Bouncing Back



BUILDING RESILIENCY IN YOUNG PEOPLE



What is resiliency?

Have you ever watched skateboarders or ice skaters learning to do some of the amazing moves they do? Starting out, they fall several times before they get it right. What makes them keep getting up to try again?

The answer is resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to recover and move on in the face of difficulties. A more simple definition of resiliency may be to bounce back. Resiliency helps people "bungee through the pitfalls of life".

The purpose of this booklet

This leaflet, along with the **Power of Parents in a Child's World** and **Connections**, explores what supports young people's healthy development. All three leaflets can be downloaded at www.edact.org in the local resources section.

The purpose of this leaflet is to discuss what parents and carers can do to build resiliency in young people.

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Why is this important? The most effective way to prevent problems with our young people is through supporting their healthy development. While there is no guarantee, young people are less likely to develop problems with a range of risky behaviour like misusing alcohol and other drugs when they have strengths that build resiliency.

How to use this leaflet

Use this leaflet positively and avoid only looking at the things you are not doing. As you read through it, note down things you are already doing. You can also identify things you would want to do more of to build resiliency in your children.

The teenage years and the need to be resilient

Adolescence is a time of change. That little boy or girl we know and love is moving towards adulthood. They are changing physically and emotionally. Which of these do you see in your son or daughter?

- Physical changes
- Influenced by media/fashion
- Expressing their own views
- Mood swings
- Wanting to be individual
- Interest in the opposite sex
- Disappointments
- Wanting to try new things
- Wanting to be with friends more than family
- Wanting to be accepted
- Uncertain of the future
- Strain on the family due to separation or loss

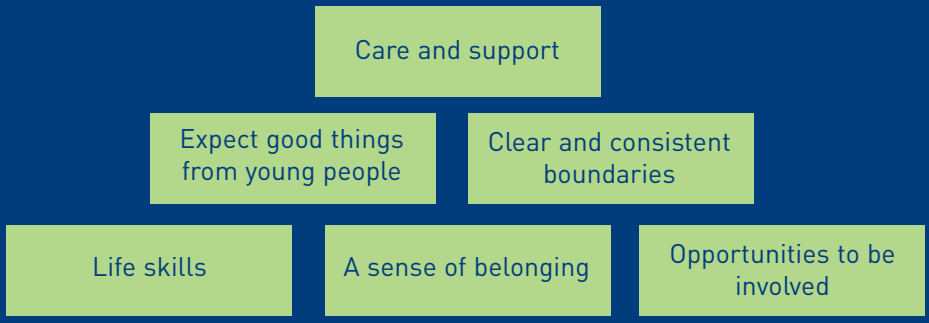
"Don't worry mum- you're just going through a phase"



While every young person develops differently, change, disappointments and stress are part of most teenagers' world. Being resilient helps them 'bounce back' and cope with these stresses and challenges.

The building blocks of resiliency

Six "protective factors" have been identified that help foster resiliency in young people.



(Adapted from Henderson and Milstein 1996)

Think through the building blocks of resilience.
What are you already doing? What could you do a bit more of to develop these building blocks?

1. Care and support

Caring is probably the most important tool for building resiliency. Every young person should have several adults they can turn to and know they care. Listening and being there emotionally says I care.

2. Expect good things from young people

Encourage young people to do their best. High, yet realistic expectations support success. Communicating positive expectations gives young people goals to reach for.

3. Opportunities to be involved

A young person believing they can make a contribution is a powerful protective factor. Get them involved in the family, school and community. Give them age appropriate responsibilities. Support young people to be involved in positive activities such as sports, art, music, drama, community and/or school service and other activities.

4. Set clear and consistent limits

Young people need to have limits and boundaries. Consistent rules and expectations for behaviour tell young people what is expected of them. While young people often rebel against rules, structures and limits help them feel safe and secure.

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5. A sense of belonging

Young people feeling connected is essential for good emotional health and well being. When children and young people feel connected to their family and school they are more likely to choose healthy behaviour.

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6. Help young people develop skills for living

Help young people develop skills including being able to talk about what is happening, resolving conflict, resisting peer pressure, assertiveness, problem solving, decision making and coping.

