



School Psychology Services

My School Psychologist

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Building Resiliency: Helping Children Learn to Weather Tough Times

Adversity is a natural part of life. At some point, we all face difficulties, such as family problems, serious illness, a personal crisis, or a painful loss. Being resilient is important to dealing with adversities like these. While most parents hope that their children never face extreme adversity, successfully facing tough situations can actually foster growth and give children the skills to be more resilient in the future.

Most people have a natural tendency to adapt and bounce back from adversity. However, parents can help their children learn to face challenges successfully, whether it is the stresses of everyday life, such as academic difficulties or problems with friends, or severe adversity, such as losing a home and being

displaced from normal routines for months. Following are five ways to promote resiliency in your children and help protect them from long-term ill affects of difficult experiences.

Think positive!! Modeling positive attitudes and positive emotions is very important. Children need to hear parents thinking out loud positively and being determined to persist until a goal is achieved. Using a "can do" problem-solving approach to problems teaches children a sense of power and promise.

Express love and gratitude! Emotions such as love and gratitude increase resiliency. Praise should always occur much more often than criticism. Children and adolescents



Gary Olsen, Dubuque Schools, www.dubuque.k12.ia.us

who are cared for, loved, and supported learn to express positive emotions to others. Positive emotions buffer kids against depression and other negative reactions to adversity.

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What is a School Psychologist?

School psychologists are mental health professionals who help children and adolescents overcome barriers to success in school, at home, and in life. We collaborate with school staff, parents, and other professionals to develop strategies that enhance learning environments and promote success for all students.

School psychologists provide a range of services including the following:

- Consultation with school staff and parents to provide effective interventions for learning and behavior problems.
- Behavior assessment leading to an intervention plan.
- Identification of learning strengths and areas in need of intervention, and assessment of social-emotional development and school related adjustment.
- Individual and group counseling to help resolve student problems that interfere with school performance.
- Direct training to students in social skills, anger management, and other essential life skills.
- Training to school staff and parents on a variety of mental health and educational issues.
- Assistance to families in accessing community resources.
- Implementation of programs that improve our schools and promote safe, effective learning environments.

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Building Resiliency (continued)

Express yourself! Resilient people appropriately express all emotions, even negative ones. Parents who help kids become more aware of emotions, label emotions appropriately, and help children deal with upsetting events are giving them useful life skills.

Get fit! Good physical health prepares the body and mind to be more resilient. Healthy eating habits, regular exercise and adequate sleep protect kids against the stress of tough situations. Regular exercise also decreases negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and depression.

Foster competency! Making sure that children and adolescents achieve academically is great protection against adversity. Children who achieve academic success and who develop individual talents, such as playing sports, drawing, making things, playing musical instruments, or playing games are much more likely to feel competent and be able to deal with stress positively. Social competency is also important. Having friends and staying connected to friends and loved ones can increase resiliency. Social competency can even be created by helping others.

Protecting our children against all of life's unexpected painful events is not possible. Giving them a sense of competency and the skills to face adverse circumstances can be a valuable legacy of all parents. Resiliency can be built by understanding these important foundations. The more we practice these approaches; the better able our children will be to weather whatever life brings.

Adapted from "Resiliency: Strategies for Parents and Educators" by Virginia Smith Harvey in Helping Children at Home and School II: Handouts for Families and Educators (NASP, 2004).

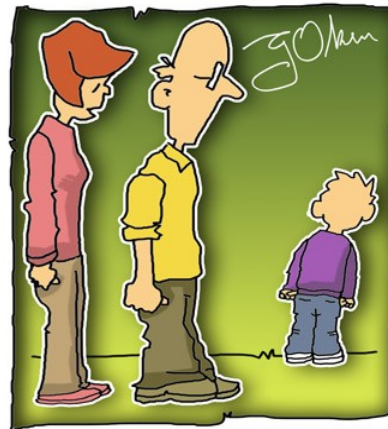
Disciplining Children in Ways that Promote Resiliency

One of the most challenging parts of being a parent is establishing how you will provide discipline to your children. Take a look at your process for discipline and see if it incorporates these discipline strategies that research has shown to work best in developing healthy, resilient children.

Focus on the Positive! Children learn to perform appropriate behaviors through positive feedback on what they are doing right. Point out when your child does something good and reward this behavior with encouragement and praise. If you are trying to help your child make changes to a problem behavior, recognize even small steps in a positive direction.

Avoid Shouting and Smacking as Punishments. These punishments simply do not work well. They serve to create an unpleasant emotional climate at home which is stressful for everyone. Since children copy behaviors of adults, they teach the child to react aggressively towards others (adults and other children). Over time, shouting and smacking can also lead to escalating power struggles between parent and child which eventually leads to the loss of the ability to control the child.

