



Building Resilient Children

Growing-up presents children with countless challenges, setbacks, failures, and general difficulties. Resilient children withstand the pressures more effectively than children who are not resilient. Resilience is being able to 'bounce back'. It means being able to deal effectively with pressure or stress, and to get through tough times with good outcomes. Parents play an important role in the development of resilience in their children. We have seven tips for parents looking for effective ways to raise resilient kids.

Listen with your heart

Listening is one of the most important ways that parents can build resilience in their children. We can help our children to know that they are important by giving them our undivided attention. This means stopping what you are doing, looking directly at your child and listening quietly and calmly. Children feel validated and worthy when adults, especially parents, listen to them. When children are upset, sensitive listening provides emotional first aid.

See the world through your child's eyes

Giving advice to someone when you or they are upset or distracted just makes them feel frustrated or worse, angry. If your child tells you about sad, angry, embarrassed or frustrated feelings – they need a supportive response. Saying something like "Cheer up, you'll be OK." or "There's no reason to feel like that" will feel superficial. Use your words and body language to communicate care, respect and a commitment to help.

Accept your children for who they are

Resilience is rooted in self-confidence. Children gain their strongest sense of confidence and security from their parents and family. All parents worry but resisting the temptation to judge and criticize is important to building security. Continual fault-finding is a sure way to create questions about self-worth in children. When children are validated, they feel worthy and accepted as real people. Specific praise and encouragement works better than general comments like "you are a good boy", which is too vague to personalize. Children want to understand the things that are admirable about them so they can repeat them and build on those qualities.

Develop Strengths

One of the best ways for promoting resilience is to give children the experience of being competent and able to manage challenges. Tasks like chores, homework and errands must be age appropriate and learned through practice but overprotecting children can give them the message that they are not competent. Every child has strengths. Parents can encourage independence in areas where children are strong and then practice will help them to build the confidence to take on new challenges.

Teach your child that mistakes are an opportunity to learn

When we make a mistake, we have a choice. We can throw our hands up in the air and say "It's just too hard. I'll never get it" or we can see the mistake as a chance to learn something new, and try again. Children are learning everything as they go along. We may feel impatient as parents because many of the things children are learning have become second nature to us. Setbacks can be very frustrating and frightening for children. They need assurance from parents that it is honorable to make mistakes if you take a 'learning' attitude and use setbacks and failures as opportunities to become skillful. When children learn that continued effort, practice, and learning are the keys to success – they become more resilient, willing to take risks, and are likely to try new things.

Teach your children to make their own decisions

When our children struggle, it is often easier to tell them what to do to fix things but constantly making decisions for your children can undermine their decision making skills, ability and confidence. When

your child is faced with a problem, sit with them, listen and help them to explore options. Assure them that you are willing to help but try not to rush them to a decision. As your child learns to problem-solve they will gain confidence in making decisions and overcoming challenging situations.

Discipline, but don't belittle

All children make lots of mistakes, even when trying their best. When they do, we can focus on teaching rather than punishing. Often the most effective way to teach is to invite our children to think about what they have learned. We can then ask them to make decisions about the most appropriate course of action, such as apologizing, making amends, and trying not to repeat mistakes. Children who are supported as they are learning feel special and appreciated, set realistic goals, learn to solve problems, develop good interpersonal skills, and best of all resilient kids bounce back!

If you would like more information on this topic you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the Community Support Worker at 232-1116.