

■ Building the 7 Cs of Resilience in Your Child

■ CORE POINTS ESSENTIAL TO RESILIENCE

- 1) Young people live up or down to expectations we set for them. They need adults who believe in them unconditionally and hold them to the high expectations of putting in a good effort and of being compassionate, generous, and creative.
- 2) What we do to model healthy resilience strategies for our children is more important than anything we say about them.

■ THE 7 CS

Competence

When we notice what young people are doing right and give them opportunities to develop important skills, they feel competent. We undermine competence when we don't allow young people to recover themselves after a fall.

Confidence

Young people need confidence to be able to navigate the world, think outside the box, and recover from challenges.

Connection

Connections with other people, schools, and communities offer young people the security that allows them to stand on their own and develop creative solutions.

Character

Young people need a clear sense of right and wrong and a commitment to integrity.

Contribution

Young people who contribute to the well-being of others will receive gratitude rather than condemnation. They will learn that contributing feels good and may therefore more easily turn to others and do so without shame.

Coping

Young people who possess a variety of healthy coping strategies will be less likely to turn to dangerous quick fixes when stressed.

Control

Young people who understand privileges and respect are earned through demonstrated responsibility will learn to make wise choices and feel a sense of control.

■ COMPETENCE

Competence is the ability or know-how to handle situations effectively. It's not a vague feeling or hunch that "I can do this." Competence is acquired through actual experience. Young people can't become competent without first developing a set of skills that allows them to trust their judgments, make responsible choices, and face difficult situations. In thinking about your child's competence and how to fortify it, ask yourself

- ▶ Do I help my child focus on his strengths and build on them?
- ▶ Do I notice what she does well, or do I focus on her mistakes?
- ▶ When I need to point out a mistake, am I clear and focused or do I communicate that I believe he always messes up?
- ▶ Do I help her recognize what she has going for herself?
- ▶ Am I helping him build the educational, social, and stress-reduction skills necessary to make him competent in the real world?
- ▶ Do I communicate in a way that empowers my child to make her own decisions, or do I undermine her sense of competence by giving her information in ways she can't grasp? In other words, do I lecture her or do I facilitate her thinking?
- ▶ Do I let him make safe mistakes so he has the opportunity to right himself, or do I try to protect him from every trip and fall?
- ▶ As I try to protect her, does my interference mistakenly send the message, "I don't think you can handle this?"
- ▶ If I have more than one child, do I recognize the competencies of each without comparison to siblings?

■ CONFIDENCE

True confidence—the solid belief in one's own abilities—is rooted in competence. Youth gain confidence by demonstrating their competence in real situations. Children who experience their own competence and know they are safe and protected develop a deep-seated security that promotes the confidence to face and cope with challenges. When parents support children to find their own islands of competence and build on them, they prepare kids to gain enough confidence to try new ventures and trust their abilities to make sound choices.

In thinking about your child's degree of confidence, consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do I see the best in my child so that he can see the best in himself?
- ▶ Do I clearly express that I expect the best qualities (not achievements, but personal qualities such as fairness, integrity, persistence, and kindness) in her?
- ▶ Do I help him recognize what he has done right or well?
- ▶ Do I treat her as an incapable child or as a youngster who is learning to navigate her world?
- ▶ Do I praise him often enough? Do I praise him honestly about specific achievements, or do I give such diffuse praise that it doesn't seem authentic? (In brief, it is better to praise effort than results. Don't say, "How many goals did you score?" Say instead, "How did you pick up your game?" Don't say, "You're so smart." Say instead, "Your hard work is paying off.")
- ▶ Do I catch her being good when she is generous, helpful, and kind or when she does something without being asked or begged?
- ▶ Do I encourage him to strive just a little bit farther because I believe he can succeed? Do I hold realistically high expectations?
- ▶ Do I unintentionally push her to take on more than she can realistically handle, causing her to stumble and lose confidence?
- ▶ When I need to criticize or correct him, do I focus only on what he's doing wrong or do I remind him that he is capable of doing well?
- ▶ Do I avoid instilling shame in my child?

■ CONNECTION

Youth with close ties to family, friends, school, and community are more likely to have a solid sense of security that produces strong values and prevents them from seeking destructive alternatives. Family is the central force in any child's life, but connections to civic, educational, religious, and athletic groups can also increase a young person's sense of belonging.

Some questions to ponder when considering how connected your child is to family and the broader world include

- ▶ Do we build a sense of physical safety and emotional security within our home?
- ▶ Does my adolescent know that I am absolutely crazy in love with him?
- ▶ Do I understand that the challenges my child will put me through on her path toward independence are normal developmental phases, or will I take them so personally that our relationship will be harmed?
- ▶ Do I allow my child to have and express all types of emotions, or do I suppress unpleasant feelings? Is he learning that going to other people for emotional support during difficult times is productive—or shameful?

- ▶ Do we do everything to address conflict within our family and work to resolve problems rather than let them fester?
- ▶ Do we have a television and entertainment center in almost every room, or do we create a common space where our family shares time together?
- ▶ Do I encourage my child to take pride in the various ethnic, religious, or cultural groups to which we belong?
- ▶ Do I jealously guard my child from developing close relationships with others, or do I foster healthy relationships that I know will reinforce my positive messages?
- ▶ Do I protect my friends' and neighbors' children, just as I hope they will protect mine?

