

PARENTS RESOURCE GUIDE



RESILIENCE

practical tools for bouncing back



BUILDING RESILIENCE

Key factors that help build resilience in young people

A resource for parents and teachers

“When things go wrong, being resilient is like a person who has a bungee rope around them to bounce back when things get tough and to maintain their idea of who they are.”

Professor Andrew Fuller

Resilience ...

Resilience is important to us:

- ✓ to be happy
- ✓ to survive
- ✓ to be successful
- ✓ to deal with the hard times of life
- ✓ to positively influence others

Resilience is managing complex issues of difficulty, duress, trauma or disappointment with:

- ✓ Well-developed problem-solving skills
- ✓ Persistence of will
- ✓ Founded on hope

What does that bungee ROPE look like?

Family

- Feeling loved by your family – Child is affirmed, encouraged and disciplined
- Feeling your family respects your decisions – e.g. allowing for age appropriate autonomy
- Family structure is sound and extended
- Family heritage and values system are positive
- Family foundation of hope is articulated and understood

Education

- School and teachers are a great resource. The school is focused on ensuring a positive & enriching experience – not just academics
- Students feel respected by teachers. Having adults who listen & believe in them
- Getting right feedback as well as input

Community

Positive peer connectedness generates a sense of belonging and being part of something bigger. The crucial element is why they are accepted. Successful community is reliant on acceptance of the person not their performance or skill e.g. communities of faith

Core foundations

Sense of meaning, purpose, values & direction – needs to be reliable, strong, tried and tested. Enables a sense of having something bigger than you – bigger than circumstances, emotions, setbacks and disappointment

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESILIENT KIDS

Intrinsic

- ☑ Temperament factors – easy going disposition, not easily upset; good self-regulation.
- ☑ Problem-solving skills – abstract thinking, reflectivity, flexibility, and the ability to try alternatives indicate adaptability to stress.
- ☑ Social competence – emotional responsiveness, flexibility, empathy and caring, communication skills and a sense of humour (including being able to laugh at themselves).
- ☑ Autonomy – self-awareness, sense of identity and an ability to act independently. They have increased sense of self-worth and mastery.
- ☑ A sense of purpose and a future orientation – healthy expectations, goal directedness, educational aspirations and persistence.
- ☑ Hold religious beliefs that are supported by significant others and that convey a sense of meaning in life (spirituality).
- ☑ A sense of optimism, maintain a hopeful outlook and employ active problem focused coping strategies (They avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems).
- ☑ Academic and social successes - less risk of developing behavioural disorders. They have talents that are valued by self and society.

Extrinsic

Within the Family:

- ☑ A close sustained relationship with at least one caring pro-social and supportive adult who is a positive role model.
- ☑ Authoritative parents who place high value on warmth and support, but whom also provide structure (set firm limits and state clear rules), monitor their child's behaviour and peer contacts, and convey high expectations.
- ☑ Positive family climate with low family discord between parents and between parents and children.
- ☑ Organized home environment (role of rituals, ceremonies, shared dinner times and mutual responsibilities, cohesive and supportive).
- ☑ A secure emotional base whereby the child feels a sense of belonging and security; access to consistent, warm care giving.
- ☑ Parents are involved in their child's education. Both parents and teachers should convey high, but realistic expectations to their children.
- ☑ Bond to pro-social adults outside family. (See www.teachsafeschools.org for information on how to establish an adult mentoring program.)
- ☑ Connections to pro-social and rule-abiding peers who have authoritative parents
- ☑ Support from "kith and kin", access to wider supports such as extended family members and friends.

Within the Schools and the Community:

- ☑ "School connectedness" is the belief by students that adults in the school care about them as students and their learning. A protective factor is the attendance in effective schools and being "bonded" to school; for instance, ask students the following question to assess school-bondedness: "If you were absent from school, besides your friends, who else would notice that you were missing and would miss you?"
- ☑ Ties to pro-social organizations, including schools, scouting/sports clubs; participation in extracurricular activities – particularly communities of faith, e.g. church youth group.
- ☑ Opportunities to learn and develop talents.
- ☑ High levels of public safety.
- ☑ Good public health and health care availability
- ☑ Support derived from cultural and religious traditions

* taken from UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN

THREE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

1) The Need to Belong

This is fundamental to all of us, but particularly teens as they wrestle with who they are. Teens are naturally drawn to their peers and seek their acceptance. Rejection from their peers can have significant immediate and long term consequences (e.g. mental health)

The drive to belong and the fear of rejection makes young people very vulnerable to peer pressure. A level headed 13 year old girl might never consider drinking, but when faced with being excluded socially by her classmates, may easily give in to the pressure.

