

Guide 1

Resilience—a brief overview



Families today are exposed to high levels of daily stress, and the incidence of childhood depression is increasing.¹⁶ Despite our best efforts, we cannot prevent adversity and stress. We can, however, learn to be more resilient by changing how we think about challenges and adversities.^{16,18,19}

What is resilience?

The definition of resilience varies in different cultures and contexts, but it generally refers to one's ability to "cope well with adversity"²⁵ and "persevere and adapt when things go awry."¹⁶

Resilience helps people deal with stress and adversity, overcome childhood disadvantage, and reach out to new opportunities.¹⁴ In addition, more than thirty years of research shows that people who are resilient are healthier, live longer, are more successful in school and at work, are happier in relationships, and are less prone to depression.^{16,28}

What role does our thinking play in being resilient?

Stress, adversity, and challenge are inevitable parts of daily life—and sometimes out of our control. However, the way we *think* about stress is very much in our control and makes a substantial difference in how we handle daily bumps in the road.

Some people feel helpless in the face of stress and adversity, so they easily give up attempts to change or improve the situation. Other people hold more resilient views. They see situations as challenges or problems that can be solved if they look for options and keep trying.^{3,28}

Studies show that people who manage stress and adversity best have 3 Cs in common:^{11,12}

- **Control:** a belief in their ability to take charge of the controllable aspects of a situation and "influence a more positive outcome"
- **Challenge:** a view of mistakes as opportunities for new learning, and change as potential for growth
- **Commitment:** an active engagement in work and

other pursuits that provides a basis of meaning for their lives

A resilient view is characterized by *accurate* and *flexible* thinking, and consists of creative problem solving, the capacity to see other points of view and to challenge one's own views, and the ability to move on with daily life despite obstacles. Most importantly, research suggests that resilient thinking patterns, based on accuracy and flexibility, can be learned.^{16,18,19}

Resilient thinking can be learned.

How can children's resilience be promoted?

Programs to promote resilience in children have existed since the 1970s. These have focused primarily on building self-esteem, increasing school readiness, and supporting the parent-child relationship.^{10,13,28} Most promotion efforts, however, have tended to overlook the importance of thinking processes in the development of resilience and the handling of stress and adversity.

Resiliency skills that help develop accurate and flexible thinking can be absorbed by children from an early age and can optimize the development of resilience.^{19,21} It makes good sense, then, to introduce resiliency-building strategies to children as early as possible in order to help them deal with inevitable adversity and inoculate them against depression.

What role does adult modelling play in children's ability to develop resilient thinking patterns?

Warm, caring adults—whether they are parents, teachers, or other caregivers—who model resilient thinking in the face of daily stresses nurture children's lifelong capacity for resilience.

In fact, researchers point to just how crucial our modelling is. By eight years of age, most children have developed a thinking style, or habitual way of responding to stressors. Even children two and three years old are able to mimic the thinking styles of caregivers around them.¹⁹



Just as children develop language in a “language-rich” environment, so they will develop the skills of resilience in a “resilience-rich” environment. Research has provided us with the direction and tools to create that environment so that we can put ourselves and our children on the pathway to a resilient future.

Please visit www.reachinginreachingout.com, RIRO’s website, to view a short video on resilience (Skills Video 1).

What do teachers say?

I think the role modelling that teachers do when they are teaching the resiliency skills is absolutely essential to the children. It is a far more important part of their learning than we realize. The role modelling we do on a daily basis—we really have to look at that. —CG (resource teacher)

[After the skills training] I’m more aware of how I talk, how I engage in conversation and play with the kids because I know they’re watching me and whatever I do. They are like sponges, they want to do the same thing. They’ll use the same tone, the same inflections, and I’ve noticed if I come in and I’m having a bad day and the group is really down—I’ll wonder why is everyone so angry today? Then I’ll think about it and I’ll figure maybe they’re seeing some of it from me. And I find when they see it from me, they initially will take over that feeling, even if they were happy and calm before. So, I am very aware of my body language, my emotional regulation, because they pick everything up. What I do is reflected right back from them. —EL (preschool)

Summary of Guide 1

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What is resilience?

Resilience is generally defined as the ability to “cope well with adversity” and “persevere and adapt when things go awry.”

Research tells us that resilient people

- are healthier and live longer
- are more successful in school and jobs
- are happier in relationships
- are less prone to depression

Resilience helps people

- deal with stress and adversity
- overcome childhood disadvantage
- reach out to new opportunities

What role does thinking play in being resilient?

- The way we think about daily stress and challenges directly affects our resilience.
- A resilient perspective is based on *accurate* and *flexible* thinking.
- We can become more resilient by changing how we think about challenges and adversity.

Thinking skills that promote resilience can be learned.

People who manage stress best have three Cs in common:

- Control: a belief in their ability to take charge and influence outcomes
- Challenge: a view of mistakes as opportunities for growth
- Commitment: an active engagement in activities that give meaning to life

What role does adult modelling play in children’s ability to develop resilient thinking patterns?

- Even two-year-olds can mimic the thinking styles and coping responses of caregivers around them.
- Adults who model resilient responses to daily stresses and challenges create a “resilience-rich” environment in which children can develop resilient thinking and coping strategies.