

Developing Resilience & Healthy Self Esteem in Your Child

Presenter: Dr Sue Roffey

Adjunct Fellow University of Western Sydney
Doc Ed. Psy, M.Sc. M.Sc, B.Sc. Dip Ed. Registered Psychologist
Phone: 0409 047 672

Email: Sue@sueroffey.com

More information on www.bounceback.com.au and www.sueroffey.com

These notes were compiled by Dr. Toni Noble, co-author of the Bounceback program

What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to bounce back after encountering hardship, adversity or reversals in life, ie to retain emotional well being in both the short term and long term. Children who can think and behave in a resilient manner are less likely to engage in harmful alternatives to coping, such as substance abuse, self harm, and anti-social behaviour. Using a positive psychology model, we can also say that children who have the skills to be resilient have happier more fulfilling livings and have greater emotional wellbeing.

Protective Factors

Research into resiliency has identified many protective factors that appear to protect some children by making them more stress-resistant and helping them to develop strength, courage and positive mental health. This is in contrast to stress-absorbent children who demonstrate negative mental behaviours when they experience difficult, adverse, or distressing life events.

The Role of Schools in the Development of Student Resiliency

School systems have now begun to act on the research knowledge of protective factors in planning effective prevention programs. The aim of these programs is to promote positive mental and physical behaviours to offset the development of personal and social problems such as harmful use of alcohol and drugs, depression, suicide, and anti-social behaviours. The research into factors that protect students from short and long term negative outcomes after hardship and adversity offers two main directions for schools who want to develop resiliency in students.

The Environmental Approach

Firstly, schools can intervene by working with aspects of students' environment which have been shown to influence the development of resiliency. These factors include peer-connectedness, school-connectedness, teacher-connectedness, community-connectedness and the availability of one caring adult outside the family.

The Personal Skills Approach

Secondly schools can focus on teaching personal skills and attitudes which are protective, such as success, mastery, social skills, optimistic thinking, self knowledge, a sense of humour, problem solving and planning skills, positive self

perceptions and self-efficacy, goal setting, and rational helpful thinking. To date the most successful prevention strategies for children and adolescents take a multi-dimensional approach with components of both environmental restructuring and the teaching of personal skills and values.

Suggestions for Teaching Your Child the Personal Skills and Values that Create Resilience

Optimism and Positive Tracking

- Look for ways to acknowledge your child's strengths in a variety of areas
- Encourage your child to be proud of their progress and achievements
- Catch your kids being good!
- Gently challenge self-defeating talk and helpless behaviour
- Show them how to 'track' the good things more than the bad things
- Remind them that bad times never last and are only temporary
- Always remember to affirm the importance of 'hope'
- When they cannot predict an outcome or know what is true, encourage them to take the positive hopeful view rather than the pessimistic one.

Night Time Nuggets

At bedtime encourage your child to name 3 good things that happened during the day. They may be little things like a friend called and invited them over to play, they had fun playing ball with their brother, they read well in class or they spoke to grandma on the phone or big things like their team won the grand final, they spoke at assembly etc. Focusing on the good things in your day is correlated with an increase in happiness.

Responsibility

- Encourage your child to take responsibility for their part rather than totally blaming others
- Encourage your child to discuss problems and face up to difficulties in constructive ways, rather than denying or avoiding problems
- It's OK to say no. Setting limits fosters a sense of security, and not giving your child everything they want, helps them to take more responsibility.

Decent behaviour

- Children with good pro-social values develop higher self esteem. Stress these values whenever you find an opportunity.
- Ensure that your child does not become involved in bullying others

Problem solving and decision making

- Model effective solving of everyday problems for your child by talking 'out loud'. Review different solutions to a problem and the possible consequences of the different solutions.
- Provide opportunities for decision making. Give your child choices but be prepared to let them have their choice and live with the consequences of their choice

Social Skills

- Provide opportunities for socialising with your family, with their friends, with community groups such as clubs, and sports teams.
- Help your child to learn how to deal with conflict. If siblings are fighting, get them to listen to each other's feelings and point of view and then insist on negotiation. Try not to act as referee where and when it isn't necessary.

Initiative

- Don't do things for your child that they are capable of doing for themselves.
- Provide lots of opportunities for your child to take on tasks and challenges that they initiate and follow through themselves eg making a cubby, cooking a meal. Only give help when asked. Make positive comments about their effectiveness in dealing with the obstacles that will always be part of initiative.
- Talk to your child about the kinds of initiative you took as a child and how it has helped you

Flow

- Encourage your child to look for what produces 'flow' for them. Flow activities are those which arise from being actively engaged in a task where the challenge, however small, is a reasonable match for their skill level, and there is a sense of satisfying a goal, no matter how small, that you have set out to achieve. Flow can happen through work tasks, gardening, organising, sport, playing music, working with others and in many other ways too numerous to mention.
- Help your child understand the concept of 'flow' ie the special 'space' you can enter where you are totally absorbed and time passes unnoticed. Flow is about enjoyment. Enjoyment is different to pleasure, although both make you feel good. Pleasure is more often passive and short term and there is no challenge to meet and no skills required eg shopping, watching TV, eating, listening to music, drugs,. Pleasure does not provide long term satisfaction or growth. There is no sense of being 'stretched'.
- Flow is an antidote to boredom. It can be where you can go for some brief respite when things are difficult instead of using drugs and antisocial behaviour. It helps with career decisions.
- Talk to your child about what gives you a sense of Flow and how you worked this out.

