

## HOW TO BOOST YOUR CHILD'S RESILIENCE

It's hard to explain to your child why they can't win every race or how to stop the pain when they fall over. Primary school teacher Rachel Barker says, giving them the ability to cope with life's little surprises doesn't have to be difficult.



We've all watched and felt helpless when a child dissolves into tears after losing a game at a party, or at some slight frustration such as a missing sock. Whereas other children seem to bounce back, no matter what life throws at them.

We'd all like our own children to be able to spring back from life's difficulties, so here are some of primary school teacher Rachel's, favourite ways to boost your child's resilience.

Resilience can be taught

Until recently, no one knew for sure what made one person more resilient than the next. Now scientists have started to come up with some answers, and their work has some good news for us all:

1. Resilience is not simply a genetic trait that you are either born with or not
2. Parents can help build resilient systems around the child
3. Parents can help build resilient systems within the child
4. Parents can help minimise stress when it comes.

## Around the child

***"The most powerful protective system for a little child is a loving, caring family."***

Ann Maston, PhD, Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota, USA.

Regardless of background or economic status, you already have the most powerful resilience-building resource for your child: you! The ways you act and respond to events in your own life can have an impact. Here are a few tips on how to build resilience within your child.

- **The village**  
You can improve your child's resilience by giving them a wide circle of positive role models outside the immediate family, such as grandparents, cousins, neighbours, mentors etc.
- **Model resilience**  
If you recover well after a misfortune, make sure you let your children see that you are modelling resilience in your everyday life.

Needless to say, you can help your child by gently praising their growing resilience. For example, *"I noticed that you kept playing, even after you lost two games."* This will help them to weave resilience into developing a self-image, and it will quietly become part of who they are.

## Within the child

Recognising inner traits can be difficult but by engaging in certain types of play with your child, you can help build resilience within.

"Bad news, good news"

If you want children to always think of a 'silver lining', whatever the situation, this fun game works really well. To play, you announce a made-up "Bad News" scenario, and then everyone takes turns to think of alternate "Good News" and "Bad News" angles.

For example:

**Bad News:** *"Sorry everyone, but the party has had to be cancelled."*

**Good News:** *"Never mind, we'll be able to fit in a trip to the park after all."*

**Bad News:** *"The swings will be wet after the rain."*

**Good News:** *"We've got that old towel that we can take, to dry them."*

The many benefits of hobbies and clubs

As they get older, children gain an enormous amount of resilience from pursuing hobbies, especially if they can do so with a group of others. These benefits can include:

- Friendships, especially with like-minded peers
- Confidence building
- Feeling part of something bigger than themselves
- Increased self-knowledge through new experiences
- Finding role models whom they admire.

### Executive Function (EF)

It is thought that EF (or 'cognitive control', as it is sometimes called) has a protective role in helping children overcome difficult circumstances. EF skills develop rapidly in the early years and include skills like inhibiting automatic reactions, delaying gratification, paying attention and switching attention from one thing to another.

EF skills are thought to be important for school readiness. Fortunately, it seems they can be learned.

Games such as 'Simon Says' and 'Musical Statues' are great for practising inhibition. Songs (especially action rhymes), nursery rhymes and games all help to extend your child's attention span. Turn-taking games help with switching attention in a fun, child-friendly way. By playing games with your children, you are providing a secure, predictable and fun arena to practise and develop these demanding but vital EF skills.

### **How to reduce stress when it comes**

From home to the office, we're all confronted with different stressful situations regularly. Think about how you decrease stress and help teach your child different coping techniques.

Routines, ceremonies, community, 'getting back to normal'

Belonging to a community, such as a religious group can help people recover after difficult times. This is because ceremony and ritual can have powerful, comforting effects. After an incident, getting back to school and normal routines sends a reassuring message that life is getting back to normal, despite the difficulties encountered.

Transferring calming skills from parent to child

Every time you comfort your child after some minor childhood trauma, you are modelling how they can calm themselves down.

That tumble down one tiny stair really does seem like the world has turned upside down to them, the first few times! After thousands of experiences, in thousands of different situations, they will start to predict that all will be well, based on past experiences. You will have taught them to manage her own emotions, not to be managed by them, as they were in their infancy.

This vital life skill will empower them to be resilient at the deepest level!