

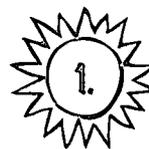
# Build Resiliency

MONICA JANAS



Building resiliency in a child must start early.

Resiliency is a trait that has a major influence on successful adaptive and coping behaviors and forms the foundation for many other positive character skills, including patience, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, determination, commitment, self-reliance, and hope. The essence of *resiliency* is the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune. For example, individuals can overcome dysfunctional relationships or buffer stressful environments through resiliency. This article discusses resiliency behaviors and characteristics that can be nurtured within a family, school, or agency.



**Practice unconditional positive acceptance.** Resiliency develops when situational factors connect with the personal traits of the individual. Building resiliency in a child must start early. Treating the child with unconditional positive regard will increase the likelihood that desirable character traits will be developed because it sets the stage for future decisions and shapes actions that support positive development.



**Establish close, supportive relationships.**

Nothing replaces the security that comes from a child having a close, personal relationship with a significant adult. Moreover, it is important to have alternative caregivers who also help the child develop trust in a variety of people. A supportive web of relationships provides the child with opportunities to understand the functions, expectations, and dynamics of different relationships.



**Communicate realistic standards.**

Paramount to constructing a framework to encourage resiliency is the need to create high, yet realistic, goals and ideals. Establish and communicate high expectations by expressing the belief that the child is capable of achieving as well as making the effort necessary to achieve goals.



**Establish clear, compatible boundaries.**

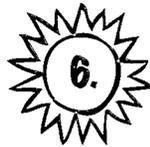
Without boundaries, the child may lack security and a familiar point of reference. Behavioral limits and rules, two types of boundaries, are necessary so that when events do not go as planned, the child has a place to which to return in order to begin again. Depending

on the child's level of development, she or he can also be involved in setting some of these benchmarks.



**Use a low-criticism style of interaction.**

Most children respond to warm, positive instruction. By avoiding criticism, the focus is on desired behaviors, and children are more likely to take risks.



**Focus on frequent, concrete praise.**

Acknowledging appropriate behaviors through frequent positive comments increases the likelihood that those behaviors will be repeated. Purposeful and continual feedback minimizes confusion because direct messages highlight expectations and target results.

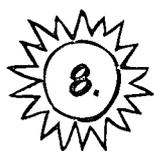
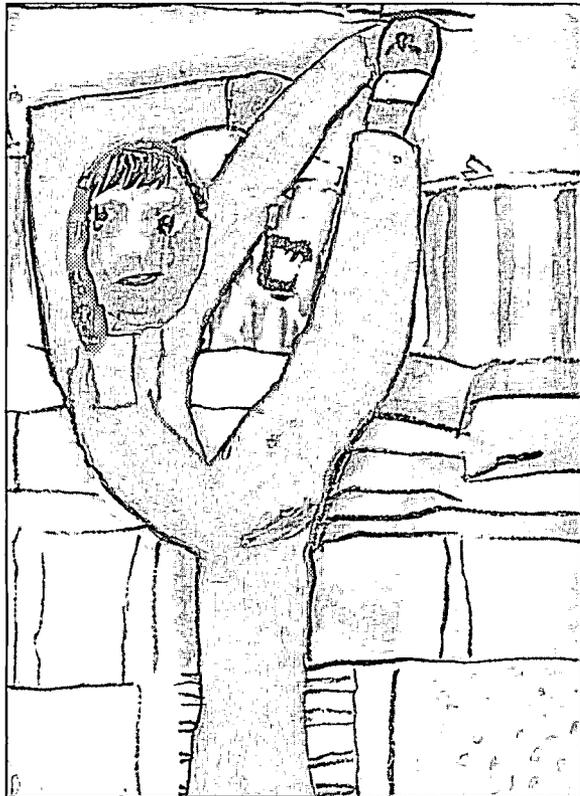


**Outline a method of reaching goals with the child.**

Failure and lack of success are opportunities to learn persistence and new strategies. A four-step process can be used: (a) clearly identify the goal, (b) decide on why you want to reach the goal, (c) clarify the appropriate line of action and generate options, and (d) take action.

