

## What is Resilience?

Resilience is, “The ability to become strong, healthy or successful again after something bad happens.”<sup>1</sup>

### Why is Resilience Important?

The ability to recover from difficulties increases the likelihood that individuals will be able to reach their full potential, and mitigates the damaging effects that adverse childhood experiences can have over the lifespan.

Jody McVittie, M.D., co-founder of Sound Discipline, identifies two things that influence how able a child is to “bounce back” when bad things happen:

1. How they are able to make meaning of their life experiences.
2. The network of “safe” connected adults they have in their lives.

People do their best thinking and learning in the context of safe relationships.



*“Resiliency is not as prevalent as we would like to believe. What we do know is that it is strongly related to the belief that somehow you ‘mattered’ to someone: the deep belief that at one time you mattered to another human being.”*

*Vincent Felitti, M.D., Co-Principal Investigator, Adverse Childhood Experiences Study*

<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster. “Dictionary Definition of Resilience.” Accessed Aug. 31, 2015. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>

## What can be Done?

Healthy relationships are key to building resilience, which is the primary way to combat ACEs. It is in the context of safe relationships that we can invite children to feel like they matter, which is critical for building resiliency.

- Look for opportunities to connect. Connection can be thought of as “being present with” another person. This can be as simple as sharing a smile, speaking a word of encouragement, doing an activity together or sitting with a child who is upset.
- Focus on encouragement. This is not the same thing as praise. Praise is focused on children’s accomplishments, while encouragement invites children to be their best selves by expressing belief in who they are. It is difficult to praise a child who is failing, and this is when encouragement is needed the most. Here are some examples of praise and encouragement.

PRAISE	ENCOURAGEMENT
I’m so proud of you.	You figured it out.
You did it just like I told you.	You reached your goal!
You’re the best player on the team.	You are capable.
You got an A!	I trust your judgement.
Good boy/girl.	You can decide for yourself.
Your painting/project is beautiful.	Can you tell me about your painting?
I’m impressed.	You really stuck it out.
You are so smart!	Look how far you’ve come.

Adapted from Positive Discipline by Jane Nelson, Ed.D. 2006



### More recommendations for building resiliency Adapted from Positive Discipline by Jane Nelson, Ed.D. 2006

- Use mistakes as opportunities to teach children instead of taking punitive action.
- Focus on finding solutions rather than punishment. Helping a child problem-solve and think through issues strengthens the “thinking” part of the brain.
- Consider both the age and developmental level of children, and adjust your expectations of them accordingly. Expecting children to be able to do something they aren’t capable of will only increase their sense of inadequacy, rather than building self-esteem.
- Balance respect for the child’s needs, your needs, and the needs of the current situation. One person’s needs do not take priority over another’s. All people are equally worthy of respect.
- Give each child meaningful tasks to do, taking into account the child’s age and developmental level. Completing a simple task such as helping to clean up after a meal can help a child feel important.
- Because we do our best thinking and learning when we feel safe and connected with others, the most effective way to correct a child is by first connecting.

### Here are some examples

- “Wow...you’re really mad because your blocks fell over. It’s not okay to hit your brother.” Connection through acknowledgement of feelings, followed by correction.
- “You seem really upset. Do you need a time out?” (see Positive Discipline section of this toolkit) and once the child has calmed, “Do you know why what happened wasn’t okay? What’s your plan for the next time you feel that way?” Connection through acknowledgement of feelings and an invitation to self-regulate, followed by correction.
- Take time for self-care. Making time to do things that are enjoyable is rejuvenating and replenishes the energy needed to care for others.
- Asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength. Modeling this skill for children is a powerful way to help them understand that they do not need to have all the solutions by themselves.



### MORE INFORMATION



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Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Series

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