One way we resist peer pressure is to not look to be popular but to find someone (just one person is enough) that we can trust and enjoy.

2) The Need to Try New Things

This is called 'individuation' and is a normal part of adolescent development, as you move from childhood toward independence in adulthood. This involves risk taking and pushing boundaries.

Teens will start to make independent decisions apart from their parents. Teens will test themselves – physically (especially guys) and mentally. Teens will test their parental values against other values to affirm their own.

This is an area where boundaries are extremely valuable if they are clear, consistent and applicable. They need to be modelled and discussed. High expectations and appropriate encouragement are also vital factors.

3) The Need to be Grown Up

Although they often act like toddlers, teenagers long to be accepted as grown up. The desire to be 'grown up' makes teens vulnerable to culturally driven rites of passage. In many cultures there are celebrated 'rites of passage' – ceremonial recognition that they have moved into adulthood. Our culture often has poor markers for initiating and is driven by media and marketing forces linked with sports and celebrities.

Cultural rites that communicate responsibility, well-developed autonomous decisions and the opportunity to meaningfully participate are crucial elements.

PARENT TOOL KIT

- ✓ Sit down and ask yourself: “What are we doing well?” and “What do we need to add /improve/focus upon?”
- ✓ Encourage analysis of influences e.g. the media – generate filters to separate the good and the bad
- ✓ Spend time together – have a specific family time e.g. Sunday afternoon
- ✓ Search for a foundation in life – begin by asking first order questions – consistently communicate it
- ✓ Ask older people of their experiences – include patriarchs
- ✓ Draw from the positives of a conventional small community where we teach young people to (1) respect elders – spend time with them, seek counsel, etc. and (2) give responsibility to them towards younger children – be a role model, give counsel, etc.
- ✓ Draw from the existing wider community – what groups can you get involved in?
- ✓ Give positive messages about who (not what) they are – their soul opposed to their image
- ✓ Teach empathy – ask “how would you feel if...?”
- ✓ What’s life about? Fulfillment or happiness? What’s the difference? Discuss
- ✓ Finally, share experiences of how you bounced back?

PHILOSOPHY FOR PARENTING

- ✓ My children are a precious gift, not an inconvenience. I have the privilege of shaping them into mature positive contributing adults
- ✓ This requires time, not money. Children spell love T.I.M.E. – I will give them both lity and quantity time
- ✓ My marriage and our home is predominantly about family and its needs – not about ‘me’ and my needs
- ✓ Our family will have strong reference points and values
- ✓ Our family will have a clear and well thought through worldview on which to base our values and hope

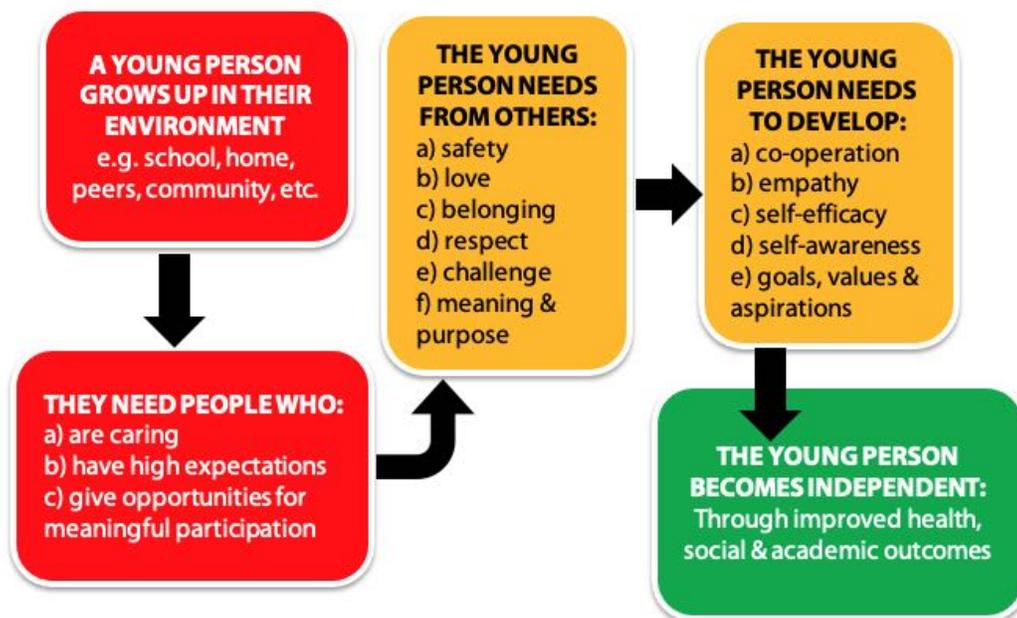
KEY STEPS TO PREVENTION

- ✓ Be sensitive to the stress in your children's lives, help them cope and for them to find solutions
- ✓ Understand when and why your children are bored and help relieve their boredom
- ✓ Have boundaries – e.g. limit the amount of money your children have to spend and monitor how that money is spent
- ✓ Know who your children's friends are
- ✓ Be engaged in your children's lives: help them with their homework, attend their sports events, participate in activities together, and talk to them about issues like drugs and alcohol

THE RESILIENCE CYCLE

Things that can build on protective factors and minimise risk factors (Burton) are:

- ✓ **Caring Relationships** (compassion, understanding, respect and interest)
- ✓ **High Expectation messages** (firm guidance, structure and challenge, focus on strengths and assets rather than negatives)
- ✓ **Opportunities for meaningful participation** (opportunities for valued responsibilities, making decisions, giving voice and being heard, contributing one's talents to the community)



Therefore, the language of resiliency is:

- *I have ... caring relationships*
- *I am ... high expectation messages*
- *I can ... meaningful participation*

PARENT CHECKLIST

- I listen to my children and take an interest in their thoughts and opinions. I have gathered specific information about each of my children. I know their favourite things.
- I am aware of what they are scared of, what makes them laugh and what is special about their personality
- I don't sweat the small stuff but choose my battles carefully
- I know what to expect from my child's age group. I am aware of what is normal developmentally
- I feel the atmosphere in our home is warm, relaxed and positive
- We regularly do fun things together
- I take time to enrich my own life
- I give physical affection to my children
- As parents we spend time on our relationship
- We are developing a family culture of regular traditions
- We support each other in our parenting
- I have communicated our family rules
- There is some structure and routine in our home
- I speak encouraging words to my children
- I am careful to follow through on my words
- I allow my children to learn from consequences rather than my anger
- I give my children opportunities to solve their own problems
- I set time aside to talk to my children about their day - what they have liked and what they have found hard
- We eat meals together regularly each week with the television off

THREE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT: BOYS

Steve Biddulph, author of 'Raising Boys' says that boys experience 3 main developmental stages as they go through life.

0-6 years old: bonding with mum and learning to love

A recent study published in the journal Child Development found that boys who have a close and loving relationship with their mothers during these years are less likely to have disciplinary issues as teenagers.

Building bonds:

- a) Make sure he knows he is loved, with cuddles, hugs, eye contact and setting firm limits. This will give him inner security and confidence for the rest of his life.
- b) Talk to him and show him new things, this helps develop the brain and encourages socialisation which is important when he starts preschool or school.
- c) Build in him a love of life, play games, share sports like swimming, kicking a ball around, explore nature and enjoy the world around him. This will build resilience skills that he will need as he begins to go into the world.

6 – 13 years old: bonding with dad through play and sharing experiences

The study also observed, 'At the other end of the scale children tended to have greater behavioural problems when their fathers were more remote and lost in their own thoughts, or when their fathers interacted less with them', said lead author Christopher Trentacosta, an assistant professor of psychology at Wayne State University in Detroit.

Building bonds:

- a) Dads and sons can enjoy playing sports together or take up a shared hobby. During these times talk to your son about your own childhood experiences, the difficulties and successes. At this age they are eager to listen to what their fathers have to say and learn from them.
- b) If work permits, it is best for dads to try not to spend extended periods of time away on business trips. Be at home and be available.
- c) Single parents – try to include an uncle, best friend or coach into your son's life. If they have an example of a 'good man' then they will learn the skills they need from them.

13 – 21 years old: bonding with a mentor helps him become part of the community

Steve Biddulph explains that parents need to: "organise some good mentors in their son's live or he will have to rely on an ill-equipped peer groups for his sense of self. The aim is for your son to learn skills, responsibility, and self-respect by joining more and more with the adult community".

Building bonds:

- a) As boys become more independent they are less inclined to listen to their parents. However they are usually willing to take note of a trusted mentor, this could be an uncle, someone who teaches them a hobby or the boss at their weekend job. Put them in contact with mentors who are good role models, allow them to experience their freedom and have more contact with other men in their lives.
- b) In traditional societies this is the time when young men would pass through initiation ceremonies conducted by the elders of the community. Young boys would become young men and learn essential lessons about life during these ceremonies. For our young men today we need to re-create this 'rites of passage' using the community and network we have around us.

THE FIVE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT: GIRLS

Steve Biddulph, author of 'Raising Girls' says that girls experience 5 main developmental stages as they go through life.