■ CHARACTER

Young people need a fundamental sense of right and wrong to ensure they are prepared to make wise choices, contribute to the world, and become stable adults. Youth with character enjoy a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. They are more comfortable sticking to their own values and demonstrating a caring attitude toward others. Some basic questions to ask yourself include

- ▶ Do I help my child understand how her behaviors affect other people in good and bad ways?
- ▶ Am I helping my child recognize himself as a caring person?
- ▶ Do I allow her to clarify her own values?
- ▶ Do I allow him to consider right versus wrong and look beyond immediate satisfaction or selfish needs?
- ▶ Do I value her so clearly that I model the importance of caring for others?
- ▶ Do I demonstrate the importance of community?
- ▶ Do I help him develop a sense of spirituality?
- ▶ Am I careful to avoid racist, ethnic, or hateful statements or stereotypes? Am I clear how I regard these thoughts and statements whenever and wherever my child is exposed to them?
- ▶ Do I express how I think of others' needs when I make decisions or take actions?
- ▶ Do I notice and respect when my child sticks to something? Do I reinforce the importance of sometimes delaying gratification?

■ CONTRIBUTION

It is powerful when youth realize that the world is a better place *because they are in it*. Young people who understand the importance of personal contribution gain a sense of purpose that can motivate them. Teens who contribute to their communities will be surrounded by reinforcing thank-yous instead of the low expectations and condemnation so many teens endure.

Before we can foster this sense of contribution, here are some things to consider.

- ▶ Do I communicate to my child (at appropriate age levels, of course) that many people in the world do not have as much human contact, money, freedom, and security as they need?
- ▶ Do I teach the important value of serving others? Do I model generosity with my time and money?
- ▶ Do I make clear to my child that I believe she can improve the world?
- ▶ Do I create opportunities for each child to contribute in some specific way?
- ▶ Do I search my child's circle for other adults who might serve as role models who contribute to their communities and the world? Do I use these adults as examples to encourage my child to be the best he can be?

■ COPING

Youth who learn to cope effectively with stress are better prepared to overcome life's challenges. The best protection against unsafe, worrisome behaviors may be a wide repertoire of positive, adaptive coping strategies. Before we begin teaching stress-reduction skills, some basic questions to ask ourselves include

- ▶ Do I help her understand the difference between a real emergency and something that just feels like a crisis?
- ▶ Do I model positive coping strategies on a consistent basis?
- ▶ Do I allow my teen downtime?
- ▶ Do I guide my child to develop positive, effective coping strategies?
- ▶ Do I believe that telling him to "just stop" the negative behaviors will do any good?
- ▶ Do I recognize that for many young people, risk behaviors are attempts to alleviate their stress and pain?
- ▶ If my child participates in negative behaviors, do I condemn her for it? Do I recognize that I may only increase her sense of shame and therefore drive her toward more negativity?
- ▶ Do I model problem-solving step-by-step, or do I just react emotionally when I'm overwhelmed?
- ▶ Do I model the response that sometimes the best thing to do is conserve energy and let go of the belief that I can tackle all problems?
- ▶ Do I model the importance of caring for our bodies through exercise, good nutrition, and adequate sleep?

- ▶ Do I model relaxation techniques?
- ▶ Do I encourage creative expression?
- ▶ As I struggle to compose myself so I can make fair, wise decisions under pressure, do I model how I take control rather than respond impulsively or rashly to stressful situations?
- ▶ Do I create a family environment in which talking, listening, and sharing are safe, comfortable, and productive?

■ CONTROL

When young people realize that *they* can control the outcomes of their decisions and actions, they're more likely to know that they have the ability to do what it takes to bounce back. On the other hand, if parents make all the decisions, they are denied opportunities to learn control. A young person who feels "everything always happens to me" tends to become passive, pessimistic, or even depressed. He sees control as external—whatever he does really doesn't matter because he has no control of the outcome. But a resilient young person knows that he has internal control. By his choices and actions, he determines the results. Some questions about control include

- ▶ Do I help my child understand that life's events are not purely random and most things happen as a direct result of someone's actions and choices?
- ▶ On the other hand, do I help my child understand that he isn't responsible for many of the bad circumstances in his life (such as parents' separation or divorce)?
- ▶ Do I help her think about the future but take it one step at a time?
- ▶ Do I help him recognize even his small successes so he can experience the knowledge that he can succeed?
- ▶ Do I help her understand that no one can control all circumstances, but everyone can shift the odds by choosing positive or protective behaviors?
- ▶ Do I understand that discipline is about teaching, not punishing or controlling? Do I use discipline as a means to help my child understand that his actions produce certain consequences?
- ▶ Do I reward demonstrated responsibility with increased privileges?

*Adapted from Ginsburg KR, Jablow MM.
Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids
Roots and Wings. 2nd ed. Elk Grove Village, IL:
American Academy of Pediatrics; 2011*

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your health care professional. There may be variations in treatment that your health care professional may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

Copyright © 2014 American Academy of Pediatrics. From *Reaching Teens: Strength-Based Communication Strategies to Build Resilience and Support Healthy Adolescent Development*. Permission to make single copies for noncommercial, educational purposes is granted.