



Building Resilience in Children

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Exercise

- Write down the three most important things you can remember about your childhood.
- This can be a person, thing, pet, community, neighborhood, school or religious community.

Things to Remember about Child Development

Even infants and young children are affected adversely when significant stressors threaten their family and caregiver environments.

Development is a highly interactive process, and life outcomes are not determined solely by genes.

While attachments to their parents are primary, children can benefit significantly from relationships with other **responsive caregivers** both within and outside the family.

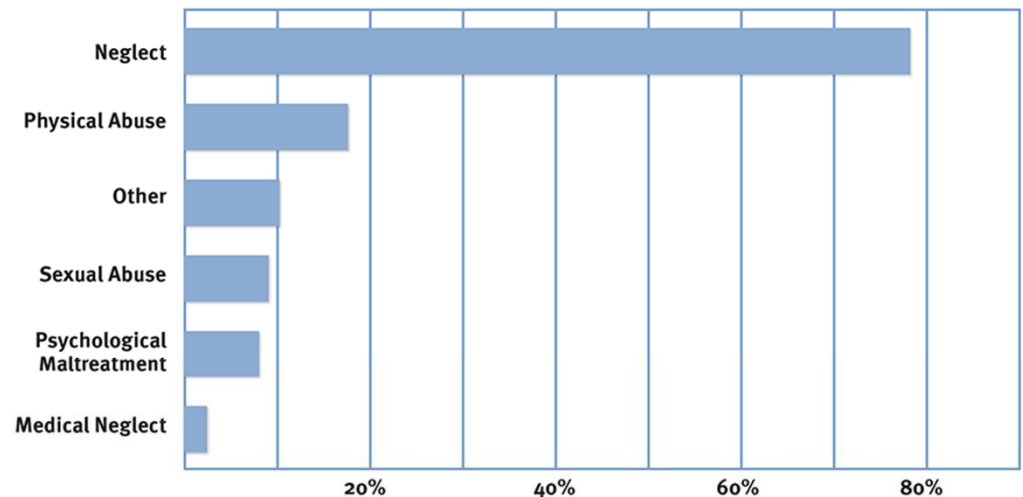
A great deal of brain architecture is shaped during the first three years after birth, but the window for opportunity does not close on a child's third birthday.

(Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016)

Things to Remember about Child Development

Severe neglect appears to be at least as great a threat to health and development as physical abuse-possibly even greater.

Neglect Is the Most Prevalent Form of Child Maltreatment



Each state defines the types of child abuse and neglect in its own statute and policy, guided by federal standards, and establishes the level of evidence needed to substantiate a report of maltreatment. The data above, from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), reflects the total number of victims (defined as a child for whom the state determined at least one report of maltreatment was found to be substantiated or indicated) as reported by all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, between Oct. 1, 2009, and Sept. 30, 2010. "Other" includes abandonment, threats of harm, and drug addiction.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010)

Things to Remember about Child Development

- Young children who have been exposed to adversity or violence do not invariably develop stress-related disorders or grow up to be violent adults.
- Simply removing children from a dangerous environment will not automatically reverse the negative impacts of that experience.
- Resilience requires relationship, not rugged individualism.

(Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016)