THE FIVE STAGES OF GIRLHOOD

0-2 years old: Security – 'Am I safe and loved?'

Human babies are the most dependent babies on earth. Born totally defenceless, babies instinctively know that the adults around them have to love them, or else may not give them proper care. It's not enough to be fed and clothed. Machines could feed a baby and keep her alive, but she would not develop intelligence or kindness. She would be a very strange being indeed. As her parents play with her, comfort her tenderly, sing and talk to her, jiggle and tickle and love her, a baby girl comes to believe that life is good.

As people respond to her needs – both physical and emotional – growth hormones, instead of stress hormones, flood her body and brain. She instinctively knows she is loved and safe. And she carries that inside her, always.

2-5 years old: Exploring – 'Is the world a fun and interesting place?'

This stage is when a girl learns to be confident and interested in the world around her; to be smart and creative. It builds on the secure feelings from Stage One. She thinks, if people are going to stay close and care for me, I can relax and check out the toys, play in the garden, toddle out across the grass, mess about with dirt and stones and leaves. Babies who don't feel securely attached to their mum (or dad) do not explore very much: they are too afraid they will be deserted.

This is the age when your daughter can be encouraged to paint and poke and build and create and enjoy the world of things, animals and people. If the people who love her share some of these activities with her, she will pick up on their enthusiasm and pleasure in making and doing. Her brain will become permanently switched on to learning. You will have taught her that life is an adventure. Strange, new and challenging things will be a joy for her for the rest of her life.

5-10 years old: People skills – 'Can I get along with others?'

Other children and other adults – as well as Mum and Dad, brothers and sisters – can be difficult, but are mostly fun. Your daughter finds that she can have better fun by sharing a little, giving way a little, cooperating and playing together, than if she is just on her own. This isn't possible until about three or four years of age, and even then, it's hard. But by learning first from Mum or Dad, and then other people, she discovers that she is not the centre of the universe. Other people have feelings, too.

Right through primary school, this most complex of skills – valuing yourself, but also valuing others and treating them with respect – is gradually being learnt. Again, it builds on the earlier stages. Being treated kindly, you grow kind. Being treated sensitively, you grow gentle. Being treated honestly, you grow honest.

Your daughter will decide: People are mostly fine. I like them. Let's play! She will become a 'people person'. For the rest of her life, she will know how to be with people in a happy and helpful way.

...Girls: Five stages of development, continued.

10-14 years old: Finding her soul - 'Can I discover my deep-down self and what makes me truly happy?'

With the coming of puberty, a girl starts to experience a much stronger sense of being her own person, a separate and private self. She is far from being a woman but she is no longer a child, either. Like a tree in winter, she is building up reserves, ready to blossom. These are the years to begin strengthening the 'inside' of her deep self. To think about what she stands for and cares most deeply about. Often at this age, a girl finds her 'spark' – something that she loves to do and which gives her joy, purpose and a creative way to make a contribution. A reason to be alive.

When your daughter gains identity through doing, and believing, and strengthening her inner world, she will be freed from the need for approval that haunts many teenage girls and makes them conformist and dull.

A girl's soul is powerful, but it's also shy like a wild animal: it needs patience and quiet to emerge. As a girl discovers her soul, she will be equipped to face the big questions of life – being wise and strong around males, choosing intimacy on her own terms, choosing a career path, knowing which peer group to hang around with. A girl who knows her own soul may be a gentle girl, but with a steel in her that is not easily manipulated. She will be loyal, tough and protective of those around her, including herself.

14-18 years old: Preparing for adulthood - 'Can I take responsibility for my own life?'

At eighteen, your daughter begins to be a woman. But before that, at the age of fourteen, the preparation for that huge leap begins in earnest. It's mostly practical – how to manage money, drive a car, manage time, eating, clothes, health, safety. But it also marks a powerful shift in attitude. That takes more care still.

Sometime between fourteen and adulthood, a girl needs some kind of marker event, a growing-up rite, experience or even misfortune which teaches her that she is now at the steering wheel of her own life; that she literally holds her life in her own hands. This is a frightening realisation, but frightening in a good way. By steadying herself, and by receiving the welcome and support of older women, she can leave behind childishness and harmful gullibility, be accountable, connected to consequences, and proactive in making her life worthwhile. While life itself can deliver this realisation to a girl, leaving it to chance is a hazardous and unreliable way for this to happen. She might come to serious harm. Also, some people never grow up and their lives are self-absorbed and wasted. They drift in misery, blame everyone else and never take responsibility.

Girls have to be deliberately and proactively launched into healthy womanhood. When this is done well, the results are impressive. A girl takes charge of her life and begins to make her unique way in the world.