

Building resilience during the COVID pandemic



• RESILIENCE

by Michael Grose

The pandemic continues to bring worry and anxiety to children and young people. Resilience can help kids get through these difficult times, but it is not something they are born with. Resilience is built up over time as kids interact with the environment and each other. Emerging relatively unscathed from a setback or hardship can boost future resilience. On the other hand, if experiences are too overwhelming or stressful, kids can be traumatised, making it difficult to respond with future hardships with resilience.

The Harvard University Centre for the Developing Child depicts resilience as 'a see-saw or balance scale, where negative experiences tip the scale toward bad outcomes, and positive experiences tip it toward good outcomes. The point where the scale balances is called the "fulcrum," and if it is more to one side or the other, it can make it harder or easier to tip the resilience scale to the positive.' Everyone's fulcrum is in a different spot—which explains why hardships impact on people so differently.

Reduce the impact of COVID by reducing stress

During the pandemic there has been a constant build-up of stress and disappointment for many kids. Remote learning, postponement or cancellation of highly anticipated events such as graduations and formals, limited access to community activities and extra-curricular activities are just some of the negative outcomes that kids have experienced.

Most of these stressors are out of parents' control however any efforts to lighten the load on kids and tip the balance to a more positive side will help build resilience. Reducing sources of stress on kids include:

- facilitating visits to recreation areas for play and contact with friends
- ensuring academic expectations are realistic and reflect the circumstances of each child
- back and forth parent-teacher communication responding to pandemic-induced problems
- alleviating unnecessary family conflict such as temporarily loosening digital limits

Build up positive outcomes through supportive relationships

The presence of healthy supportive adult relationships with children and teenagers is a recognised contributor to resilience. Harvard University state, "The one thing that most children who develop resilience have in common is a stable, committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult. Adults need those supportive relationships, too!"

Parents can build more positive outcomes for kids by strengthening the connections they have with friends, family and members of the community. Relationship-building activities can include:

- increasing family connections through shared mealtimes and enjoyable family activities
- positive one-on-one activities between parents and kids
- encouraging regular digital or face-to-face connection with friends
- maintaining contact with extended family

Strengthening core skills and coping capacities

Children and adults need a set of core skills to manage their daily lives. These skills include planning, ability to focus, self-control, self-awareness and adaptability. When children and young people are under extreme stress it's difficult to apply these core skills so the ability to manage even simple tasks can be compromised.

Parents can strengthen these skills in children and young people by:

- building daily organisational skills at age-appropriate levels including the use of schedules, timetables and other visual organisers
- encouraging children to relax and enjoy regular downtime

- developing anxiety-management tools such as deep breathing and mindfulness
- embedding wellbeing strategies of relaxation, exercise and play into family life

Building resilience in children and young people during the current pandemic is a continuous task for families. Resilience is best promoted by relieving stressors on kids, ensuring they experience a variety of supporting relationships with adults and other children, and building core executive functioning skills so that they can successfully manage their daily lives during these times of change.



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