

# RESILIENCY IN CHILDREN

Childhood is a time of exploration and trying new behaviours. Rather than trying to remove life's challenges, we need to support our children to develop self-confidence, skills and abilities that make them resilient. Developing these skills will benefit children as they move into adolescence and adulthood.

## What is Resiliency?

Resilience means the ability to overcome and 'bounce back' from change or from difficult life events. A person that is resilient is able to learn from their experiences, and apply this knowledge and coping skills to other situations. The more resiliency factors your child has, the more likely he or she will be able to resist negative influences.

## What are Resiliency Factors?

Resiliency factors are things within a person's environment that assist in developing self-confidence and resilience. These factors provide a cushion or protection against harmful or negative influences. Resiliency factors increase the likelihood that children will be able to make healthy choices.

## Characteristics of Resilient Children



## Resilient Children:

- ✓ Are involved in meaningful activities
- ✓ Have goals and a positive outlook
- ✓ Have an interest in school
- ✓ Are assertive
- ✓ Are aware of their feelings and able to work through difficult emotions
- ✓ Seek out positive adult role models

- ✓ Can solve problems
- ✓ Are confident in their abilities
- ✓ Have a network of supportive people
- ✓ Can reflect and remember times when they have done well despite difficulty
- ✓ Can cope with uncertainty in their lives
- ✓ Have empathy toward others
- ✓ Have a sense of responsibility
- ✓ Show qualities of being both independent, and dependent on others

## Risk Factors

Children search for a way to belong and participate. Behaviours that we consider negative, or to be 'risk factors' may be a child's search for independence, recognition and attachment to others. If adults are unavailable, critical or model negative behaviours, children will search for acceptance, recognition and attachments from friends and others.

## Some 'risk factors' include:

- Poor school performance
- Peers with negative attitudes and behaviours
- Illness
- Violence
- Dropping out of school
- Gang involvement
- Drug use
- Excessive or early alcohol use
- Family conflict, neglect or abuse

Resiliency is present in all children, regardless of their behaviour and circumstances. For example, when children are involved with negative peer groups and behaviours (E.g. gang activities), they may also be showing qualities of leadership and loyalty. If given support by adults and other community members, these same survival skills can be channeled to more positive activities (E.g. being leaders within peer age activities, showing loyalty to their sports team).

# How to be a Supportive Parent



## Be a good role model

- ✓ Stay calm in the face of challenges
- ✓ Do kind things for yourself
- ✓ Set limits on what you will do for others
- ✓ Set boundaries in your relationships, requiring that others treat you with respect

If you want your child to make wise decisions, you need to demonstrate good decision-making skills. Children observe what their parents do, how they spend their leisure time, how they handle difficult situations, and how they interact with others. Your behaviours will influence how your child looks at and thinks about the world. To raise a healthy child, you need to be a positive role model and make healthy decisions for yourself.

## Build a strong relationship

- ✓ Start building a good relationship when your child is young
- ✓ Be consistently present in your child's life Be a positive role model
- ✓ Set clear boundaries, and consistently follow through
- ✓ Have high but reasonable expectations

Parents, other adults and the community can play important roles in influencing whether or not your child behaves in negative ways. Having a consistent and positive presence in your child's life will help them feel more attached to you. When this strong tie is present, children are more likely to ask for support when they encounter situations that are unfamiliar, uncomfortable, difficult or stressful.

## Be mindful of stressful times

- ✓ Share life stories of when you have struggled
- ✓ Avoid judging or criticizing
- ✓ Be a patient listener
- ✓ Be genuinely interested, asking about your child's interests, thoughts and feelings
- ✓ Be caring and supportive

Assist your child through transition periods. This includes such times as moving from kindergarten to elementary school, elementary school to high school, and other milestones that a child goes through as they are growing up. Although these times can be exciting, they can also be stressful, creating anxiety or excessive worry in children.

## Provide adequate supervision

- ✓ Know where your child is and be able to contact him or her as needed
- ✓ Let your child know where and how you can be contacted
- ✓ Have someone available to your child if you cannot be reached
- ✓ Have adequate child care arrangements in place
- ✓ Know your child's friends
- ✓ Be aware of the online games and websites your child visits

Securing your child's safety does not mean you let your fears take over and interfere with his or her independence. You don't need to watch every move your child makes. Adequate supervision is a fine balance, and is important for helping your child feel secure and confident.

