



10 TIPS FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN AND TEENS¹

How you can help your child build resilience.

1. **Make connections** Connecting with people provides social support and strengthens resilience. Connecting with friends on social media or online video gaming is not the same as having a true connection with another human being. Show your child how to make real friends, and help them to learn the skill of empathy, or the ability to feel the emotions of another person. Teach your child to be a friend in order to make friends. Build a strong family network to support your child through his or her inevitable disappointments and hurts. At school, watch to make sure that your child is not isolated. Some find comfort in connecting with a higher power, whether through organized religion or privately and you may wish to introduce your child to your own traditions of worship.
2. **Help your child by having him or her help others** Children are empowered when they help others. Engage your child in age-appropriate volunteer work, or ask for your child's assistance with a task you're working on that he or she can learn or master. At school, find out what opportunities are available for your child to volunteer to help others; there are often groups or extracurricular activities focusing on helping others.
3. **Maintain a daily routine** Sticking to a routine can be comforting for children and parents. Providing structure helps decrease stress and anxiety around inevitable transitions and change. Teach your child how to structure their time and work; encourage your child to develop his or her own routines and stick to them. Children who know what to expect are also less likely to push back and argue about daily required activities like homework or chores. While it is important to stick to routines, remember not to sweat the small stuff. Stressing out about something that didn't go according to plan is counter-productive.
4. **Take a break** If your child is worried, anxious or stressed, help him or her to focus on something else. Be aware of what your child is exposed to that can be troubling, whether it be TV, YouTube, social media, or overheard conversations. Make sure your child takes a break from those things if they trouble her. Build unstructured time in your routine to allow children to be creative.
5. **Teach your child self-care that includes daily physical activity** Show by example how your child can make time to eat healthy food, engage in physical activity, and rest. Allow time for structured and unstructured fun. Make sure that your child hasn't scheduled every moment of his or her life with no "down time" to relax. Caring for oneself in a similar way will help you to have a balanced mind-body-spirit so both of you can better deal with stressful times.
6. **Move toward your goals** Teach your child to set reasonable goals and then to move toward them one step at a time. Moving toward that goal — even if it's a tiny step — and receiving praise for doing so will focus your child on what he or she has accomplished rather than on what hasn't been accomplished, and can help build the resilience to move forward in the face of challenges. At home and school, help to break down large assignments into small, achievable goals; acknowledge accomplishments on the way to larger goals.
7. **Nurture a positive self-view** Help your child remember ways that he or she has successfully handled hardships in the past and then help him understand that these past challenges help him build the strength to handle future challenges. Help your child learn to trust himself to solve

¹ Adapted from information provided by the American Psychological Association

problems and make appropriate decisions. Don't do it for him. Let him fail and know that it's ok to do so. Show your child how to see the humor in life, and to laugh at one's self.

8. **Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook** Even when your child is facing very painful events, help him look at the situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Although your child may be too young to consider a long-term look on his own, help him or her see that there is a future beyond the current situation and that the future can be good. An optimistic and positive outlook enables your child to see the good things in life and keep going even in the hardest times.
9. **Look for opportunities for self-discovery** Tough times are when children learn the most about themselves. Point out how you see your child facing challenges and use these opportunities to teach him or her about "grit" or not giving up when things get hard. Talk with your child about how you got through difficult times and saw something positive in the end.
10. **Accept that change is part of living** Change can be scary for children and teens. Help your child see that change is part of life and new goals can replace goals that have become unattainable. Change can be wonderful and exciting and does not have to be scary or stressful.

Additional information on supporting teens:

Although your teens may tower over you, they still are very young and can keenly feel the fear and uncertainty of both the normal stresses of being a teen, as well as events in the world around them. Emotions may be volatile and close to the surface during the teen years and finding the best way to connect to your teen can be difficult.

→ Talk with your teens whenever you can, even if it seems they don't want to talk to you. Sometimes the best time to talk may be when you are in the car together; sometimes it may be when you are doing chores together, allowing your teens to focus on something else while they talk. Taking a walk or a hike together is another way to build your relationship and give them time to talk with you in a non-threatening environment. When your teens have questions, answer them honestly but with reassurance. Ask them their opinion about what is happening and listen to their answers. If you feel upset about what they tell you, remember to keep control of your emotions and wait until later to respond, if needed.

→ Make your home a safe place emotionally for your teens. In high school, taunting and bullying can intensify — home should be a haven, especially as your teen encounters more freedoms and choices and looks to home to be a constant in his or her life. Your child may prefer to be with friends rather than spend time with you, but be ready to provide lots of family time for them when they need it and set aside family time that includes their friends.

→ When stressful things are happening in the world at large, encourage your teen to take "news breaks," whether he or she is getting that news from the television, the Internet or social media. Use the news as a catalyst for discussion. Teens may act like they feel immortal, but at their core they still want to know that they will be all right and honest discussions of your fears and expectations can help your high schooler learn to express his own fears. If your teen struggles with words, encourage him or her to use journaling or art to express emotions.

→ Many teens are already feeling extreme highs and lows because of hormonal levels in their bodies; added stress or trauma can make these shifts seem more extreme. Be understanding but firm when teens respond to stress with angry or sullen behavior. Reassure them that you just expect them to do their best.