

Resiliency and Young Children

Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Causal Analysis

What is resiliency?

Resiliency is the ability to cope with new or stressful situations, changes, problems, or opportunities. Resilient children use coping skills that they have developed from past experiences to cope better with new situations as they arise. These help them to adapt to new situations and continue to learn new coping skills that they can use in the future.

Why is resilience important?

Life is not stress free. All people experience stress, change, problems, and opportunities in their lives. Caregivers can help children learn skills to deal with stress. Children can start learning these skills at a very young age.

What are resiliency skills?

There are three main abilities that people who are resilient have: relax, reflect, and respond. These can be further broken down into seven resiliency skills. Each skill forms the basis on which others can be built. These include emotional regulation, impulse control, causal analysis, empathy, realistic optimism, self-efficacy, and reaching out.

It is important for children to learn resiliency skills when they are not experiencing stress. When we experience stress, different areas of our brains are activated and the areas that are in charge of learning are not working at their best level. If children learn resiliency skills when they are calm, they are more likely to retain the information and to be able to use the skills when needed.

Causal Analysis

Causal Analysis is the ability to analyze a problem accurately...to be able to understand exactly what the stressor is and what the cause is. This is very important as research shows the way how people define a stressor (or think about it) directly impacts the way that they feel and act.

The following are practical strategies to help children develop causal analysis:

MODEL

- Show children that you also struggle with self-talk...that endless stream of words that goes through your head when you are faced with a stressor. For example, "I can't believe that my boss wants me to meet her tomorrow morning. I hope that I didn't do anything wrong. It is probably because I came in a bit late the other day. Of course she wouldn't understand that. She doesn't have kids that she has to get ready for school and drop off. She picks on me so much. Other people came in later than I did."
- Practice each of the strategies in this fact sheet with children. When you are using any of the strategies throughout the day, talk to your children about what you are doing and why.
- When children are successful at using any of the strategies, praise them for this and talk about how it helped.
- It is also important to show positive self talk. For example, "I've never cross-country skied before, but I know I can do this. It will be fun and challenging."

For More Information

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The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is supported by:

Government of Saskatchewan
Kinsmen Telemiracle
Foundation
Saskatchewan Abilities Council
University of Saskatchewan
Community-At-Large

CATCHING YOUR THOUGHTS

- Help children learn how to catch their first thoughts about situations. “What are you saying to yourself?” The first thoughts that people have in times of stress are often the most accurate description of the stressor, for example, “Anna is playing with Tom and will not play with me right now.”
- Catching the first thought in a situation allows the child to stop self-talk, for example, “Anna is playing with Tom and will not play with me right now. They are always playing with each other and even when they aren’t, they never want to play with me.”
- Once a child has ‘caught’ her first thought about a stressful situation, adults can help them to think about different ways of thinking about the situation. For example, “Who else can you play with right now?”; “Can you ask Anna if she will play with you after she plays with Tom?”; “Can you join in their game?”; “Look, Carl is looking for someone to build a puzzle with him. What do you think of that?”
- Encourage children to describe their actions, thoughts, and feelings.

CALMING ONESELF

- Teach children how to remove themselves from stressful situations so that they can take a break and calm down. This will help them to think more clearly about the situation. With small children, you may have to take this time together. This is not a “time out” and should not be used as discipline.
- Please see the fact sheets Resiliency and Young Children Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Emotional Regulation and Resiliency and Young Children Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Impulse Control (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute) for more information about helping children learn how to calm themselves.

CHALLENGING PERSPECTIVE

- Help children to challenge unrealistic perspectives that they might have in stressful situations. Help them to understand that the stressor will not always be present, and that it will not take over their entire life. For example, “My teacher hates me...she always yells at me.” “What did she yell at you about?” “I kicked Johnny.” “Should you kick Johnny?” “No, it is not allowed.” “So your teacher yelled at you because you kicked Johnny and it is not allowed. Did she yell at you for anything else today?” “No.” “So she doesn’t always yell at you.” “I guess not.”
- Help children to challenge beliefs that the stressor happened because of them or that they had absolutely no control over the event. For example, “Mommy and daddy got in a fight. It’s all my fault. If I wasn’t so noisy they would not be fighting.” “My teacher is so mean. She yelled at me today. She always yells at me.”

PRACTICE PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

- Help children to ask themselves and others questions about situations that they may be facing.
- Through example, teach children how to seek help from their adults and peers when they need it.
- Help children to identify the choices that they have within the situation and be sure to provide choices.
- Help children to develop “back up” or emergency plans and practice these with children. For example, “Mommy is going to have a baby soon and I will have to go to the hospital so that the doctors can help me. Auntie Nora is going to look after you while I am in the hospital. It will be lots of fun having a sleep over with your cousins.”

KNOWING CHILDREN’S THINKING TRAPS

- In order to take in all of the information that our five senses are exposed each and every minute of the day, we develop thinking habits and methods to sort and categorize information. Sometimes, thinking habits can cause impulsive reactions and thought processes that lead to inaccurate conclusions.
- Be aware of children’s thinking traps and challenge them when these are occurring. Thinking traps include:
 - ♦ **Jumping to Conclusions:** “Tommy is not going to let me play with him.”
 - ♦ **Personalizing/Externalizing:** “It is my fault that the teacher is too sick to work today.”
 - ♦ **Mind Reading:** “Sally will know that I want to read with her. I don’t have to ask her.”
 - ♦ **Emotional Reasoning:** “The teacher hates me because she didn’t hug me this morning.”
 - ♦ **Over-generalizing:** “A bee is going to bite me if I go to the park. That happened last time.”
 - ♦ **Magnifying/Minimizing:** “My whole day sucked.”
 - ♦ **Catastrophizing:** “I spilled milk on the floor and mommy is going to be so mad. She will never let me have milk again.”
- Challenge catastrophizing by encouraging children to look at the best thing that could happen in a situation (“I spilled my milk on the floor. Mommy is going to replace it with a huge chocolate milk shake.”); the worst thing that could happen in a situation (“I am never, ever going to get milk again because that was the last milk out of the last cow in the whole world.”); and then find a middle ground (“Mom’s probably going to tell me I have to be more careful. After I help her clean up, she will get me another cup of milk.”)