

Resilience can be defined as the ability of a person to cope and deal with the adverse experiences of life. Resilience in children and young people can grow out of a strong sense of belonging, self-efficacy, good self-esteem and positive life experiences. These qualities can grow from supportive relationships with parents, teachers, carers or other adults who can offer support and encouragement.

Children and young people can develop resilience through a supportive home and school environment, positive encouragement, and being actively involved in decisions (and services) that affect their lives. When children are able to understand events, develop the confidence to make key decisions and feel they can influence events in their life, they can become more resilient and better able to cope with life's adversities.

Self-esteem is a key building block of resilience and can develop from positive attachment experiences and encouragement. It can also be enhanced by participation in valued activities. Self-efficacy is about developing the qualities of persistence and optimism, and the belief that a person's own efforts can make a difference.

Building resilience

A child is more likely to be resilient if they:

- feel loved
- are proud of themselves
- are able to take responsibility for what they do
- are able to trust others
- are able to communicate
- can solve problems
- can manage feelings and impulses.

Aspects that can help build resilience in children and young people include:

- having positive role models in their life who they can trust and who can set examples of how to behave
- encouragement to be more autonomous, to do things on their own, and to take responsibility for their own actions
- having access to appropriate health care, education and social services, which are sensitive to their needs and circumstances.

Resilience

Steps you can take to help build a child's resilience include:

- providing a safe, nurturing environment
- spending time listening to the child or young person
- trusting and valuing the child
- encouraging the child to communicate
- allowing a child to make their own mistakes
- involving the child in day-to-day decisions, activities and home routines.

Young people in difficult circumstances can learn to react like victims who blame others for their distress. It is important for carers to act as positive role models for teaching children to be resilient. Instead of complaining and blaming others when things are going wrong, show a young person that you have ways of coping with pressure that come from within yourself. This can help the child or young person to understand that they can also learn to take control of a difficult situation.

What can I do?

- Try to be more positive and optimistic about life's challenges, as well as being realistic.
- Think before you speak and avoid putting a child down when you are angry – being too critical can directly damage confidence.
- Believe in the young person and show it more often – let them know they are a worthwhile, lovable individual.
- Give praise and positive feedback – children and young people measure their worth and achievements by the views and opinions of others. For example, you might say, 'Well done, that was hard, and you managed it'.
- Reassure them that it's OK to make mistakes and that it's all part of growing up.
- Acknowledge their feelings and help them express them in words. For example, encourage them to say 'I'm upset because...' or 'I feel happy when...'.
- Criticise the behaviour, not the child – be clear that it's an action you're angry about or a behaviour you don't like, not the child.

- Focus on their strengths, not their weaknesses.
- Focus on their successes, not their failures.
- Respect the child's interests, even if they seem boring to you.
- Accept that their fears are real to them, don't just brush them aside.
- Encourage the child to take chances and try new things. Succeeding can boost self-esteem and sometimes they will learn by their mistakes.
- Use creativity to help the child express themselves such as drama, art, music and dance.
- Help children discover and develop their talents. Finding something that they are good at provides a huge boost to their feelings of self-worth.
- Make sure your expectations of them are achievable and realistic. Remember small successes can enhance self-esteem while failures can diminish self-esteem.
- Help make them feel included in decision-making and answer their questions in a thoughtful way. Never respond by saying something like 'because I said so'.
- Say 'sorry' if you get it wrong. None of us are saints, and we may sometimes say something and immediately regret it. If this happens, it's best to immediately admit this to the child. Say 'I should never have said that. It was an unkind thing to say and I don't mean it. I'm just tired. Please forgive me'.

What not to do

- Avoid focusing on the child's weaknesses and seeing them as a problem to be overcome.
- Avoid telling them to 'snap out of it' if they are withdrawn.
- Don't ignore them because they are being quiet or shy.
- Avoid blaming the child for something that was beyond their control. If appropriate, let them know that there was very little they could have done.



Website

www.handsonscotland.co.uk

A new website commissioned by HeadsUpScotland, the national project for children and young people's mental health. The information in this section is based on information from HeadsUpScotland.
www.handsonscotland.co.uk



Useful leaflets/resources

Promoting Resilience in Fostered Children and Young People, Social Care Institute for Excellence (2004). www.scie.org.uk/publications

The following are available from Mind:

Tel: 0844 444 4448

Website: www.mind.org.uk

How to Accept Yourself (Sheldon Press, 1999).

How to Increase Your Self-esteem (Mind, 2006).

How to Look After Yourself (Mind, 2006).

What Works in Building Resilience? Available to purchase online from www.barnardos.org.uk/resources

Promoting Resilience: A Resource Guide on Working with Children in the Care System (Robbie Gilligan, 2001). Published by British Agencies for Adopting and Fostering, London. www.baaf.org.uk/res/pubs

Resilience – What it is and How Children and Young People can be Helped to Develop it (Kirstie Maclean, SIRCC, 2003). Available at www.sircc.strath.ac.uk