

## Resiliency and Young Children

### Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Reaching Out

#### 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?

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.

#### Reaching Out

“Reaching out” means seeking support when needed, and taking advantage of new opportunities. Taking advantage of new opportunities is very important and is the way that a person grows and learns.

***The following are practical strategies to help children develop the ability to reach out:***

#### MODEL

- Try new things, whether that is meeting new people or taking a class at the community center. Talk about how you feel as you go through this experience. “I was really nervous about going to the book club last night. I was afraid because I didn’t know anyone and I did not want anyone to laugh at my comments. But once I got there and met a few people, I started to relax and had a really fun evening. I can’t wait until next month.”
- Adults in a child’s environment should develop a support system for themselves that they can reach out to when needed. Talking about this with your child can help him understand the importance of developing a “safety net”. For example, “It makes me feel reassured when I can call your Grandma if I need to be away overnight for work. Knowing that you have somewhere safe to go with someone who loves you, makes me very happy.”
- 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 More Information

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## **CALMING AND RELAXING**

- The key to taking risks, such as reaching out, is learning how to calm down and relax.
- Please see the fact sheet *Resiliency and Young Children Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Emotional Regulation* (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute) for more information about building skills that help children calm themselves.

## **PROMOTE ATTACHMENT**

- Children who are securely attached will feel confident exploring their environment and taking risks.
- Provide a safe base that a child can come back to after exploring.
- Many of the same behaviours that promote attachment also promote empathy. Please see the fact sheet *Resiliency and Young Children Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Empathy* (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute) for more information about promoting empathy.

## **PATIENCE AND DELAYING GRATIFICATION**

- Taking risks and trying new things takes patience. For example, if a child wants to take gymnastics, he/she will not be as good as the Olympic gymnast he/she was inspired by in a few lessons.
- Please see the fact sheet *Resiliency and Young Children Providing Opportunities to Build Skills: Impulse Control* (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute) for more information about building skills in this area.

## **PRAISE AND DEBRIEF**

- When children try new opportunities, praise them for this and talk about how it felt. For example, "It was really brave of you to go to ballet class. I know that you were nervous because you did not know anyone. How are you feeling about it now?"
- Praise children for trying, instead of for the outcome.
- Emphasize effort not accomplishment, for example, "You worked really hard on that picture. What careful work you did."

## **BUILD SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

- Provide opportunities for children to have interactions with a variety of safe peers and adults in their community. This may or may not include extended family members. Help children to understand how these people can become part of their safety net.
- Provide support to others, with the help of your child.

## **PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES**

- Provide safe and healthy opportunities for children and step back, allowing them to experience things on their own, while providing a safe base to return to if needed.
- Break down challenges into smaller, doable steps. Celebrate the completion of each step.
- Encourage resourcefulness and independence. For example, if a child's toy breaks and she puts it back together using bandages, do not dismiss her effort or strategy.
- Create balance between taking hard challenges and easy ones.
- Take breaks when a child is feeling pushed beyond her comfort zone. Let her regroup and reenergize before trying again.
- Help teach flexibility ... that there is more than one way to do things. For example, take a different route to the park.

## **References**

*Available upon request.*