

Resiliency and Young Children

Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Impulse Control

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 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?

People who are resilient have three main abilities. 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 other skills 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.

Impulse Control

Impulse control means stopping and calming down before acting or reacting, and delaying gratification. Impulse control goes hand in hand with emotional regulation. Please see the fact sheet Resiliency and Young Children Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Emotional Regulation (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute) for more information about building resiliency skills.

MODEL

- Show children that you also have to delay gratification. If this is something you find challenging, practice this skill and involve your children.
- Try each of the strategies in this fact sheet with children. When you are using any of these methods throughout the day, talk to children about what you are doing and why. For example, “Your dad and I would like to get a new TV for our family room. It costs \$300. During the next five months, we are going to put aside \$60.00 a month to save for the TV then we can all go and pick it out together.”
- When children are successful at using any of the strategies, praise them and talk about how it helped.
- Model self-talk. For example, “I really want a piece of chocolate. I am going to wait until I have made and eaten dinner. Then I can have it.”

STOPPING AND CALMING DOWN

- When asking a child to stop a behaviour, be clear what you want them to stop and explain why in age-appropriate terms.
- Play games or sing songs that require taking turns, for example, “copy my rhythm” games and “I spy”.

For More Information

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- Sing songs that require actions and a certain speed.
- Create opportunities for sharing.
- Encourage children to describe their actions, thoughts, and feelings.
- Teach children how to remove themselves from stressful situations so they can take a break and calm down. With small children, you may need to take this time together. This is not a “time out” and should not be used as discipline.
- Teach children to stop ... cool down ... wait ... think ... respond.
- Show children how to act like a turtle. Stop ... go into your shell (yourself) ... calm yourself ... count to three ... think ... respond.
- Offer alternative choices for children; for example, “You cannot play with my vase, but you can use this plastic cup as your very own vase and we can pick some flowers to put in it.”

DELAYING GRATIFICATION

- Sympathize with children’s feelings when they do not get what they want.
- Teach children how to set manageable goals and work towards achieving them.
 - Remember that success produces accomplishment. Set up opportunities where children can meet their goals.
 - Create small tasks that are age appropriate.
- Set mutual goals that you can achieve together.
- Help children set self-motivated goals around things they enjoy doing.
- Be involved in what your children are interested in. This helps you to be enthusiastic about children's goals and then to help them follow through.
- Use and model a *I can-do it* attitude in your family.
- Create a visual representation of meeting a goal.
- Play with toys that require time and patience, for example, puzzles. Take your time doing this together. Example, if you are working on a 100-piece puzzle, put it together 10 pieces at a time. Or colour a poster together, section by section.
- Give children piggy banks and help them to save up coins. Allow them to see how these build up over time.
- Plant bulbs together in the fall and watch them bloom in the spring.
- Select a long book to read together, one chapter at a time.
- Plan a day, weekend or vacation together.
- Bake cookies and have children involved from the very beginning of the process.
- Tackle an art project (or craft) that has multiple steps.
- Create a routine in your house so that children can look forward to the parts that they like.

References
Available upon request.