Keeping it simple

Bonnie Benard, a leader in the field of resilience, has identified three key qualities that help young people manage stress points in their lives. These qualities are:

- Having a caring and supportive relationship with at least one adult for example, a parent, a teacher, a neighbour, a relative, a member of the clergy.
- Hearing consistent expectations that give an "I know you can do it!" message.
- Having plenty of opportunities to shape, influence and control what is going on in their lives.



The language of resilience



The language of resilience is more than a set of words. It is a set of tools that promote resiliency. It is a positive way to see your strengths, abilities and resources.

It is the adults in a young person's world who help them shape these strengths and the ability to use them.

The I have factors are outside supports. The resilient young person says, "I have"....

- **Trusting relationships:** Parents, other family members, teachers, and friends who say through words and actions, "I care about you".
- **Structure and rules at home:** Clear rules and routines help to contribute to a feeling of security and belonging. When rules are broken young people are helped to learn from it.
- **Positive role models:** People to look up to and learn from.
- **Encouragement:** People in their lives who give consistent messages of "you can do it".
- **People who are there for me:** People who can and do help.

The I AM factors are strengths. These are feelings, attitudes and beliefs. The resilient young person says "I am...."

- **Lovable:** The young person is aware that people like and love them. They do things that get a positive response from people.
- **Caring and empathetic:** They care what happens to people. They show that caring through both words and action.
- **Proud of myself:** They feel proud of who they are, their efforts and what they can achieve.
- **Responsible:** The young person can accept the consequences of their behaviour. They have values and keep in mind what is important.
- **Independent:** The young person can do things on their own. There is the feeling that what they do makes a difference. They understand the limits of their control over events and recognises when others are responsible.
- **Filled with hope:** The young person is positive about the future. They see possibilities and are hopeful.

"I CAN" are skills. The resilient young person says "I can"...

- **Communicate:** The young person is able to talk about their thoughts and feelings. They listen to what others are saying.
- **Manage my feelings and impulses:** The young person can recognise and name their feelings. They express emotions both in words and appropriate behaviour. They can think things through before they act.
- **Seek trusting relationships:** The young can find someone — a parent, teacher, other adult or same-age friend — to ask for help, to share feelings and concerns and explore ways to solve problems and conflict.
- **Solve problems. This is a key skill and involves:**
  - **Planning:** being able to see options
  - **Being Flexible:** Not getting stuck on one way of doing it
  - **Resourcefulness:** Can use `outside help
  - **Critical thinking:** Can figure things out

Strengthening resiliency as children grow

Building resiliency, like building other protective factors, requires consistent effort. Parents often worry they are getting it wrong. No parent gets it right all the time.
It is about doing the best we can.

- Each of the I HAVE, I AM, and I CAN factors gives us ways to promote resilience. To be resilient you need all three.
- The external supports and resources help foster the feelings of safety and security that lay the foundation for developing resilience.
- As children grow, they increasingly shift their reliance from outside supports (I HAVE) to their own skills (I CAN), while strengthening their personal attitudes and beliefs (I AM). .
- As your child grows parents need to adopt their approach along with their children's development.

Young people learn what they live

No matter how well intentioned personal development work in schools is, its benefits will be short lived if young people do not have the opportunity to use what they are learning outside the classroom.

If we want our young people to cope, solve problems or look after themselves, we need to provide the opportunities to use these skills in areas that mean something to them.

It will also help if the adults in the young person's world value and use these skills as well.
Young people learn from their parents. They watch what we do as well as what we say. As stated in **The Power of Parents in a Child's World**, parents do have a powerful influence.

What ways are you trying to teach by example?

A daily dose of what helps

When Tony Humphreys, a psychologist and bestselling author on the needs of families and young people spoke to a group in Northern Ireland in 2005, he suggested some ways to develop young peoples' self esteem. Here are some points from that discussion:

- The fear of failure is our biggest obstacle to achievement.
- Mistakes are excellent opportunities for learning. How else do we learn if we don't allow ourselves to make mistakes?
- We all need praise and encouragement. Teenagers still need praise just like they did when they were younger.
- Children need to be recognised for who they are, not just what they do. When our children were small, we put their drawings on the wall or fridge even though we were not too sure what it was. Now that they are teenagers, where do we display their work?
- How well do we recognise young peoples' efforts as well as their successes?
- Parents need to look after their needs if they are going to meets others needs.

