

# Teaching your child resilience



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The school years present children with countless challenges, setbacks, failures, and general difficulties. Resilient children withstand the pressures that school provides more effectively than children who are not resilient. Resilience is being able to 'bounce back' from difficult times, setbacks, and other significant challenges. It includes being able to deal effectively with pressure, and get through tough times with good outcomes. Parents play a substantial role in the development of resilience in their children. The following eight tips outline the most effective things you can do to raise resilient kids.

## **Parenting tip #1: Listen with your heart**

Listening is one of the most important ways that we can build resilience. Rather than operating on 'auto-parent' we will help our children know they are important by giving them our undivided attention. Children feel validated and worthy when we listen to them. While children are upset, sensitive listening provides emotional first aid.

Listening with your heart allows you to be empathic, take your child's perspective, or see the world through his or her eyes.

### **Parenting tip #2: See the world through your child's eyes**

Imagine you had a difficult day. It wasn't a catastrophic day, but some of your plans failed to materialise into reality. You failed to effectively navigate some relationship challenges with someone close. When you explained things to your spouse the response you received was, "Oh well, I guess you'll just have to try harder again tomorrow."

While this response may be correct, it is unlikely to help you feel any better. If you don't feel better, you're unlikely to 'bounce-back' with as much bounce! Likewise, giving advice when children are upset just makes them feel frustrated, or foolish. When they tell you they feel sad, saying "Cheer up, you'll be ok. There's no reason to feel like that" will undermine their feelings, make them question their worth, and create a feeling that they are not normal inside them. Instead, reflect their emotions and avoid advice or lectures.

"I can see it's been a tough day for you today."

"Wow, that must have made you feel really disappointed."

When they know you understand them, ask them how they think you can help. Let them strategise the most effective way to overcome their challenges and support them in their decisions or guide them toward appropriate actions.

### **Parenting tip #3: Accept your children for who they are**

Your child is likely to be resilient if she feels accepted for who she is. To really accept our children for who they are we must resist the temptation to judge and criticise. Continual fault-finding is a sure-fire way to create questions about self-worth in children. Additionally, children who are consistently criticised will start to wonder about their relevance.

In contrast, children whose parents affirm their children's efforts feel useful. When children are validated they feel worthy and acceptable as people. And they are also likely to work hard to maintain those positive feelings, which means when they encounter setbacks they will have the confidence to try again. Letting children know specifically what you love about them or why you are proud of them can bolster resilience.

"I am so proud to be your mum. The way you treated the children outside the school this afternoon made me feel like the luckiest mum in the world!"

"You worked so hard at that activity today. I know you didn't come first, but all that matters is that you tried hard – and it looked to me like you gave it everything you had!"

Remember, be specific. And avoid general praise such as "You're such a good boy." This is meaningless and can be taken back at any time. But when we let our children know we accept and love them, and offer them specifics, they feel like they can conquer anything!

Our children don't need to 'fixed' as much as they need to be loved.

### **Parenting tip #4: Develop strengths**

One of the best things for promoting resilience is a belief that we are competent and able to complete difficult challenges. Parents who identify their children's strengths and help them develop those strengths will see their children become increasingly competent. Their children will experience success. They will be inspired and confident. They will gain a sense that they have something to offer the world.

Maddie, a seven year-old, had trouble with reading and writing. But her parents and teachers noticed her love for drawing. They encouraged Maddie to draw by displaying her art in the classroom and at home. Maddie's strengths ensured she was not defined by her weaknesses in reading.

Your child may possess strengths in relationships, academics, music, sport, creativity, curiosity, or any number of other areas. By developing those strengths, inspiration, competence, and confidence will build resilience in your child.

#### **Parenting tip #5: Teach that mistakes are an opportunity to learn**

When you make a mistake, what do you do? Are you likely to throw your hands in the air and say it's too hard? Do you give up and go back to what you know you can do? Or do you see the mistake as a chance to learn something new, and try again?

When your children make a mistake, what do they do? And perhaps more importantly, what do you say to them?

When we have a 'learning' orientation we see setbacks and failures as opportunities for mastery. By teaching our children that continued effort, practice, and learning are the keys to success, setbacks are no longer seen as frightening, and children become more resilient – willing to take risks and try new things.

They are also more likely to look forward to possibilities in the future and have a more optimistic and curious nature. This mindset is strongly linked to resilience.

#### **Parenting tip #6: Promote responsibility by giving responsibilities**

Many parents say of their irresponsible children, "I want my child to be responsible but I simply can't trust her to do what I ask." They are unwilling to give the child any responsibilities because they fear the child will not be responsible.

Lectures will not promote responsibility. Instead, responsibility comes from opportunities to be responsible, a chance to help, and by being part of a family that is involved in doing things for others.

#### **Parenting tip #7: Teach your children to make their own decisions**

When our children struggle, we often want to tell them what to do to fix things. Constantly making decisions for our children can undermine their decision making skills and confidence.

When your child is faced with a problem, listen with your heart. Then see the world through his eyes. When he feels understood, ask the question: "What do YOU think we should do?"

Let your child know that you are willing to help and support. Then invite him or her to make a decision, and be supportive. If a decision is poor, offer gentle guidance or ask, "I wonder what might happen if we did that." As your child thinks through the various possibilities, he will gain confidence in making his own decisions following challenging situations.

### **Parenting tip #8: Discipline, but don't denigrate**

Children will make lots of mistakes, even when trying their best. When our children do things that are wrong, we can focus on teaching them rather than punishing them. Often the most effective way to teach is to invite our children to think about what they have learned from a particular situation. We can then ask them to make decisions about the most appropriate course of action, such as apologising, making restitution, and refraining from doing what they have done again in the future.

Children who are resilient do better than children who are not resilient. Their parents use the skills outlined above to foster resilience, and as a result resilient children:

- feel special and appreciated
- learn to set realistic goals
- have appropriate expectations of themselves
- and others believe they can solve problems and make good decisions
- see weaknesses as a chance to learn and do things better
- recognise, develop, and enjoy their strengths and talents
- believe they are competent and comfortable with others
- have good interpersonal skills
- and most of all, resilient kids bounce back!