

Parenting for Resilience

by Michael Grose



Resilience has proven to be one of the most important factors in predicting success as an adult. The ability to bounce back, regulate emotions and cope with stress are key traits in a healthy, functioning person. Resilience also helps prevent anxiety and depression. It is something we need to be instilling in our children.

As a child's first educators, parents can't leave it to early learning centres, pre-schools and schools to develop their child's resilience. It's something that parents need to be constantly developing. Building resilience is not a program, but should be an approach or mindset that guides your parenting. Here are five principles/ideas that you can easily adapt to develop a strong sense of resilience in your child.

1. Develop your child's self-sufficiency

Self-esteem is an essential element for resilience. It teflon coats children against rejection and self-doubt. The foundation for self-esteem is self-sufficiency. It's the simple things such as feeding yourself as a toddler, making your own snacks in primary school and making your own lunch in secondary school that build self-esteem. Mastery over your own life provides a strong sense of self, which is an important piece of the resilience puzzle.



2. Allow kids to resolve their own problems

Resilience is developed when children own and resolve their own problems, whether those problems are learning, relational or organisational challenges. A lunch left at home is a child's problem to solve – either he borrows or goes without. A teenager who sleeps in on a school day needs to be allowed to manage the inconvenience of the situation, experience the stress that comes with being late and find a solution to avoid a repeat. Look for ways to coach your kids through social, physical and learning challenges but resist the urge to interfere or rescue kids unless it's absolutely necessary.

3. Encourage play (and mucking around) at every age

Encourage your child to play and be playful. As a community we seem to hold little store in the value of free, child-initiated, or even teenager-initiated, play. It's almost as if play time is a waste of valuable learning time. As any adult who experienced the joys of 'mucking around' as a child or young person will know, free play has huge benefits. These include helping children manage fear, providing opportunities to negotiate risk, and learning how to work flexibly with others. Importantly, free play and mucking around help children experience and tame stress, which is essential for resilience.

4. Focus on face-to-face friendships

Healthy peer relationships are important protective factors against anxiety and depression for children and young people. From a resilience perspective, peer relationships are most potent when connections are face-to-face rather than through a digital medium. Studies are now showing how simple face-to-face social engagement has a massive positive impact on wellbeing. Positive face-to-face engagement – a smile, a wink or a nod – releases oxytocin, which increases trust and reduces cortisol (stress hormone). These simple face-to-face interactions also release dopamine, which makes us feel better.

For the sake of your child's resilience, encourage more face-to-face interactions, model healthy socialisation and help them balance their time between the online and real worlds.

5. Tell stories of resilience

Storytelling is a powerful way of shaping children's understanding of how the world works. According to a recent study, children who hear stories about family members overcoming obstacles are more resilient and display more grit in the face of challenges. The most helpful stories are those that are realistic, reflecting life's ups and downs. It's often stories of difficulty rather than success that teach and inspire children to persist. Similarly, it helps to remind children of times you worked hard in the past to overcome obstacles. These might include how you learned to ride a bike, how you adjusted to moving schools or how you got along with a seemingly challenging teacher, boss or work colleague.

Perhaps the easiest way to bring resilience into your parenting is to develop a mindset for resilience. It helps to remember the struggles and difficulties you may have experienced and be willing to keep kids' chins up when difficulties and challenges get them down. It's also helpful to remind kids that things will get better. They always do, which is a fabulous resilience lesson to learn.



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