talking to their children about how they are feeling. For example, instead of saying, 'you're feeling sad, but you're strong and you'll get over it,' you can say, 'you're feeling sad because I know this was important to you.'

Balance uncertainties with certainty

Focus on what is under your control, whether it is establishing new routines, making a small choice or relying on the consistent things and/or people in your life. For example, you can say, 'I don't know when this will end, but I know we can get through it together.'

Resources

Kids Help Phone – kidshelpphone.ca

Kids Help Phone is a 24/7 e-mental health service offering free, confidential support to young people.

[Fostering hope: How to build resilience in youth](#)

Please visit AboutKidsHealth.ca for more child health information.

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