Use Time-Out and Withdrawal of Privileges to Discipline Younger Children. Time-out (putting a child in a specified place for a specified time when misbehaving) is a popular method for disciplining children and for good reason, as it works well when used properly. A *quick guide to using time-out effectively is located on page three.* Withdrawal of privileges is another effective discipline



"No, he gave himself a time out. Actually, I don't know what he did, and I don't think I want to know."

Gary Olsen, Dubuque Schools, www.dubuque.k12.ia.us

technique, but it should be used far less frequently than time-out. Privileges that can be removed include anything of value to your child including TV or computer time, use of a bike or a favorite toy, etc.

Have Clear, Rational Expectations (Rules) and Enforce Them Consistently.

For any good discipline plan to work, children need to know what the expectations of the household are and what will consistently happen as a consequence when these expectations are not followed. Create three to five expectations with input from your children, state them positively, and clearly display them in your home. Discuss the expectations and consequences with your children, and have them practice the positive behaviors desired in your home (those behaviors required to be successful in meeting the expectations). It is equally important to practice the delivery of consequences and ultimately, delivering consequences consistently is the key. Lastly, the adults of the household should set the example and follow any expectations (to the extent that they apply to adults) that are established for the children. This shows your children that you value the expectations and leads to less resistance in your children following them.

Adapted from information on resiliency and how to foster it provided by the Resiliency Resource Center. Visit their website: <http://www.embracefuture.org.au/resiliency/index.htm>.

Help Your Child Overcome Anxiety to a New School Year

The transition at the start of a new school year can be difficult and provoke increased anxiety for many children (and their parents). Here are some recommendations to try in helping your child overcome anxiety.

Let your child know you care. If your child is anxious about school, send personal notes in the lunch box or book bag. Reinforce the ability to cope. Children absorb their parent's anxiety, so model optimism and confidence in your child. Let your child know that it is natural to be a little anxious anytime you start something new, but that your child will be just fine once he or she becomes familiar with classmates, the teacher, and school routines.

Stay calm and positive. If the first few days are a little rough, try not to over react. Young children in particular may experience separation anxiety or shyness initially, but teachers are trained to help them adjust. If you drop your child off, try not to linger. Reassure your child that you love him, will think of him during the day, and will be back. A calm and positive approach will promote a similar response from your child.

Acknowledge anxiety over a bad experience the previous year. Children who had a difficult time academically or socially, or were teased or bullied may be more fearful or reluctant to return to school. If you have not yet done so, share your child's concern with the school and confirm that the problem has been

“It is natural to be a little anxious anytime you start something new”

addressed. Reassure your child that the problem will not occur again in the new school year, and that you and the school are working together to prevent further issues. Reinforce your child's ability to cope. Give your child a few strategies to manage a difficult situation on his own. However, encourage your child to tell you or the teacher if the problem persists. Maintain open lines of communication with the school.

Arrange play dates. Try to arrange get-togethers with some of your child's classmates before school starts and during the first weeks of school to help your child re-establish positive social relationships with peers.

Plan to volunteer in the school. If possible, plan to volunteer at least periodically throughout the year. Doing so helps your child understand that school and family life are linked and that you care about the learning experience.

Seek out help. If your child shows a level of anxiety that seems extreme in nature or goes on for an extended period, you may want to contact the school to schedule an appointment to meet with your child's teachers and school psychologist. They may be able to offer support that will help identify and reduce the presenting problem.

Adapted from “Back-To-School Transitions: Tips for Parents” by Ted Feinberg, EdD, NCSP and Katherine C. Cowan in Helping Children at Home and School II: Handouts for Families and Educators (NASP, 2004).

Quick Tips on Using Time-Out Effectively

- The time-out area should be a place where not much is happening. It should be dull and boring.
- As a general rule, the time-out should be no more than one minute per child's age up to a total of five minutes.
- When giving a time-out, calmly state the inappropriate behavior (or expectation not followed) and tell your child to please go to time-out. There is no need to say anything else.
- During the time-out, your child should be expected to be quiet and remain seated.
- Use a kitchen timer to monitor time.
- Meet with your child and determine if he is ready to exit the time-out area once the timer rings. The child must show self-control. Focus on telling your child the behaviors you want, not what you don't want.
- If a child leaves the time-out early or is still upset and complaining when time is up, calmly return the child to the time-out area until the time has elapsed or add a short amount of additional time.
- Allow your child to start with a “clean slate” once the time-out is over and look to catch him being good shortly thereafter.
- Practice the use of time-out with your child ahead of time so you can ensure understanding.
- All members of the household should know the procedures for time-out to promote consistency.