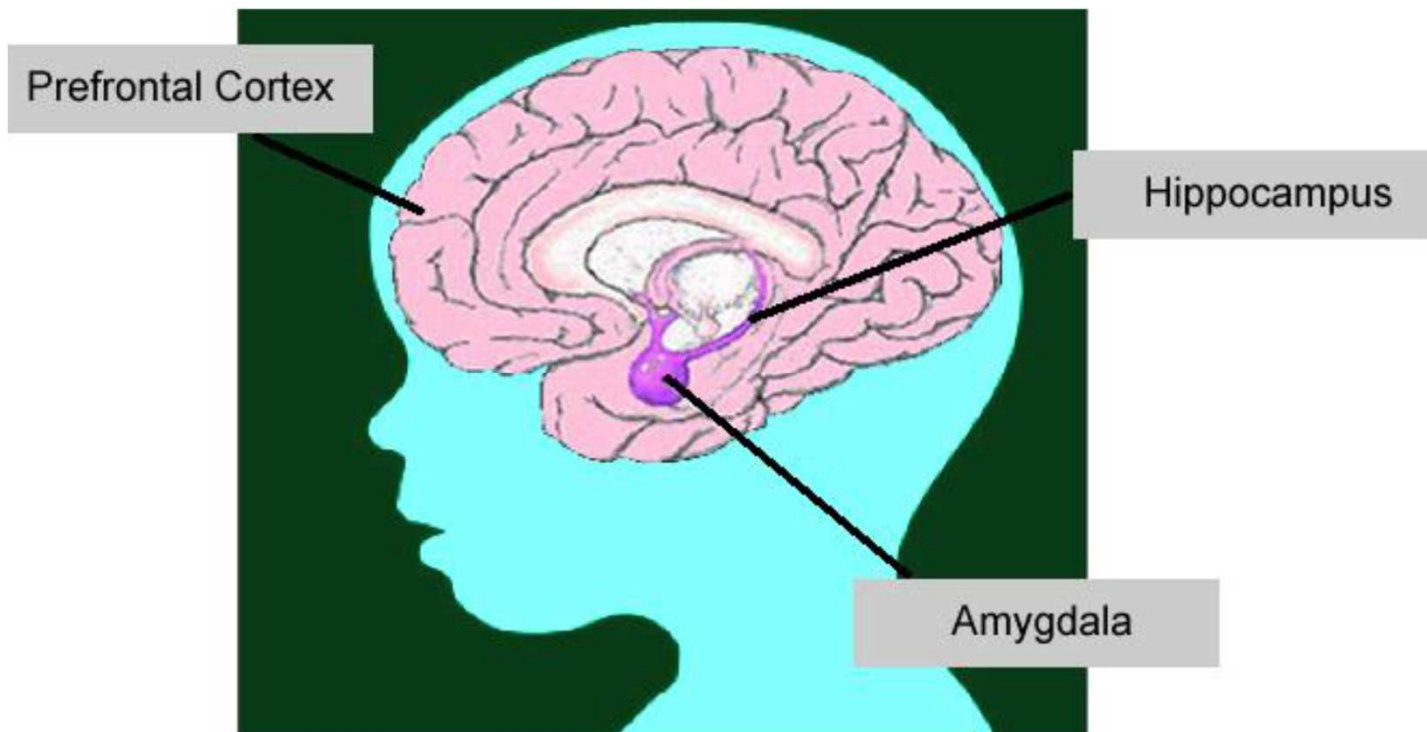
Adversity

- In order to look at how to build resiliency in children we must look at how adversity affects children.
- YouTube-In Brief: The Science of Neglect (Center for Developing Children at Harvard University)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF3j5UVCSCA>

Trauma and the Brain

www.getselfhelp.co.uk



Hippocampus

- The hippocampus processes trauma memories,
- by recycling the memory, mostly at night via dreams, which takes place over weeks or months.
 - It then transfers the integrated stored memory to another part of the brain.
 - High levels of stress hormones causes the hippocampus to shrink or under-develop, resulting in impaired function.
 - Childhood trauma exaggerates this effect.
 - The trauma memory therefore remains unprocessed in the hippocampus, disintegrated, fragmented, and feels 'current' rather than in the past.

Amygdala

- The brain's 'fear center'.
- The amygdala helps to store memories, particularly emotions and physical sensations.
- It also controls activation of stress hormones – the body's fight or flight response.
- In PTSD, the amygdala becomes over-reactive causing frequent or near constant high levels of stress hormones.

Pre-frontal Cortex

The pre-frontal cortex

- helps us to assess threats,
- manage emotion,
- plan responses, and
- control impulses.

It is the center of rational thinking.

Childhood trauma causes under-development of the pre-frontal cortex, which results in impaired ability to assess threat through rational thinking, manage emotions, and control impulses.

Current triggers



Hippocampus recalls part of fragmented and disintegrated memory – thought, image etc .



Amygdala reacts – emotional and body memory reactivated – ‘flashback’ re-experiencing of event. Interprets as current threat – emergency - stress hormones – fight / flight response



Pre-frontal cortex unable to rationalize or determine that situation is not a current threat. Difficulty in managing emotions or controlling impulses



Attempts to escape or avoid distressing memories and feelings mean the memory is never processed, so symptoms remain.

