

Resiliency and Young Children

Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Self-Efficacy

What is resiliency?

Resiliency is the ability to cope with new or stressful situations, changes, problems, or opportunities. Resilient children use 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. These are the ability to 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 use the skills when needed.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a feeling of being effective in the world. Children need to feel that what they do matters, that they can make a difference, and can deal with problems.

The following are practical strategies to help children develop self-efficacy:

MODEL

- Practice each of the strategies in this fact sheet with children. When you are using any of the strategies throughout the day, talk to children about what you are doing and why. For example, model self-talk.
- When children are successful at using any of the strategies, praise them for this and talk about how it helped. For example, “You were really supportive when you gave daddy a hug when he was sad. I think it made him feel better.”
- Talk to your children about what your own strengths are as well as areas that you would like to work on.

PROMOTE MASTERY

- When children ask for help, support them but take a step back. Tell them that “they can do it” and support them in completing the task at hand successfully. Be patient. The more independently the child can complete a challenging task, the more success they will feel. Make sure that you remain calm and positive throughout the accomplishment of the task.
- Provide opportunities where children can master tasks. During the day, provide lots of opportunities that will ensure success as well as some that provide a challenge.

For More Information

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- When a child is learning a new skill, provide just enough help to assist in the completion of the task. Lessen this amount each time she tries the new skill and increase encouragement.
- Provide descriptive feedback that is specific not general. For example, “You were really helpful when you carried out the garbage with me” instead of “Good boy”. The more specific the praise the further a child will understand what he has accomplished.

KEEP TRYING

- Encourage perseverance...keep on trying. However, if a child becomes frustrated, allow her to take a break and refocus before challenging her again.

EMBRACING MISTAKES

- Help children to understand that mistakes are okay. Everyone makes mistakes and people cannot be successful every time.
- Encourage children to talk about what they can learn from mistakes.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

- Positively reinforce your child’s behaviour. For example, “Thank you for putting away your toys. The living room looks really clean now. We have some time left before Grandma gets here. How about we make some cookies for her visit?”

PROVIDE CHOICE

- Create as many opportunities for simple choices as possible during each day, e.g., “Do you want to have your milk in a blue cup or a yellow cup?” Make sure that they are choices that are comfortable for others in the environment.

- Create opportunities for child-led play. This can be frustrating for adults as what we think is play may not necessarily be what a child wants to do. Join children where they are at. Show interest and delight in the child as they lead the play.
- Follow the lead with small babies as well. When playing with a small baby (e.g., making faces with her), she will turn her head away when she needs a break. Let her have this time until she turns back. At this time, re-engage with her.

DISCOVER STRENGTHS

- Take a personal inventory of a child’s strengths and weaknesses. Remember that success builds courage, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the willingness to keep trying.
- Together look at pictures of the child at various ages. Talk to the child about the milestones achieved and what was accomplished at each age.
- Have children make a list of their own strengths. “I can...” This can be written, drawn, or collaged. Have children also make a list of what they would like to learn to do. “I want to...”
- Avoid making comparisons between children. Each child has strengths and is an individual.
- Encourage children to challenge themselves when they engaged in a task. Avoid challenging them to do better than another child.
- Give children credit and ownership of their successes.

*References
Available upon request.*