

Resilience

Why do some kids thrive while others struggle in abusive homes and how can we help?



Dandelions vs. Orchids

- Biology: Dandelions vs. Orchids
 - Biology predisposes children’s sensitivity to stress
 - Children with the glucocorticoid receptor gene NR3C1 are more vulnerable
 - 75% of these children who are raised with adverse childhood experience and have no support services develop psychological problems by age 25. Higher risk of substance abuse, aggression, and anti-social personality disorder
 - With support services, only 18% develop these issues
 - Other children are like weeds – they can rise to the sun through the cracks
- Environment: Hostility vs. Shelter
 - Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
 - Neglect
 - Inappropriate parenting and ignorance of normal child development
 - Parental issues like mental health, emotional dysregulation, incarceration, domestic violence
 - Poverty
 - Chaos

Vs.

- Enriched activity
- Appropriate parenting and discipline
- Nurturing
- Physical needs met (clothing, shelter, food, safety)
- Engaged, caring adult
- Structure

- Support services: Resources vs. No Resources
 - Trauma informed adults
 - Therapy
 - Building resilience in the home
 - Nurtured Heart – we have trainers who can provide tools

Some tips on building resilience:

1. **Make connections**
Teach your child how to make friends, including the skill of empathy, or feeling another's pain. Encourage your child to be a friend in order to get friends. Build a strong family and social network to support your child through his or her inevitable disappointments and hurts.
2. **Help your child by having him or her help others**
Children who may feel helpless can be empowered by helping others. Engage your child in age-appropriate volunteer work, or ask for assistance yourself with some task that he or she can master. At school, brainstorm with children about ways they can help others.
3. **Maintain a daily routine**
Sticking to a routine can be comforting to children, especially younger children who crave structure in their lives. Encourage your child to develop his or her own routines.
4. **Take a break**
While it is important to stick to routines, endlessly worrying can be counter-productive. Teach your child how to focus on something besides what's worrying him. Be aware of what your child is exposed to that can be troubling and make sure she takes a break from those things if they trouble her.
5. **Teach your child self-care**
Make yourself a good example and teach your child the importance of making time to eat properly, exercise and rest. Make sure your child has time to have fun, and make sure that your child hasn't scheduled every moment of his or her life with no "down time." Caring for oneself and even having fun will help your child stay balanced and better deal with stressful times.
6. **Move toward your goals**
Teach your child to set reasonable goals and then to move toward them one step at a time. Moving toward that goal and receiving praise for doing so will focus your child on what he or she has accomplished rather than on what hasn't been accomplished, and can help build the resilience to move forward in the face of challenges.
7. **Nurture a positive self-view**
Help your child remember ways that he or she has successfully handled hardships in the past and then help him understand that these past challenges help him build the strength to handle future challenges. Help your child learn to trust himself to solve problems and make appropriate decisions. Teach your child to see the humor in life, and the ability to laugh at one's self.
8. **Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook**
Even when your child is facing very painful events, help him look at the situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Although your child may be too young to consider a long-term look on his own, help him or her see that there is a future beyond the current situation and that the future can be good. An optimistic and positive outlook enables your child to see the good things in life and keep going even in the hardest times.
9. **Look for opportunities for self-discovery**
Tough times are often the times when children learn the most about themselves. Help your child take a look at how whatever he is facing can teach him "what he is made of."

10. **Accept that change is part of living**

Change often can be scary for children and teens. Help your child see that change is part of life and new goals can replace goals that have become unattainable.

Signs of fear or anxiety in very young children:

- Extra clingy
 - Need more hugs/kisses than usual
- Wetting the bed or pooping in their pants
- Thumb sucking after outgrowing the behavior
 - Whining

How to help very young children:

- Use play to express fears
- Use art to express fears and emotions
- Spend extra time through games, reading, activities, etc.
- Plan family activities to support togetherness
- Physical affection (hugs, kisses, snuggles)
- Routine and rituals

Signs of anxiety in older children:

- Irritability
- Aggression
- Problems with eating, sleeping, concentration
 - Concerns about safety and security
- Somatic issues like headaches and stomach aches
 - Self-destructive behaviors

How to help school-age children:

- Recognize that they may look to parents and teachers to help them feel safe.
- Make sure your child has a place he or she feels safe, whether that is home or school.
- Talk to your children. When they have questions, answer them honestly but simply and with reassurance that includes black-and-white statements that leave no room for doubt, such as "I will always take care of you." Don't discount their fears when they bring them to you.
- When there is a situation outside of the home that is frightening, limit the amount of news your children watch or listen to. You don't need to hide what's happening in the world from your children, but neither do they have to be exposed to constant stories that fuel their fears.
- Realize that extra stresses may heighten normal daily stresses. Your children might normally be able to handle a failed test or teasing, but be understanding that they may respond with anger or bad behavior to stress that normally wouldn't rattle them. Reassure them that you just expect them to do their best.

How to help middle school-age children:

- Even without larger traumas, middle school can be an especially difficult time for many children as they struggle to meet extra academic demands and avoid new social pitfalls. They look to teachers and friends as well as to parents to make them feel safe.
- Reinforce empathy and help your child keep perspective. When she is a victim of the shifting social alliances that form in middle school, help her understand that other children may be feeling just as lonely and confused, and help her see beyond the current situation.
- Talk with your child about your own feelings during times of extraordinary stress such as the death of a loved one. You should leave no room for doubt when you talk about how you will do whatever it takes to keep them safe.
- Enlist your children's help, whether it's a chore or an opinion about a family activity. Include your children in any volunteer activity you do. Make sure your children know how their actions contribute to the entire family's well-being. If your children know that they have roles to play, and that they can help, they will feel more in control and more confident.

How to help high school-age children:

- Although your teens may tower over you, they still are very young and can keenly feel the fear and uncertainty of both the normal stresses of being a teen, as well as events in the world around them. Emotions may be volatile and close to the surface during the teen years and finding the best way to connect to your teen can be difficult.
- Talk with your teens whenever you can, even if it seems they don't want to talk to you. Sometimes the best time to talk may be when you are in the car together; sometimes it may be when you are doing chores together, allowing your teens to focus on something else while they talk. When your teens have questions, answer them honestly but with reassurance. Ask them their opinion about what is happening and listen to their answers.
- Make your home a safe place emotionally for your teens. In high school, taunting and bullying can intensify — home should be a haven, especially as your teen encounters more freedoms and choices and looks to home to be a constant in his or her life. Your children may prefer to be with their friends rather than spend time with you, but be ready to provide lots of family time for them when they need it and set aside family time that includes their friends.
- When stressful things are happening in the world at large, encourage your teen to take "news breaks," whether he or she is getting that news from the television, magazines or newspapers or the Internet. Use the news as a catalyst for discussion. Teens may act like they feel immortal, but at bottom they still want to know that they will be all right and honest discussions of your fears and expectations can help your high schooler learn to express his own fears. If your teen struggles with words, encourage him or her to use journaling or art to express emotions.
- Many teens are already feeling extreme highs and lows because of hormonal levels in their bodies; added stress or trauma can make these shifts seem more extreme. Be understanding but firm when teens respond to stress with angry or sullen behavior. Reassure them that you just expect them to do their best.

Tips courtesy of the American Psychological Association,
<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx>