

childPSYCH News

A newsletter for professionals and parents

In 10 Years
we have
helped over
5000
children!

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Toowoomba

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How to make your child resilient!

Have you seen the stories on TV about Extreme Parenting? This is where some parents are encouraging their children from as young as 3 to engage in extreme sports. The argument is that this gives children confidence and therefore resilience. Of course these same parents are themselves extreme sports people so it is likely they will have genetically similar children. Too bad if the universe had gifted them a sensitive child—jumping off a cliff is more likely to do harm for the child.

However, for those of us who are sensible about raising out children, how can we encourage our children to be more resilient?

What is resilience?

First it is important to understand what resilience is! Resilience is best considered the ability to regain mental health after experiencing adversity. There you go. Not too complicated really. So the key words are “regain” and “adversity”. In other words, experiencing difficult times and being able to get through those difficult times builds resilience.

Are resilient people made OR born?

Personality traits such as agreeableness (gets along with others), openness (accepts feedback and new opportunities) and extraversion (seeks others etc.) are associated with being a resilient person. A positive out look on life, good relationships and strong self esteem are also associated with resilient people.

Some research has shown that



A positive out look on life, good relationships and strong self esteem are also associated with resilient people

exposure to highly stressful home environments can effect brain structures leading to lower ability to cope with stress. A study on rats showed that increased licking by mother rats during stressful times lowered stress response of rat pups. In other words, parents who are also supportive of their child during stress raise more resilient children.

Can you tell if a child is resilient?

Maybe. It seems if you have better emotional control, adequate academic attainment, friendships then you are likely to be a more resilient child.

So can we develop resilience?

YES. Resilience is an interactive concept. So if you have a good home environment, friends and adequate academic attainment but are easily anxious, you can still be a resilient person. This means, even if some weaknesses exist, they can be compensated for by other areas of strength.

How do we develop resilience?

1. Controlled exposure to risk - exposing your child to some risk in a controlled way can help. This will develop self esteem. So I

guess the Extreme Parenting folk have a point here. However, research suggests resilience is constrained by your biological make up. So if the child is naturally anxious, then exposure to extreme experiences may make matters worse!

2. Learning coping strategies - even more important than having friends and other positive qualities of resilient children, is coping skills. Coping skills refers to the ability to control emotions and cope with stressful situations. For example, child psychologists frequently teach children problem solving skills and rational thinking skills.

What promoting resilience looks like in everyday parenting

Fostering resilience in your child means being consciously aware of when you are being over protective or overly insensitive. For our Extreme Parenting peers, if their child is naturally a “brave” child then certainly exposing them to some of the activities may be appropriate. However, if your child is anxious, then certainly exposing them to an extreme sport experience will only make them more anxious. Instead, most children can become resilient by learning to cope with the frustration of competing in sport, or having to learn a skill they are not naturally good at, or managing friendship problems.

As a parent you need to monitor a situation, advise your child about how to manage their emotions and solve problems but feel free to step in to sort things out if the situation is getting out of hand.

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the childpsych difference

We're a specialist practice - we specialise in children, adolescents and family issues. That's all we do.

Employees not contractors! - Our psychologists are employees not contractors. Our staff are committed to childpsych and we only hire staff who are prepared to be legally accountable for their performance.

Accountability and commitment - Our psychologists undergo regular performance appraisals - we evaluate our psychologists through formal performance appraisal processes that require a high standard of care.

A professional psychology practice - Our psychologists work for a professional service firm, not renting rooms under the one "banner" - we value our staff and support them through resourcing, formal training and supervision.

Our staff are highly qualified and experienced - noticed the number of psychologists with Masters degrees or higher?

We work with the "whole psychology" of the child - that's why we're called childpsych, short for child psychology. If the child or adolescent has an anxiety problem and a weight management problem, we can help with both areas. We work closely with professionals such as General Practitioners and Paediatricians as well as Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Behavioural Optometrists to name a few.

The child comes first - we go out of our way to ensure the child overcomes their difficulties as quickly as possible. We will speak with school staff, other family members and any other significant person, to ensure that everyone knows how to assist in the child's recovery.

Lessons from Sport on Resilience

The field of sports psychology has a lot to offer when it comes to developing resilience. Research from the sport psychology world and applied to soldiers has shown that a competitive mindset, "good" perfectionism and strong self belief predicted more resilient soldiers.

The research showed in particular that it was a fear of failure mindset that really hindered one's ability to cope with stress. This makes sense as it seems that over focussing on failure will undermine your ability to draw on your strengths and cope with whatever is stressing you. For example, if a child is focussing on how bad they are at sport, and ignoring that they are actually getting better, they will likely find attending sport training highly stressful and be less resilient.

Little wonder we see our top athletes focussing on their "personal best". A focus on personal best places an emphasis on improvement and helps the person identify that they are getting better—this builds confidence. No one is saying this is easy however! If you happen to have a child who is, well, half glass empty (a pessimist) then of course your battle to make



them more resilient will be greater. Remember the main article saying your biology (nature) constrains resilience? So yes you will sound like a broken record as you constantly encourage your child to identify what they are improving in. A typical conversation may go like this:

Parent: how was soccer training today?

Child: hopeless...I'm no good at it

Parent: so what did you do better this week than last week you think?

Child: I can't kick like the other kids!

Parent: That's not what I'm asking...I asked what did you think you did better this week?

Child: I kinda kick better

Parent: So you got a personal best then!

CELEBRATING
10 years

Our expertise

Clinical Psychology

- ◆ ADHD/ADD
- ◆ Fears/Anxiety
- ◆ Sadness/Depression
- ◆ Behavioural difficulties
- ◆ Autistic spectrum disorders
- ◆ Peculiar/concerning behaviours
- ◆ Grief

Educational Psychology

- ◆ Learning difficulties
- ◆ Intellectual functioning
- ◆ Gifted & talented assessments
- ◆ Developmental assessments

Autism Services

childpsych provides a specialist autism clinic focused on assessment and diagnosis and intervention services. Our autism interventions are delivered by psychologists accredited to work with children with autism spectrum disorders.

- ✓ Assessment and diagnosis of autism
- ✓ Management of children with autism to age 18 years
- ✓ Behavioural interventions, social skills, transition to school, treatment of other conditions such as anxiety, depression
- ✓ Special education development classes and remedial teaching classes

childpsych.net.au/autism-services.php