

Building the Resiliency of Children

In the engineering community, one will often find the word “reliance” used throughout research and literature. In this context, the word is defined as the ability of a structure or system to withstand external pressures and stresses. In terms of mental health, the definition holds up exceedingly well. Resilience has been cited throughout as a sizeable marker of positive mental health and emotional wellness. In mental health, one can understand resilience as the ability to manage and withstand stress and adversity

With the ever increasing demands and pressures on children, cultivating resilience should be a top priority. In the fast paced, ever divisive, and increasingly negative world that is shaping around us, we all need children who can withstand the pressures and stresses that life will inevitably present. Parents, teachers, counselors, and other authorities over children can do well to understand some key tenets of building resiliency in children.

A key term to keep in mind as one builds resilience is balance. Consider a fan favorite of children, the pizza. Consider the slices to be the varying roles and responsibilities of the child. Resilience is formed from the balance of positive and well functioning roles, such as student, friend, teammate, sibling, hobbyist, etc. This correlates well to wellness, attending to the various aspects that promote human wellness, such as health, social life, spirituality, intellect, among others.

As caregivers to the children of the world, cultivating a growth mindset is essential. A growth mindset can be understood as forming process and opportunity out of the entities of life. For example, in education teachers can promote the concept of learning and discovery over getting certain grades and achieving a certain GPA. Another example would be to cultivate the attitude that mistakes and setbacks are something to be embraced as opportunities, rather than indictments of intelligence. As parents, giving praise for effort and tenacity trumps praise for certain individual achievements in developing a growth mindset.

Resilience also grows well out of the development of character and competence. To build character is to teach children the arts of self-discipline, mortality and ethics, and self-directed behaviors. As started before, these are more process oriented entities, over individual moments and achievements. Related to this is competence. Children need to feel that they have mastery over elements of life. The implication here is that we need to give children all the opportunities to discover what they love, what they are curious about, and provide them the tools and opportunities for that discovery, while giving them the freedom to explore without undue influence. Children also need room to fail and learn from said failures. In a similar way to mastery, children feel best when they have some control and autonomy over portions of their

life. Rationally speaking this cannot be everything, but certainly can be in terms of children's hobbies, interests, relationships, and personal goals.

Life will always present disappointments, fears, and trials. These are natural conditions of human existence. The main goal in building resilience is not so much to control these conditions, as that would be near impossible, and ultimately be detrimental. However, caregivers of children can work to instill courage in the face of such adversities. This comes from helping children establish healthy core beliefs about themselves, and teaching them that they are the constant good and capable in a world that can be unpredictable, harsh, and unfair.

Any parent will tell you that raising children is a hard task. With all the outside influences, new challenges, and individual differences, it's no wonder that parenting presents significant stresses. One must never forget that children have the capacity to weather changes, challenges, and setbacks. Any parent will also tell you that one of the main goals, if not the main goal, is to raise a competent and confident child who goes on to be a productive and successful adult. Resilience is necessary to achieve this goal, and is definitely within reach for any child.

References:

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Summary:

In an ever changing world, new challenges and troubles will inevitably present themselves. Human beings have always been able to overcome and adapt to this, however. One of the main drivers of this adaptation is resilience, the ability to weather the storms and become stronger and wiser as a result. There are a myriad of ways to increase resilience. Developing a balanced life, cultivating competence and mastery within this balance, increasing character, and instilling courage are tried and true actions that can set children up for success towards their goals, and against the troubles that will befall them.

