

# Nine Things all Children Need to be Resilient

(and the strategies to help them grow)

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## 1. Structure

- Our children want a reasonable amount of structure. It convinces them that their parents love them.

*Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Give your child rules: bedtimes when he's younger; expectations for chores and homework when he's older.
- Be clear about how you expect to be spoken to, and model that same behaviour when speaking with your child.
- As your child grows, increase the decisions that he can make on his own.
- When you tell your child he can't do something, be sure your decision makes sense. If it looks like you are over-reacting you will lose credibility.
- When you are sure you know better, and have to tell a child "Wait" or "You can't do that," be sure to promise to revisit your decision when the child is older.

## 2. Consequences

- Our children want the security of knowing there are reasonable consequences to their actions.

*Practical things caregivers can do:*

- When you discipline a child, be sure the child understands what she did wrong. It's all right if the child feels embarrassment or shame, but she should also be shown how to correct what she did wrong.
- If you threaten a consequence, be sure to follow through.
- When disciplining a child, make sure she is kept safe and her needs are met. Discipline is not the same as

punishment.

- If a child's behaviour has affected more than one person, then everyone affected should be a part of the consequence. A child should feel accountable to the people she has hurt.
- Give a child the chance to fix her mistakes.
- Give a child a chance to say she's sorry.
- Show a child how what she did affected others rather than just telling her she did something wrong.

## 3. Parent-child connections

- Our children really do want connections with their parents, but those connections will look very different at each age and stage of development.

*Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Sometimes hugs are more powerful than words.
- The quantity of the time we give to a child is sometimes more important than the quality. Our child may want us there, waiting, even if he doesn't appear to need us just then.
- Put down our phone, turn off our computer and open space for our child to approach us.
- Eat together as a family three times a week.
- Take time each day to find out what a child did at school, at her friend's, or out in the community.
- Share an activity together as a family.
- Insist the child help others with a task that will be noticed by others in the family.
- Travel together.
- Kiss your child goodnight, no matter how old he is.

## 4. Lots and lots of strong relationships

- Children live in interdependent worlds that bring them the possibility of lots of supportive relationships. Our job as adults is to help them nurture these connections.

*Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Celebrate special occasions together.
- Tell a child about a problem that you are struggling with as an adult, and ask for the child's help to solve it.
- Catch a child doing something good and let others know what you saw.
- Encourage a child to make friends with people who are different from her.
- Leave your child alone with people who are there to help your child, like coaches.
- Encourage your child to visit other families, go on sleepovers and spend time with grandparents, aunts and uncles.

## **5. A powerful identity**

- As adults, we are mirrors to our children. We reflect back to them who they are and how much they are valued.

*Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Provide opportunities for your child to experiment with different identities.
- Encourage your child to volunteer, work, or travel when he is ready and able.
- Encourage your child to participate in different activities, even if they are likely to fail.
- Tell a child what you think of the identities he has chosen. You don't have to like your child's choices.
- Tell your child about your own childhood and the identities you tried.
- Encourage your child to look around his family and community for people he admires and would like to grow up to be like.
- Encourage your child to experiment with the clothes he wears and other impermanent ways of trying a new identity.
- Talk to your child about the consequences of making a commitment to an identity before he is sure he wants that

identity forever (e.g., getting a tattoo, or not taking science in high school).

## **6. Sense of control**

- Children need opportunities to control their own lives and learn the consequences of their actions. Children who experience manageable amounts of risk and responsibility have the risk-taker's advantage. They are better prepared for future challenges having learned how to solve problems early.

*Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Let a child experience manageable and age-appropriate amounts of risk and responsibility.
- Give a child opportunities to make age-appropriate decisions for herself, like what she wears, eats, and when she goes to bed. If her choices begin to cause problems, use these problems as teachable moments and coach the child on how to make better decisions.
- Don't be shy about telling your child that her failure was something she could have controlled.
- Don't be shy about telling your child that her failure was something that she did not have the power to control, no matter how hard she tried.
- When children are successful, celebrate their success.
- Give children an allowance so they can manage their own money.

## **7. Sense of belonging**

- Children need to know they belong in their families, as well as at their schools and in their communities. They need to believe their lives have a purpose and that their families, peers, and communities need them.

*Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Help your child participate in many different activities and groups.

- Rather than telling your child who to be friends with, ask your child why he has chosen his peer group? What is it about these other children that your child likes?
- Involve your child in family traditions.
- Talk to your child about what you believe in, but be sure to leave space for your child to ask questions and disagree.
- Ask your child to contribute to making your family work better.

## 8. Fair and just treatment

- Children need to experience their homes and schools as places where they are treated fairly. Children need to be protected from racism, sexism, and other forms of intolerance.

### *Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Tell stories. Encourage family elders to talk about their experiences growing up and their coping strategies.
- When a child is treated unfairly, show the child how to defend herself and advocate for her rights. Only advocate on her behalf if you are sure the child can't protect herself without your help.
- Share your home with people who are different. This will help your child understand that people have different values and beliefs.
- Encourage your child to defend someone else's rights when your child sees him or her being mistreated.
- Watch movies about political struggle. Watch the news and talk about what you see. Celebrate holidays that have a political message. Be sure to explain to your child what the holiday means.
- Inspire your child to fight back when he is mistreated. Help him find ways to fight back that will be respected by others.
- Avoid overprotecting your child from every hurt, bully, and injustice. While your child is young enough to be

coached by you, let him experience being treated unfairly so that you can teach him how to speak up for himself.

## 9. Physical and psychological safety

- Our children need access to the resources that make them healthy. This includes housing, safe streets, well-resourced schools, and parents with the time to pay attention to them.

### *Practical things caregivers can do:*

- Distinguish between what a child needs and wants. Giving children everything they want may actually cause more problems than it solves.
- Help children access the services that are available.
- When formal services aren't available, explore the volunteer services that are available like food banks, service clubs and religious organizations.
- Look for help for a child from her informal supports such as her extended family, congregation or friends.
- Ensure a child has good food, and does not go to school hungry.
- Advocate for a child to get what he needs in the least intrusive way possible. Before we send an anxious child to a psychiatrist, look at what we can do to make the child feel safer. Before we call the police to deal with a delinquent or violent child, see if there is an extended family member who is willing to help care for the child temporarily.

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