

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS RESILIENCY

Many families throughout this country have shown remarkable resiliency, or flexible adjustment, to natural, economic and social challenges. Strong families are able to react to such challenges in the same way a yo-yo responds to the string: It may go down, but it also “bounces back.” Resilience is not measured by wealth, muscle or efficiency but by the creativity, unity and hope that help families survive and thrive.

WHAT IS RESILIENCY?

Family resiliency is the ability to cultivate strengths within a family that will help all members meet the challenges of life positively. Because families show resiliency in unique ways, there are no universal rules for success. Resiliency involves not only the ability to cope with everyday stress, it also requires confidence, hard work, cooperation and forgiveness to increase the family’s well-being. Strong families help children learn resilient behavior when they teach problem-solving skills and provide positive, non-critical support and a sense of togetherness.

Families who learn the values and skills of resiliency, cope with stress, manage relationships, and contribute to others’ lives more consistently than those without such strengths.

PROMOTING RESILIENCY WITHIN FAMILIES

Resiliency becomes very evident in families who have learned to cope with overwhelming stressors. Resilient families:

- Share a commitment to each other. Commitment involves working toward shared goals

through self-sacrifice, persistence, and loyalty to other family members and building an environment of trust and dependability.

- Cope with change by balancing stable roles and traditions with flexibility to change rules and share decisions that stimulate growth and health.
- Cultivate a protective environment in which family members actively contribute to the physical and emotional survival, safety, and self-esteem of each other and minimize risks that jeopardize healthy development.
- Develop healthy lifestyles and encourage coping skills within individual members.

Resilient individuals contribute to the “whole” by demonstrating the following traits:

- Insight: seeing things as they really are and not being afraid to ask questions.
- Independence: becoming one’s own person and not caught up in being someone else.
- Healthy Relationships: connecting with peers and friends in ways that build self-worth and belonging.
- Initiative: developing interests, talents, confidence and leadership abilities.
- Humor: willing to laugh at self and with others.
- Creativity: using art, drama, writing, sports, etc. to express one’s uniqueness.



One message that comes from research is that “no man is an island.” Therefore, we must remember that families need supportive, caring relationships to strengthen their ability to “bounce back” from crisis situations and events.

PRESCHOOL CHILDREN



Resiliency is important to young children because it is the extra measure of attitude, knowledge and skill that helps them cope and grow. Children who can build healthy relationships during the formative years open a new world of learning and laughing with peers, parents and significant others.

ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

Children, like adults, experience stress. They may feel overwhelmed by schoolwork, intimidated on the playground, or anxious about fitting in. Often children do not have the words to describe how they feel — they may cry, withdraw, become angry or feel guilty. In addition to the normal stressors of growing up, many young children unfortunately experience stressors due to crisis situations such as death, divorce and illnesses within the family. They need knowledge and skills to help them cope and become more resilient in spite of life's changes and transitions.



MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH ADOLESCENTS



The natural developmental changes that happen during these years provide stressors for many adolescents. They struggle to balance these changes along with many societal changes. In addition, many adolescents experience life events and situations that challenge who they are and where they fit. The ability to “bounce back” from unhappy situations becomes important for healthy growth and development during these years.

SENIOR HIGH TEENS

Sometimes, the most difficult and frustrating lesson for teens to learn is that all life events are not within their control. It is very likely that they will experience situations and events that will cause them stress. Therefore, the ability to cope with life's stressors becomes very important in helping them grow up to be healthy, happy, contributing adults. These coping skills will give them the ability to work through situations and “bounce back” from those problems that come their way.



ADULTS

Adults respond to personal crisis with many feelings: anger, anxiety, outrage, self-doubt, etc. While these symptoms are unpleasant, they are normal reactions to loss or critical changes in life. Recognizing these feelings, understanding why they may be present and dealing with them in positive ways are important. Adults who cultivate creativity and initiative to help them cope will be better prepared and more productive in dealing with life's changes and challenges. Even adults need to remember that the art of “bouncing back” is not born, but learned.



SUMMARY

Families that learn how to cope with challenges and meet individual needs are more resilient to stress and crisis. They learn to solve problems with cooperation, creative brainstorming and openness to others. A family's ability to recover from crisis is influenced by life stressors and by family perceptions. A family's goals, values, problem-solving skills and support networks affect its adaptation to long-term stress and crisis.

Children and adults who learn the values and skills of resiliency will cope with stress, manage relationships and contribute to others' lives more consistently than those without such strengths.

Families who use crises to learn new coping skills reduce the financial and emotional costs of repeated crises.

Remember:

“It's not how far you fall, but how high you bounce.”

— Jackson Brown, Sr.

HOW DOES YOUR RESILIENCY MEASURE UP?



FAMILY ACTIVITY



Read the statement under each resiliency trait. Place a 5 by the statement that is **MOST** like you and a 1 by the statement that is **LEAST** like you. Add up your score for the first item under each trait and place in the space by number 1 at the bottom of the page. Now, add up your score for the second item under each trait and place in the space by number 2 at the bottom of the page. If your score is higher under number 1, your resiliency is probably pretty good. If your score is higher under number 2, your resiliency could probably be improved. Encourage each family member to complete this activity.

INSIGHT

1. _____ I can sense when something in a relationship is going bad.
2. _____ My friends do not seek my advice on relationship problems.

INDEPENDENCE

1. _____ I enjoy being my own person.
2. _____ People are always pulling me into their conflicts.

RELATIONSHIPS

1. _____ Listening and making friends are my strong suits.
2. _____ I often have no one to talk to about my problems.

INITIATIVE

1. _____ I am always coming up with and trying out new ideas.
2. _____ When there is a problem I usually wait for others to act.

CREATIVITY

1. _____ My talents for art, crafts, music and other outlets help me de-stress.
2. _____ I get run down and burned out with nothing to refresh me.

HUMOR

1. _____ I often see the funny side of things and can laugh at myself.
2. _____ When I am feeling down, it is no time to joke.

MORALITY

1. _____ It is better to do what is right, even if there is a risk.
2. _____ I feel good when I tell someone off or get revenge.

TOTAL SCORE: 1. _____ 2. _____

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