Humour

- Show your child how to use humour well to bond with another, create a positive mood, show confidence and kindness, reduce tension and create a little optimism in a dark situation.
- Caution them about not using humour to attack, deny or trivialise.
- Share humorous games, DVDs and activities as a bonding opportunity.

Goal setting,

- Help your child to set realistic goals and to make plans on how to achieve their goals. A star chart (one star for each step) for younger children can help them gain a concrete sense of progress.
- Model for them the process of setting and achieving goals. Don't forget to stress the part about hard work!
- Celebrate with them their successful achievement of their goal and review with them how they achieved it.

Persistence

- Emphasise that success always requires not giving up when the going gets tough or boring.
- Talk about how we can learn from our mistakes.
- Frame obstacles as problems to be solved and a chance to practise being creative and brave
- Talk to your child about the times when you persisted even though you were tempted to give up.

Risk taking and Courage

- Talk about everyday courage as being prepared to face up to something that is difficult for you even though you might feel anxious or nervous or fearful.
- Affirm that different people are frightened of different things. Courage is relative.
- Differentiate between courage and foolhardiness or bravado to impress others.
- Encourage thoughtful risk taking but make sure your child has thought through potential consequences and is ready for the possibility.
- Talk to your child about your own fears and how you deal with them.

Emotional Literacy

Emotional literacy involves recognising and accurately naming your own feelings, managing those feelings so they don't get out of control and cause excessive distress, and recognising and responding empathically and kindly to the feelings of others. Help your child to develop emotional literacy by using the following strategy whenever there is an opportunity

- Take notice when your child is feeling sad or angry or upset
- See this as an opportunity for closeness and teaching
- Name their feeling and empathically validate it
- Help with problem solving but within stated limits
- Take an optimistic approach

An example of the 5 steps in action:

Your child comes home from school looking upset

Parent: How was school today?

Child: Awful, Jack was sick and he won't be back till Friday and I had no-one to play with. All the other kids said I couldn't be in their group.

Parent: You must have felt lonely then, and a bit sad probably
(*Identification of the emotion your child is feeling*)

Child: I don't want to go back to school till Jack comes back

Parent: Well I can understand why you feel that way because it isn't nice to feel all by yourself and left out. (*Empathically validate the feeling*) But you can't stay home from school just because you have a bit of a problem over Jack being away. Can you think of any ways to make you feel less lonely tomorrow? (*Help with problem solving but within stated limits*)

- Child:* Perhaps I could go to the library or find someone else to play with
- Parent:* Yes, that seems like a good idea. Maybe you could think about who else might be a friendly person to approach before you go to bed tonight. Things will seem better in the morning. (*Take an optimistic approach*)

Self Knowledge and a Sense of Competence

A child who has confidence in their ability to solve problems in different situations has strong self efficacy. They will set higher goals, be less afraid of failure and be flexible in their thinking. Helping your child to develop a realistic, evidence-based understanding of their relative strengths and limitations will help them feel more in control of events in their life. Successful problem solving build's children's self efficacy and their sense of optimism that they can repeat the process.

- Look for ways to acknowledge your child's strengths.
Intellectual Strengths: Children can have strengths in different intellectual domains such as in music, art, sport, making friends, understanding others, helping others, understanding themselves, reading, writing, in doing maths, in exploring nature.
- *Character strengths:* children can also have character strengths such as kindness, generosity, courage, curiosity, love of learning, zest and enthusiasm
- Help your child to firstly identify and secondly engage their strengths in their school work and out of school time is seen as a buffer to depression. Building children's self efficacy through a strengths based approach also builds their optimism.
- Provide your child with opportunities to learn new skills and new games. This will help them to develop a better understanding of their relative strengths and limitations and to learn to take initiative
- Give your child evidence-based positive feedback; for example you are good at spelling because you now can spell these difficult words, you are thoughtful because you helped your sister to fix her bike. Encourage your child to do likewise ie give a piece of evidence for their conclusion re self.
- When reprimanding your child, remember to criticise the behaviour, not the child. Make complaints using an 'I statement' (eg *I am upset about the state of your room*). Avoid criticism a 'permanent' statement about competency or character eg *you are dirty*). Avoid contempt ie a sarcastic insulting remark or putdown (eg *you are such a pig. I don't know how anyone can stand to be around you.*)
- Encourage your child to be self-reflective at the end of each day. This might mean, for example, asking themselves questions such as: *what is one thing I did well today, one thing I learned, one thing I could do better, one way I helped someone else, one time where I missed an opportunity to behave decently, one plan I have for tomorrow, one step I took to help me reach my goal*. This can be linked to Night Time Nuggets.