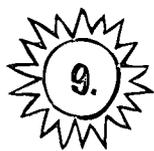


**A supportive web of relationships provides the child with opportunities to understand the functions, expectations, and dynamics of different relationships.**



**Celebrate efforts.** Acknowledge efforts and successes by incorporating rituals and context-specific celebrations. Individual and group celebrations are

good strategies that can reinforce learning. It is also important to assist children in developing confidence in their own efforts and behaviors as they gradually learn to form goals for themselves.



**Provide opportunities to defer gratification.** Helping the child learn to defer gratification builds a sense of control and confidence. Flexibility is

enhanced and impulsiveness is lessened when children learn to delay gratification.



**Teach survival and life skills.**

A part of overall competency is the mastery of life skills, including assertiveness, conflict resolution, refusal skills, stress management, coping techniques, decision making, and goal setting. These skills can be taught through a combination of direct instruction and modeling.



**Develop competencies based on interests.**

Structure the environment so that children have ample opportunities to try new behaviors and skills that are age-appropriate and address their interests and abilities. Continually increase the complexity of the activities so the children add to their store of skills and abilities, thereby enhancing their self-esteem.



**Be sensitive to gender-related influences.**

While it is crucial to always consider a child's individual preferences and characteristics, it is also important to be aware of gender issues. For instance, research has indicated that boys often respond to structure, organization, and rules to a greater degree than girls do. On the other hand, girls may require more support as they learn to take risks and grow more independent.



**Provide service opportunities.**

Even young children can participate in governance, peer assistance, and service. Skills and abilities can be mastered while children learn to be helpful. When children give of themselves by helping others, cleaning up, or caring for pets, they can develop confidence, self-esteem, and feelings of accomplishment. Even when they are the recipients of help from others, children can learn that the interaction, the give-and-take of life, is what has value.





**14. Emphasize being part of something greater than self.** The most diligent efforts to build resiliency will be wasted if children do not develop

a sense of perspective about the world and their place in it. Traditions and routines are ways to help children link themselves to events and people. Focusing on holidays and anniversaries is one way to establish connections to the past.



**15. Master a variety of communication strategies.** Improving interpersonal communication, including body language, is a skill that never

stops evolving. By reflecting on the ways information is given and received, patterns of ineffective communication can be identified and corrected. Good communication skills are critical to the development of trust. Furthermore, it is equally important to practice learning to listen and communicating with your heart in addition to using techniques of good communication. The more reluctant a child is to try again after a lack of success, the greater the need to increase the child's feelings of security through words and acts of caring and support.



**16. Motivate children with stories from films and books.** Stories teach, comfort, and entertain as they focus on problems and solutions.

Whether stories are personal accounts, derived from books, or taken from films, they must be relevant to and resonate with the child. Drawing attention to the themes of stories can influence a child's thinking and attitude on two levels. The surface level enables the child to make literal interpretations of the narrative and factual descriptions of characters and events. On a second level, stories can enhance moral development by relating stories of characters who have risen above adversity to find their own paths to success and achievement.



**17. Create opportunities for participation with groups.**

Meaningful participation can be nurtured so that children learn to relate to others in a variety of contexts and roles. Learning to work within groups requires the child to develop good judgement, respect for others, harmony, and flexibility.



**Help children structure meaning for actions.**

Children can develop a meaningful philosophy or belief system to live by when they are helped to make the connections among their thoughts, words, and actions. Interests and themes generated by the child are a natural starting point for looking at values and reasons. Thinking errors (cognitive distortions) and attributions (the causes people ascribe to events or circumstances) can be addressed in discussions.



**Share your humor.**

The use of humor is a choice and can become a favorite coping strategy. When children observe adults responding to challenges with humor and a willingness to try again, they are more likely to choose the same kind of response for themselves.



**Model being a resilient adult.**

Because most learning takes place from observing what others do, it is vital that

children have rich and frequent opportunities to observe resiliency in action. Involve children in actively noticing behaviors and give them reasons for specific decisions. Encourage children to monitor, make predications, and summarize events as they encounter the challenges of daily life.

*Persons interested in submitting material for 20 Ways To . . . should contact Robin H. Lock, College of Education, Box 41071, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 76409-1701.*

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