

Raising Resilient Children

Peer Support Australia provides essential support to Australian school communities and works positively to impact the wellbeing of children and young people. We acknowledge that parents and caregivers provide critical foundations in the social and emotional health of their children and work in partnership with schools to support this. Our work is founded on the importance of self-awareness, connectedness and a sense of possibility. Each of these contributes to the ability to be resilient.

Becoming a parent is one of life's most rewarding and fulfilling experiences. It can also be one of the most challenging! Resilience is an essential trait for parents and children as it provides the psychological strength and skills to cope with and recover from challenges and hardship.

Resilience has been defined in many ways: the ability to bounce back, the ability to cope, to find purpose in life and engage in meaningful activity, and to respond constructively in the face of challenge, adversity or stress.

Resilience is not one simple quality that people either have or do not have. It is made up of various behaviours and ways of thinking. All of these can be learned, developed and strengthened throughout life, and our sense of resilience can vary over time.

Caregivers build their children's resilience through physical care and support, as well as by creating positive relationships. Knowing your child's strengths, and explicitly encouraging them to develop these in an atmosphere of loving expectation can also help them to become more self-aware and optimistic. When young people have a sense of purpose and achievement, they may be more engaged and motivated to make an effort in their learning and life in general.

Here are some tips for building resilience in your family:



Be caring and consistent. To help children feel more secure, be there for them regardless of the situation and provide clarity of what they can rely on: be your word. This can help them develop strong attachments and a solid sense of belonging. When children form secure attachments early in life, they have a greater capacity to form effective relationships later in life, which contributes towards resilience and mental health.

Identify and talk about feelings. Encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling and help them find words to describe their own and others' feelings. This helps children understand the emotional world in which they live.



Teach your child how to calm themselves down when they feel upset.

Remain calm yourself and acknowledge your child's feelings and experiences. Teach skills such as deep breathing or focusing on something other than being upset by encouraging them to think of helpful thoughts or to engage in an activity such as drawing, painting or colouring.

Identify your child's strengths. Children knowing their strengths helps them to make the most of what they do well. If you or your child are facing a challenge, have a discussion about how to use strengths to figure out solutions and build up a problem-solving toolbox. Andrew Fuller, Clinical Psychologist, has a free personalised assessment of learning strengths available at <https://mylearningstrengths.com/>





Nurture optimism. Optimism has been found to be one of the key characteristics of resilient people. It is a habit of thinking about how we interpret events, and it can be taught. Model being optimistic by looking for and pointing out the good side to events and experiences. Present setbacks as a natural part of learning that help us to recognise what we don't know or can't do yet. Encourage your child to set achievable goals and develop plans to work towards them. Model and encourage healthy thinking habits such as positive self-talk, self-compassion, and a positive attitude.

Foster and maintain close relationships with caring, trusted adults in and outside the family. As children grow, they increasingly look for affirmation outside of the family unit to work out who they are and where they fit. It can have a powerful positive impact on a child, when an adult identifies something special in them and looks beyond behaviour or a situation to affirm them. These trusted relationships can provide opportunities for your child to develop vital coping skills and can be “a gift they'll spend the rest of their life unwrapping”.



Know that difficult times pass. Help your child realise that challenging times are a part of life and that things can get better. Share how you, people you know, or even famous people have gone through difficult times. Practise how to handle these situations by discussing them and perhaps using role plays.

Find purpose. Encourage your child to make meaningful contributions that help others. Encourage engagement in activities they really care about. Volunteering for a local organisation or simply supporting a friend can foster a sense of purpose and self-worth.



Peer Support Australia work with school communities to positively impact the wellbeing of young people. Our student led approach enhances resilience through purposeful connections and authentic leadership skills.

Contact us on 1300 579 963 if you would like more information about how our services can benefit your child and school community.

References:

- Benard, Bonnie (1993). Fostering Resiliency in Kids <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov93/vol51/num03/Fostering-Resiliency-in-Kids.aspx> (Accessed July 2020).
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- Grotberg, Edith H. (1995) The International Resilience Project: Promoting resilience in children <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED383424.pdf> (Accessed July 2020).