Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Raising resilient children



All children benefit from being able to cope well with challenges, change, and adversity. These are coping skills that help build a foundation of resilience. In this article you'll find tips on how to help children develop a lasting resilience that will help them all through life.

What makes a child resilient?

Why is it that some children seem to have a natural resilience and can stay strong even when they face challenges that might undo others? Experts agree that resilience results from a combination of factors. Partly, it comes from the natural tendency to adapt to change. Social, spiritual, psychological, and biological factors also contribute to resilience. You can take steps to build those factors into your child's life.

The seven C's of childhood resilience

Building resilience is a process that goes on from infancy through the teenage and young adult years. You can find help in the book *A Parent's Guide to Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Your Child Roots and Wings*, written by the Academy of American Pediatrics (AAP) and Kenneth Ginsburg, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Ginsburg has identified seven key aspects of resilience that he and the AAP call "the 7 C's of resilience." The following things, he says, will help children develop the ability to cope with change and rebound from setbacks:

Competence, the strengths and abilities they need to master their challenges and cope with change all through life.

Confidence, a belief in their abilities that comes in part from competence.

Connection, close ties to a family and community that give them a sense of security and belonging.

Character, values that help children see the difference between right and wrong and make good, moral decisions.

Contribution, the knowledge that they can make a positive difference and that "the world is a better place because they are in it."

Coping, having the emotional and other tools they need to deal capably with many kinds of stress they may face.

Control, the knowledge that they can affect the results of their decisions.
Help your child appreciate their skills. Support your child as much as you can if they'd like to gain a new skill that will help to build competence.
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Ways to help children develop resilience

Here are some ways to build resilience in children from a young age:

Encourage your child to keep developing new skills. Help your child appreciate their skills. Support your child as much as you can if they'd like to gain a new skill that will help to build competence, such as the ability to play a musical instrument or learn the basics of computer coding.

Give your child frequent and sincere praise. Strengthen their confidence and sense of self by praising them when they make a good effort, whether or not it has the results you had hoped.

Remember that "it takes a village." Ask for and welcome the support of relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers and coaches, members of your faith community, and others. Their help will make your job as a parent easier and will give your child a strong sense of connection to a wider community. Have family rituals and routines, and include your extended family in these.

Model the kind of character you would like to see. Let your child see you acting in ways that are honest, kind, and loving—by obeying traffic signs, by helping older neighbors, by showing respect for people who come from different religious or cultural traditions. Also model positive coping strategies when feeling stressed or angry, like meditating, practicing yoga, and exercising.

Offer your child many opportunities to help others. When your child helps others—whether by sharing a meal with a friend or taking part in a community-wide volunteer project—they learn that their actions make a difference and that they can make a contribution to the world.

Let your child solve problems and make decisions. Give your child age-appropriate decision-making opportunities.

Show that you have faith in them by not rushing in to solve every problem they could handle on their own. This will help them see that their actions have consequences. If they can't always get what they want, they do have control over the results of many of their decisions.

Teach your child to manage stress and painful emotions. Help your child develop the ability to cope with all kinds of challenges. Send the message that sadness, like happiness, is a part of life. It's natural to feel sad and cry, and knowing how to handle those feelings is part of staying physically and emotionally healthy. Talk with your child about how to express feelings in healthy and appropriate ways —for example, by kicking a soccer ball in the yard to let off steam when feeling frustrated or talking with a trusted adult, like a parent or grandparent, when they are sad.

Finally, remember that developing resilience is a lifelong process. Reassure your child often that you love them, that they can always come to you if they face challenges that seem overwhelming, and that you had a lot of those in your own childhood, too.