

# Building Resilience in Young Children

## What's Inside...

- ◆ Protective factors
- ◆ Strategies to help build protective factors and resilience
- ◆ Ways to make your child more resilient
- ◆ Useful resources for more information

Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back, recover from, or adjust to misfortune or change. Successful adaptation in the individual who has been exposed to biological risk factors or stressful life events. (Werner,1992) "Overcoming the odds," so to speak. Resilience is a characteristic that even our youngest children need. Everyone faces adversity at some point in their life. Building resilience helps us cope with change and adversity and experience more positive outcomes. This involves reducing the risk factors and strengthening the protective factors within the family, environment, and in the child themselves. Protective factors are closely tied to the social and emotional health of an individual. Social development involves the ability to interact and get along with others through relationships. Emotional development is the ability to express feelings about oneself, others and the situations being faced. It is developing the ability to experience and regulate emotions, form secure relationships, and explore and learn. Children can and do cope with trauma and stress in the early years and, with the help of sensitive and caring adults, have the opportunity to develop strengths and skills that will empower them to cope with adversity throughout their lives.

SOURCE: Lerner & Ciervo; (2010)



You can't control what happens when a child leaves your classroom, but you can control what happens when he is there.

**Make it the most positive, encouraging, accepting place he has ever known. Let him know that he is loved.** Only then can he be excited about learning.

ReallyGoodStuff.com

## Impact of Early Experiences

Today there is a growing knowledge base recognizing that even the youngest learners, including infants, are affected by the events and experiences in their environment and that stress and trauma can have long-term consequences. The lack of understanding about how deeply children are affected by their early experiences, brings a new urgency to meeting the needs of very young children who have been exposed to stressful or traumatic events. Symptoms of stress may show up in their play, in disruptions in their eating or sleeping routines, in their growth and development, in their relationships with others, and in regressions in their developmental abilities.

According to the Devereux Center for Resilient Children, an estimated 60% of children experience some form of potentially traumatic event or circumstance at some point in their development. These are called risk factors and can include parental depression, community violence, poverty, homelessness, just to name a few. We as caregivers need to create an environment of support and safety for these young children. A relationship with a supportive adult plays a key role in building children's resilience. As teachers, we can help the child to deal with those risk factors more effectively by building up their protective factors or resilience. In general, the more protective factors there are and the better they balance the risk factors, the more likely it is that a child will meet challenges in his/her life and turn out to be a competent and caring individual.

SOURCE: Lerner & Ciervo; (2010) & Werner, E.E.; (2000)

## It's Complex!

As Bruce Ellis of the University of Arizona points out, resilience is complex. We can incorporate what we already know about resilience into the classroom by creating strong relationships with children, enhancing their strengths and potential resources, promoting confidence and emotional regulation, and paying close attention both to context and to what children tell and show us. Remember, the environment plays a powerful role in fostering a young child's resilience, and you are a large part of the environment.

SOURCE: Ellis, B. (2009, Spring)

# Protective Factors

## INITIATIVE

*The child's ability to use independent thought and action to meet his or her needs*



## SELF-REGULATION

*The child's ability to experience a range of feelings and express them in a safe and healthy way*



## ATTACHMENT/RELATIONSHIPS

*The child's ability to promote and maintain mutual, positive connections with others*



## Initiative

### Infant Behaviors:

- Try to do new things
- Imitate actions of others
- Keep trying when unsuccessful
- Explore surroundings

### Toddler Behaviors:

- Show concern for other children
- Try to clean up/ do things for him/herself
- Play with other children

### Preschool Behaviors:

- Choose to do a task that is hard for him/her
- Make decisions for him/herself
- Start and organize play with other children

## Self-Regulation

### Infant Behaviors:

- Cooing and babbling
- Smiling
- Fussing when hungry or tired
- Kicking legs when excited

### Toddler Behaviors:

- Adjust to changes in routine
- Have regular sleeping patterns
- Easily follow a daily routine

### Preschool Behaviors:

- Control his/her anger
- Show patience
- Cooperate with others
- Listen to or respect others
- Play well with others

## Attachment/Relationship

### Infant Behaviors:

- Respond when spoken to
- Make eye contact with others
- Show affection for familiar adult
- Accept comfort from a familiar adult

### Toddler Behaviors:

- Enjoy being cuddled
- Enjoy interacting with others
- Express a variety of emotions
- Reach for a familiar adult

### Preschool Behaviors:

- Ask adults to play/read to him/her
- Appear happy when playing with others
- Trust familiar adults and believe what they say

**Strengthening children's protective factors to offset the negative impact of risk is essential** to supporting children's resilience. A child is more likely to have a positive outcome when protective factors outweigh risk factors and a child is more vulnerable when risk factors outweigh protective factors. Without resilience children are at risk for poor outcomes in several areas. Cognitively, they may have delayed or difficulty with language learning, memory difficulties, reduced ability to focus/concentrate, and problems with school readiness/academic failure. Emotionally, children may have difficulties with self-regulation of emotions or behaviors, poor impulse control, or high emotional reactivity. Physically, children may suffer from a weakened immune system, changes in brain development, obesity, mental health problems, or chronic health issues. Socially they may show aggression, be rejected by peers, have hostile perceptions, and have volatile relationships.

## Strategies to Help Build Protective Factors

### **Initiative:**

- 1) Encourage Self-Talk
- 2) Invite Children to Help
- 3) Role-Play tough Situations
- 4) Scaffold—Let Her Talk!

