

Resiliency

Nurturing the health and wellness of school-age children



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Introduction

I am not afraid of storms, but I am learning how to sail my ship.

Louisa May Alcott

Resiliency is our ability to cope, to bounce back, even to thrive and be changed for the better when faced with adversity. While it's not a word that finds its way into our everyday vocabulary, we practice the art of being resilient daily, often without much consideration. We rely on that ability to navigate our fast-paced lives, many responsibilities and multiple stresses both big and small.

Everyone has bad days, and some have been dealt bad circumstances through no fault of their own. It's in how we face these challenges that will make us stronger for ourselves, our families and our communities.

Why Does Resiliency Matter?

When you look at the characteristics of resilient people, you will find those who:

- ✓ **Create connections**
- ✓ **Maintain strong, positive relationships**
- ✓ **Set goals for themselves**
- ✓ **Enjoy a positive view of the world**
- ✓ **Take care of themselves**

With their sense of connection, resilient individuals form healthier bonds within their communities. That equates not only to a stronger individual, but also a stronger community.

Even if we feel as though our resiliency has been sorely tested, we still learn to face our adversities head on and teach others to do so as well, including our children. They may yearn for acceptance by their peers, academic excellence, improved relationships with their families or something as seemingly simple as passing their driver's test. Their days are filled with teachable moments, when they can practice the art of resiliency and enhance the characteristics that are already part of their toolkit of coping skills.



www.youtube.com/missionhealthyliving

Learn more about what resiliency is, what it means to be resilient and why it matters through Mission Healthy Living's webinar series.

The Evolution of Bullying



Recognize the Warning Signs

The American Justice Department's bullying statistics show that one out of every four kids will be bullied sometime throughout their adolescence. It's not a new phenomenon—so why is it only now getting the attention it deserves? Is it because there is a global awareness that children are committing suicide from being bullied? Or, because there are now other, sneakier ways to (cyber) bully? Or, because it's now affecting a larger number of kids than ever before? The correct answer is yes, yes and yes.

Warning Signs that Your Child Is Being Bullied:

- Sudden change in attitude toward school
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to/from school, riding bus or participating in organized activities with peers
- Unexplained cuts, bruises or other injuries
- Starts to lose or misplace belongings or money
- Significant drop in grades
- Persistent requests to stay home because of hard-to-prove illnesses
- Change in eating habits or sleep patterns
- Changes in social patterns, activities or friends
- Mood swings, angry outbursts or other emotional changes



www.youtube.com/missionhealthyliving

Lorraine Henry, LPC, Mental Health Out-Patient Counselor for Creative Health Services explains the signs of bullying through Mission Healthy Living's webinar series.

The Parental Role

There are three major steps parents should take if they find out that their child is being bullied:

Gather Information: Many kids are embarrassed to say they have been bullied—so listen carefully and learn as much as you can when given the opportunity. You should also emphasize that bullying is wrong and not your child's fault. Address the situation as soon as you are aware of it. While at the same time, keep a record and preserve all evidence (texts, emails, photos, etc.) of the bullying. Most importantly, keep the lines of communication open with your child.

Contact the School: If the bullying is occurring at school, make the school aware of the situation. You should also ask to see the school's bullying policy. Give them a reasonable amount of time to investigate both sides of the story—however, that should not take more than a week. If the bullying continues and the school has not done anything else, contact school administrators or the superintendent. Don't give up.

Educate Your Child: While the situation is being addressed, take time to educate your child on how to act if a bullying episode occurs. Most importantly, make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where he or she can take shelter and express feelings in a nonjudgmental way.

What Not to Do:

- Ask your child to solve the bullying problem
- Advise your child to fight back
- Blame your child
- Allow or encourage your child to respond to threatening messages or texts
- Mediate the situation yourself



Listen to Sharon Giamporcaro, Deputy District Attorney, and Detective Mary Anders as they explain how parents should handle the situation.

Moving Forward

After your child has been the victim of bullying and it has come to an end, there are ways to help your child become more resilient to bullying and perhaps prevent further incidents. Suggest and facilitate activities for them to get involved in, like music, sports or art.

A fresh start can build confidence. Encourage them to make contact with friendlier students—a teacher may be able to make suggestions. You can also role play how your child should react if someone starts to bully them again.

Unfortunately, the effects of bullying can last a lifetime if left unaddressed. Behaviors, attitudes and hurts can manifest over time and become ways that children use to define themselves as they grow into adulthood. Long-term effects can include decreased self-esteem, long-term depression, anxiety, loneliness, withdrawal, suicidal ideation and actually becoming an adult bully at home or in the workplace.