## Protect, but don't 'overprotect'

- ✓ Don't shield your child from all of life's challenges.
- ✓ Allow your child to make mistakes under your watchful eye, and to learn from these mistakes
- ✓ Let your child see you struggle as you move toward solving problems

- ✓ Tell your child you believe in his or her abilities
- ✓ Encourage your child to ask for help if needed

Support your child through negative experiences, but avoid placing blame or rescuing. When your child is disappointed about not reaching a personal goal (E.g. not being selected for a sports team or not getting a higher grade at school), be supportive. At the same time, it is important not to shield your child from all of life's difficulties. Mistakes help children learn how to manage and cope with difficult situations. Help your child understand that mistakes are a normal part of life, as they help build character and a sense of determination. Mistakes also can give your child a new perspective the next time a challenge arises.

### Involve your child

- ✓ Give your child opportunities to participate within your community
- ✓ Provide opportunities for your child to learn to be responsible (E.g. chores) even at a young age
- ✓ Allow your child to make some of his or her own decisions
- ✓ Encourage your child to use creativity and imagination
- ✓ Encourage your child's independence.
- ✓ Let your child know that he or she is capable
- ✓ Let your child see you struggle as you move toward solving problems
- ✓ Focus on your child's strengths and abilities

Don't make all the decisions regarding your child. When children are allowed to influence decisions and are given choices, they learn to be capable, competent and confident. Your child will develop a strong sense of self-worth, have high self-expectations, and feel a sense of importance, pride and commitment.

### Sources and Helpful Websites

- Alberta Health Services at [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) (formerly Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission at [www.aadac.ca](http://www.aadac.ca))
- Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse at [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at [www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)
- Centre for Addictions Research of B.C. at [www.carbc.ca](http://www.carbc.ca)
- Child & Youth Health Network for Eastern Ontario at [www.child-youth-health.net](http://www.child-youth-health.net)
- Michael Ungar at [www.michaelungar.com](http://www.michaelungar.com),
- [www.resilienceproject.org](http://www.resilienceproject.org) and [www.voicesforchildren.ca](http://www.voicesforchildren.ca)
- SAMHSA Model Programs at [www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov](http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov)
- Saskatchewan Health Line Online at [www.health.gov.sk.ca/healthline-online](http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/healthline-online)

*For more information about:*

**LAUGH UN TIL IT HELPS!**  
Building Resilience Through  
Humour & Laughter

Contact: Cheryl Ann Oberg  
403-955-7629  
[cherylann.oberg@ahs.ca](mailto:cherylann.oberg@ahs.ca)

Alberta Children's Hospital





## “COMPASSIONATE LIVING” LAUGH & PLAY EVERY DAY!

**Follow These Daily Practices to Prevent Hardening of the Attitudes & Add More Laughter to Your Life**

This is easy and fun. Begin with *mindfulness*. Each day remember what the special practice is for that day. Whenever you see an opportunity, *take some action to fulfill the practice for that day*. Your actions will become habits and the habits will become *a natural and positive way of life for you*. Soon you will be amazed to find that you laugh more and are more cheerful and optimistic. Whenever you are mindful of any of the practices and the pleasant feelings they bring, you can tell yourself, “Isn’t it great that I feel happy now! Right now, this is being stored in my brain, where it joins my other moments of serenity. The larger the library and storehouse of serenity in my brain, the easier it will be for me to access it at will.”

**Mondays are for Compliments:** This overcomes our tendency to criticize and be judgmental of others, which robs us of laughter. Look for the good in others, tell them about it, and you might just end up laughing together. Monday thought: “A kind word often goes unspoken, but never goes unheard.”

**Tuesdays are for Flexibility:** There is no laughter in being stubborn. We all get set in our ways and yet it is a good thing to be open to new ideas. It can be more fun than being in a rut. An open mind lets the laughter in. Tuesday thought: “The tree that bends in the wind does not break.”

**Wednesdays are for Gratitude:** A good way to feel miserable is to always think you need something more to make you happy. An attitude of gratitude bring serenity and laughter. Wednesday thought: “As you go through life, let this always be your goal: Keep your eye upon the donut and not upon the hole!”

**Thursdays are for Kindness:** Think of ways to help make the other person’s life a little easier. Simple kindness may be the most vital key to the riddle of how human beings can live with each other in peace, and care properly for this planet we all share. Thursday thought: “The practice of kindness creates healthy relationships and community connections and inspires people to pass kindness on to others.”

**Fridays are for Forgiveness:** Forgiveness means letting go of anger. Find a way to see those who have hurt you in the new light of compassion. Releasing anger makes you healthier and opens up room in your heart for more laughter. Friday thought: “I never hold a grudge because while I am being angry the other guy is out dancing!” (Buddy Hackett)

**Weekends are for Chocolate:** Remember to eat some chocolate or any other favorite food. Remember to take time for leisure, pleasure and relaxation. Weekend thought: “A bad day fishing beats a good day working.”