

Raising Resilient Children

Because life is full of challenges, setbacks, disappointment, loss, and hardships, resilience is one of the most important life skills a person can develop. You might even say that life is a series of resilience tests that start just after we're born; yet, whether we ace or fail those tests—and all the pop quizzes in between—depends in large part on how we're nurtured in childhood. Children aren't naturally resilient, they learn to be, and the earlier they begin learning and practicing how to work through dilemmas and swerve around curveballs, the better equipped they'll be to bounce back from the difficult stuff all their life. Keep reading for guidance on how you can begin to raise a more resilient child who's able to handle uncertainty, problem-solve, and make decisions with confidence.

Characteristics of resilient children

Before discussing how to raise a resilient child, let's review a few traits that are common among resilient children.

- **They're solution-oriented.** When presented with a problem or less-than-desirable situation, resilient children are ultimately able to look past the letdown and get to work on a solution that can transform the negative into something positive and meaningful.
- **They treat themselves with kindness and compassion.** Resilient children learn that life isn't perfect, and neither are they. When disappointment occurs, they find ways to acknowledge what went well rather than simply dwelling on what they could have done better.
- **They can name their feelings.** Rather than reacting to upsetting news by completely losing control, resilient children learn to label how they feel and why and seek to understand the same of others.
- **They don't see their peers as competition.** It's normal to feel sad or angry or envious when someone else "wins." But those feelings don't stop resilient children from being able to acknowledge and applaud their peers' successes, talents, and endeavors, as well as their own.

Nurturing your child's resilience

Developing your child's resilience skills doesn't happen overnight and isn't the product of a single conversation. It develops over time with practice, through the interactions you have with your child, the way you model resilience, and the patterns that form in the way you respond to and support your child in times of stress or adversity.

Encourage problem-solving

Empowering your children to resolve problems on their own promotes independence, builds critical thinking skills, and helps with emotional regulation, the ability to manage your own reactions and behaviors in the face of strong emotions. Teach them to first identify the problem and have them acknowledge how it makes them feel. Next, ask them what they want the outcome to be and help them come up with a few potential solutions. Finally, have them choose a solution (on their own) and let them put it in motion. Over time, using these steps to deal with issues will become routine for your child, evolving as they learn what works best.

Foster supportive relationships

Younger kids rely on adults for feedback, support, and encouragement; however, as they get older, they'll need to form positive, supportive relationships with kids their own age in which they can help one another persevere through the bumps and bends of adolescence and beyond. Therefore, it's important that you teach your child about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, what it means to be a good friend, and how to recognize when a friendship has run its course.

Provide lessons on labeling emotions

Introduce your child to feeling and emotion words early on, even if they are too young to understand the meanings. Start with the basics like *sad*, *happy*, or *angry*, advancing over time to *sorrow*, *joy*, and *irritated* and so on until your child has a rich vocabulary to use when describing how they feel. Being able to identify and

label emotions helps your child connect how they feel (e.g., nervous) with what they need to do (e.g., take some deep breaths) to forge ahead.

Let them practice

As a parent, wanting to keep your kid safe is innate and understandable, but try to avoid the urge to step in and rescue your child from all of life's difficulties. Protecting them from *every* adversity and sticky situation is not only impossible, it robs your child of the opportunity to practice being resilient and further developing life skills on their own. Know that you've laid the groundwork, and now it's time to let them problem-solve and make decisions based on what they've learned.

Let them fail

This is a tough one, but again, resist the temptation to intervene and take care of your child's problems for them. Even when you may know that the outcome of what your child is struggling with won't go in the direction you would want, or that it may be distressing for them, part of being resilient is about how we handle and go through difficult experiences and it's something that each of us has to learn on our own.

Raising resilient children takes practice—and a village! So, lean on your EAP for all the information, resources, and expert advice you need to ensure your child is prepared for a successful, resilient life. Reach out to the EAP any time, day or night, to speak with a licensed counselor or to schedule an appointment.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to eligible federal employees at no cost.

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800-222-0364

TTY: 888-262-7848

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