Helping Your Child Be More Resilient



Fact or Fiction

Because children don't have the life experience of adults, they bounce back more quickly when faced with adversity.

Answer? It's more fiction than fact, as many children are exposed to traumatic circumstances at a younger age.

The lives of our children are just as fast-paced as our own, so it's important to watch for three signs that they may be struggling to establish their sense of well-being.

Does your child seem:

- Stuck or unable to move forward due to stressful situations?
- Unwilling or unable to explain feelings?
- Unusually emotional?

Now consider this statement: Most children turn to their parents for advice. This is a fact. While the percentage might dip as children hit adolescence, parents remain the most trusted resource in times of need. That makes the ability to identify signs of resiliency even more important.



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Learn more about determining if your child is resilient, and what to do if they are not.

Resiliency Checklist

Resilient Kids Are:

Able to ask for help and support

Happy and able to laugh

Persistent with a don't-give-up attitude

Self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses

Generally positive in their outlook

Empathetic and see themselves as part of a greater whole

Willing to take initiative and some risks

Non-Resilient Kids Are:

Anxious and less likely to ask for advice

Angry and more pessimistic

Easily frustrated with a reaction trigger akin to a volcano

Emotionless or overly emotional, from one extreme to another

Know-it-alls who rarely take responsibility for their behavior

Unengaged or not interested in anything

Often isolated or withdrawn

Teachable Moments

The ability to cope with varying levels of stress is a skill we must all embrace. Can you teach your children to be more resilient? Absolutely! In fact, it's one of the best lessons you can impart as they grow into adulthood. As their model, a few tips to keep in mind:

Listen to them. Too often we want to jump in and fix problems. We tell them how to feel, rather than embrace how they actually feel. Children need to tell their stories and be heard. Be their sounding board and offer feedback when asked or when needed.

Avoid telegraphing negative messages. Remember, they're picking up cues from you on how to react themselves. If you are calm and reassuring that the situation can be handled, children can adopt that attitude and persevere.

Allow them to fail. Making mistakes and learning from them is part of life. Children who are resilient know that they're safe, secure and ultimately that it's okay to make mistakes.

Encourage them to become problem solvers. Rather than telling children how to solve problems, aid them in learning to make their own smart choices. Encourage them to share their thoughts on how they think they can solve problems encountered. Support their attempts to solve issues on their own. This will increase their self-confidence and their self-trust.



How to Help Yourself Become More Resilient



Where to Start

It's easy to fall into traps when our emotions take over:

- *I'm upset. Therefore someone else is at fault. And they are responsible for making me feel better.*

Instead, we serve ourselves better when we ask:

- *What can I do in this situation to improve the outcome for myself and others.* In doing so, we are empowered to take back control.

We can't always plan ahead for stressful situations, but we can build our resilience so that adversity will only make us stronger individuals. In that way, we serve as models for others, especially our children, who look to us for cues on how to behave.



More tips on how to react to adverse situations in a way meant to become more resilient.

How Can You Enhance Your Resiliency Toolbox?

Find meaning in past adversity.

Learn from what has happened and take action going forward. For instance, a slow economic recovery can deeply affect small business owners, making for a lot of sleepless nights. Instead of letting frustration get the best of them, many now view their businesses differently and use what they learned to create new opportunities. Do we want to battle adversity all the time? No! But facing it head-on allows us to put our inner resilience into practice.

Form a community of support.

Whether with trusted people or places, good relationships go to the heart of what's essential when it comes to resiliency. For adults, that person is a spouse, life-long friend, sibling or relationship nurtured in a life interest or faith community. For children, it could be a parent, teacher or friend, in addition to the support offered by schools, churches and after-school programs.

Rely on the knowledge that life has a purpose and meaning.

Adversity can make us become stronger. Through it all, an optimistic outlook helps keep everything in perspective. In doing so, you are able to build your stress tolerance and focus on the areas you can change, rather than those out of your control.



About The Foundation

The Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation's mission is to enhance the health and wellness of area residents, providing education, funding and programs that motivate people to adopt healthy lifestyles. Visit www.pottstownfoundation.org for more information about the Foundation. Discover Pottstown area's online community at www.missionhealthyliving.org to learn and share information on how to lead a healthier life. You can also follow Mission Healthy Living on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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