### **Self-Regulation:**

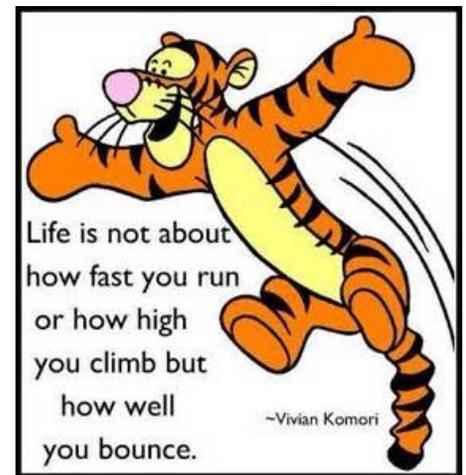
- 1) Read Cues and Temperament Styles
- 2) Plan Ahead for Transition and Change
- 3) Talk and Read and Sing About Feelings
- 4) Provide Calm Places and Soothing Activities

### **Attachment/Relationships:**

- 1) Follow Your Child's Lead
- 2) Personalize and Individualize
- 3) Create Peer-Partners
- 4) Hug and Cuddle

## Fostering Resilience in Our Youngsters

There is not one golden path to the future. Each child travels through life on their own unique road that is shaped by a variety of factors, including his/her inborn temperament, educational experiences, family style, and values as well as the broader society or culture. However, there are things we as parents, caregivers, schools, and communities can do to foster their resilience so that children are hopeful and possess a high self-worth. We want them to feel special and appreciated, learn to set realistic goals and expectations, develop the ability to solve problems, make decisions, and also to view mistakes, hardships, and obstacles as challenges to confront rather than as stressors to avoid.



## 10 Ways To Make Your Children More Resilient

By Robert Brooks, Ph.D. and Sam Goldstein, Ph.D.

1. **Being empathetic:** Put yourselves in the shoes of the child and see the world through their eyes. Appreciate and validate their point of view.
2. **Communicating effectively and listening actively:** Actively listen, understand and validate what they say, respond in ways that avoid power struggles.
3. **Changing negative words:** If we are repeatedly nagging and telling a child to do something with little positive response from them, then we need to change our words if the child is to change theirs.
4. **Loving our children in ways to help them feel special and appreciated:** Believe in the worth of the child so that they can draw strength from you.
5. **Accepting children for who they are and helping them set realistic expectations and goals:** When they feel accepted, it is easier for them to respond to requests and limits because they experience these in an atmosphere of love and support.
6. **Helping children experience success:** Promote our children's strengths rather than emphasizing their weaknesses.
7. **Helping children recognize that mistakes are to be learned from:** Emphasize that mistakes are accepted and expected.
8. **Developing their responsibility, compassion, and a social conscience:** Children need opportunities to make a positive difference in the world.
9. **Teaching children to solve problems and make decisions:** Engage them in thinking about possible solutions, which will give them a sense of ownership and control.
10. **Discipline in a way that promotes self-discipline and self-worth:** Being consistent, providing positive feedback and encouragement.

## Resources and Weblinks

American Academy of Pediatrics: [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

American Psychological Association:  
<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx>

Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:  
[www.ecmhc.org](http://www.ecmhc.org)

Center for Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning:  
[www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel) (Click "For Families")

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention:  
<http://www.challengingbehavior.org/communities/families.htm>

National Association for the Education of Young Children for Families: <http://families.naeyc.org/>

Zero to Three: <http://www.zerotothree.org/>

Devereux Center for Resilient Children:  
[www.CenterForResilientChildren.org](http://www.CenterForResilientChildren.org)

Kids storybooks that promote resilience:  
[www.reachinginreachingout.com](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com) (Click "Resources")

### Sources

Lerner, C., & Ciervo, L. Parenting young children today: What the research tells us. *Zero to Three*, (2010).

Werner, E.E. Protective factors and individual resilience. In J.P. Shonkoff & S.J. Meisels (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (2nd ed.) New York: Cambridge University Press; (2000).

Ellis, B. Educating children who differ in susceptibility to rearing. *Florida Humanist Journal*; (2009, Spring).

[http://familytlc.net/resilient\\_children\\_preteen.html](http://familytlc.net/resilient_children_preteen.html)

**“Building resilience in children is not about making them tough. Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulties and manage how you feel.”**

[www.easypeasykids.com.au](http://www.easypeasykids.com.au)

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## Workshops of Interest

### Mid-State Early Childhood Direction Center

Syracuse University  
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Syracuse, NY 13244-2280

Phone:

315-443-4444

1-800-962-5488

Fax:

315-443-4338

E-mail: [ecdc@syr.edu](mailto:ecdc@syr.edu)

<http://ecdc.syr.edu>

**WHILE WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN,  
THEY TEACH US.**



**35 Years**  
Caring for All Children

The ECDC can provide information and workshops on a variety of topics tailored to the interests and needs of parents and early childhood professionals. Resources are available on such topics as general child development, developmental issues for children with special needs, coping strategies, and specific disabilities.

#### Workshops include:

- Including All Kids
- Parent Partnerships
- Developmentally Appropriate Practices
- Early Childhood Development: The Meaning of Red Flags
- Supporting Social Emotional Development
- Challenging Behaviors
- Moving On: Transitioning Families (EI-CPSE) & (CPSE-CSE)
- What Are Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education?
- What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?
- Writing IEP Goals
- Getting Ready for Kindergarten

## Who We Are

The Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) is a regional technical assistance center for the State Education Department providing information, referral and support to families, professionals, and community agencies concerned with young children birth to five. We are located at Syracuse University's Center on Human Policy.

*ECDC services are  
free and confidential.*

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