What else can we do on a daily basis to build our own strengths and resources?

- Value yourself and others
- Get involved and make a contribution
- Talk about your feelings
- Appreciate what we have
- Keep in touch with friends and loved ones
- Ask for help
- Enjoy your sense of humour
- Learn new skills
- Take a break
- Do something enjoyable
- Keep physically active
- Eat well



Practical ideas to build resiliency

Developing young peoples' strengths and creating the environments that say "we care about you" and "you are valued" are things parents and carers do every day.

The opportunity exists to make a difference in a young person's life every time we make a small effort to build these strengths. All these small efforts together do make a difference.

It is also important as parents and carers that we look after ourselves. A good example of this is how empathy supports a caring relationship. Empathy or understanding what someone else is experiencing, helps young people feel understood and builds trust.
Empathy is something parents have naturally. Mothers for example, know their baby's cry instinctively.
As children get older, the most effective way to help bring out empathy is for us as parents to look after ourselves so this natural process happens. (Mills, 1995)
The daily dose of what helps applies to parents and carers as well as young people.

How do we get a message to our kids you can do it?
A woman always told a story when her kids said "I can't". She would respond saying, "Well, bees can't fly". This is true. The bumble bee's body is too big for its little wings. It should not be able to fly. It's just that nobody told the bumble bee that.



Help young people develop good problem solving skills and the ability to see things positively.

What ways are you looking after yourself?

Being able to ask for help enables young people to feel supported

We all need help at some times in our lives. Yet there are times help may be difficult to ask for. We often prefer to solve problems on our own. Occasionally, life piles on too many stresses at once. Circumstances may overwhelm our usual coping skills.

What stops people asking for help?

People can hold beliefs that stop them asking for help.

Wanting to keep things to themselves

Why burden others with my problems?

Thinking they should be independent

I should be able to do this myself

Thinking others will think less of them if they ask for help

They will think I am weak

Why should we ask for help?

Have you ever heard a problem shared is a problem halved? Being able to ask for help strengthens our belief that we are not alone and that someone cares.
It strengthens a sense of feeling connected.

Another way to look at asking for help is ask yourself this: How do I feel when someone turns to me for help? Do I feel valued? Is my opinion important? Asking for help is a way to make others feel valued as well as gaining support for ourselves.

Young men, in particular often have difficulty asking for help. Fathers have an important role to teach this skill by example. Being able to ask for help can be seen as a strength. This sends out a powerful message. When faced with a problem, it's ok to ask for help.

Who do you turn to for help?

This leaflet is an introduction to resiliency. Sources for further reading are provided. A final thought:
Abraham Maslow the psychologist said, "It takes nine affirming, positive comments to make up for one critical comment we give our children". That is why we believe strongly that we show our kids we care by putting thought into what we do. That says very clearly "I care". It is our hope that this leaflet gives you ideas to build on.

The language of resiliency is adopted from A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human Spirit (1995), Edith Grotberg from the Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflection Series, Bernard Van Leer Foundation
Suggestions for further reading:
Bonnie Benard, Resiliency, What Have We Learned (2004)
Nan Henderson and Mike Milstein, Resiliency in School's: Making it Happen for Students and Educators (1996)
Tony Humphries, Self Esteem: The Key to Your Childs Future (2005) A Different Kind of Discipline (1998)
For further information of young peoples' healthy development and asset building see The Search Institute at www.search-institute.org

Talking to Your Children About Tough Issues, a workshop for parents to build protective factors and training to prevent suicide (ASIST) are available locally. Contact your local Health Trust's Health Development Department for further information.

For further information on local resources contact your GP or
www.edact.org and www.drugsalcohol.info

Developed through the Chrysalis Partnership

Prevention through partnership
Chrysalis

With thanks to Joan Sipler for giving that message about the bee.

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