Self management

- Encourage good time management eg give them an alarm clock, model punctuality, help them to predict how long it will take them to do different things
- Comment positively on behaviour that shows self control or self discipline.

Facing the harsher side of life

- Don't over-protect your child from experiencing some everyday frustrations or difficulties.
- Avoid offering 'quick fixes' or 'feel good' options when things get tough. Rather than saying 'let's go to McDonalds', let them sit with the bad feelings, knowing that you care that they are hurting, but that it is something they have to deal with, not escape from.
- Encourage your child to talk about what's troubling them and help them to find solutions. Such experiences can help a child to become more resilient in the future.
- Don't fight all your child's battles. Children need to experience some difficult times so they learn how to bounce back.
- Let them know that although life is mainly good, everyone has the occasional bad time sometimes.

Resilient Families

The Australian Family Strengths Research Project conducted by the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle has identified the following strengths in resilient Australian families.

Communication

Communication is a strength when the family interact with each other frequently and predominantly in an open, positive, honest manner. Some families mention humour as a strength in their communication.

Togetherness

The invisible glue that bonds or connects the family and gives family members a sense of belonging. An important ingredient is sharing similar values, beliefs, and morals.

Sharing Activities

Strong families like to share and do activities with each other; such as sports, camping, playing games, reading stories, socialising together, sharing hobbies and holidays

Affection

Affection is a strength when family members show love, care, concern and interest for each other on a regular basis through hugs, cuddles, kisses and thoughtfulness.

Support

Assisting, encouraging and reassuring each other and looking out for each other. Support is a strength when family members feel equally comfortable to offer or ask for support.

Acceptance

Showing respect, appreciation and understanding for each other's individuality and uniqueness. Acceptance is a strength when family members acknowledge, value and tolerate each other's differences, and when the members allow each other space.

Commitment

Showing dedication and loyalty towards the family as a whole. Strong families often view the well-being of the family as a first priority. Commitment is expressed in many ways; to the family, the partner relationship, the children, the extended family and/or the community.

Coping with Family Challenges

Every family faces challenges. The three major challenges are:-

- dealing with family break downs in family communication

- managing children's behaviour problems; concerns about how to parent appropriately
- relationship dynamics: eg sibling rivalry, tension in the couple's relationship.

Strong families are able to adapt to changing circumstances and they have a positive attitude towards the challenges and setbacks of family life

<i>Family Strengths</i>	<i>Typical Strategies for developing Family Strengths</i>
<i>Communication</i>	<p>Eat dinner together & float a topic</p> <p>Each family member shares one good thing that happened in a day</p> <p>Hold family meetings on chore rosters</p> <p>Tell jokes</p> <p>Don't keep unnecessary secrets</p>
<i>Togetherness</i>	<p>Keep a box of treasures for each child eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby & toddler milestones; First day at preschool, school • Birthdays, family celebrations & holidays; trophies etc <p>Maintain family rituals</p>
<i>Sharing activities</i>	<p>Play a board game or cards on a rainy day</p> <p>Go for walks, swims, fishing, play sport together</p> <p>Read stories, watch movies together</p> <p>Plan together and go on family weekends away or holidays</p>
<i>Showing Affection</i>	<p>Increase hugs and touching</p> <p>Write a lunchbox message</p> <p>Tell family members of your love and delight</p>
<i>Support</i>	<p>Listen to your child read; ask siblings to help each other</p> <p>Encourage your child to think about how they can help other members of the family</p>
<i>Acceptance</i>	<p>Outlaw 'putdowns' in the home; create as much safety as you can</p> <p>Encourage acceptance of the value that 'it's OK to be different'</p>
<i>Commitment & loyalty</i>	<p>Don't putdown family members to each other or to others outside the family</p> <p>Make time to do things together</p> <p>Celebrate together such as birthdays</p>
<i>Coping with Family Challenges</i>	<p>Stay optimistic; model effective, calm problem solving</p> <p>Use family meetings to discuss family issues</p> <p>Talk about past times when the family coped well with a challenge</p>

<i>Family Strengths</i>	<i>What We Do Already</i>	<i>Additional strategies we could try</i>
<i>Communication</i>		
<i>Togetherness</i>		
<i>Sharing activities</i>		
<i>Showing Affection</i>		
<i>Support</i>		
<i>Acceptance</i>		
<i>Commitment & loyalty</i>		