Children may experience physical and emotional distress

- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Poor control of emotions
- Inconsistent academic performance
- Unpredictable or impulsive behavior
- Irritability
- Over or under-reacting to bells, physical contact, doors slamming, sirens, lighting, sudden movements.
- Emotional numbing
- Hyperarousal
- Hypervigilance

(The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008)

Intense Reaction to Reminders of the Traumatic Event



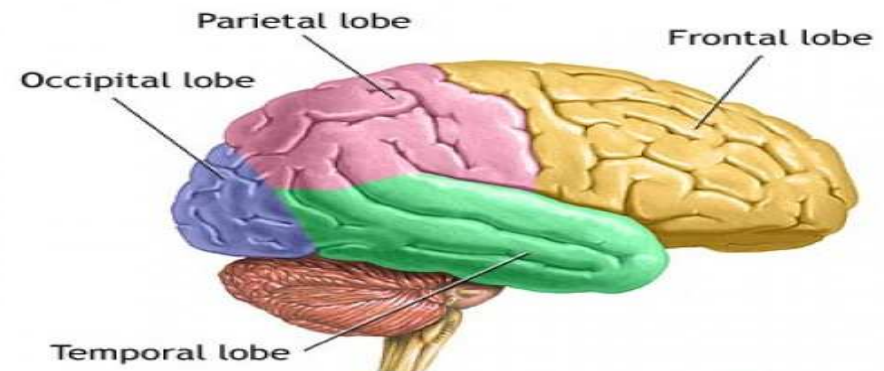
- **Thinking others are violating their personal space, i.e., “What are you looking at”?**
- **Blowing up when being corrected or told to do something by authority figures.**
- **Fighting when criticized or teased by others.**
- **Resisting transition and/or change.**

(The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

Effects of Maltreatment on Behavioral, Social and Emotional Functioning

- **Persistent Fear Response** -cannot differentiate between danger and safety
- **Hyperarousal**-highly sensitive to nonverbal cues (be careful with touch)
- **Increased Internalizing Symptoms**-
anxiety and depression
- **Diminished Executive Functioning**-
lower academic achievement,
intellectual impairment, decreased I.Q.,
difficult paying attention

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015)



ADAM.

Effects of Maltreatment on Behavioral, Social and Emotional Functioning

- **Delayed Developmental Milestones**-(often caused by prolonged neglect) , behind in language, cognitively, behaviorally, socially, emotionally and physically.
- **Weakened Response to Positive Feedback**-less responsive to positive stimuli
- **Complicated Social Interactions**-more challenging to navigate social situations.

(Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015)





Bad Storms

(Pickover & Brown, 2016)

When looking at children who have been abused, neglected or suffered significant loss:

- We can look at what is wrong with the child's, behavior, attitude or symptoms.
- or
- “We can ask the question, what has happened to this child”?
 - “What can I do to help this child move forward starting today”?



Hurt Children



- “When children are hurt and their healthy development is threatened, they seek to regain mastery and control over their environment in one of three ways”.
1. **Prosocial efforts**- finding comfort, seeking out trusted adults, adopting positive behaviors such as participation in sports, or searching for positive ways to interpret negative behaviors
 2. **Antisocial efforts**-violence, destruction, stealing, and/or other crime
 3. **Self-injurious behaviors**-cutting, eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicide attempts

(Gilgun, 2003)

What is Resiliency?

“Resiliency refers to the ability to survive or bounce back from pressure or crisis- a kind of emotional buoyancy” (Crosson-Tower, 2014 p.347).



Themes of Resilience


Study of practitioners who work directly with maltreated children.

Surviving-adaptive functioning following adversity, maintaining a normal level of daily functioning

Thriving-performing beyond typical developmental expectations

Perseverance-tenacity (core of internal resilience)

(Yoon et al., 2020).



Themes of Resilience

Ability to **reconcile and integrate experiences into healthy development:** recognizing that their maltreatment was something that happened to them but does not define them. Their ability to reconcile trauma and personal identity.

Advocating for self-ability to identify and value their own needs, and to actively engage in services (therapy), seek support, or access resources to meet their needs.

(Yoon et al., 2020).

Resilience

- YouTube-In brief: The Science of Resilience
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1r8hj72bfGo>



What Makes a Child Resilient?

- **Close relationship with at least one parent or another nurturing adult**

If we can't be that someone who believes in them, loves them and nurtures them help them find **someone** who can (linking).

- **Child's own temperament**
- **Affirming ethnic and culture identification**

Ask the child about their culture (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, spiritual beliefs, socioeconomic class and political views), accept and support who they are.

- **Ability to engage in self-soothing behaviors (music, affirmative self-talk, or daydreams about a positive future)**

(Crosson-Tower, 2014)

What Makes a Child Resilient?

Ability to chose people who model prosocial behaviors

Development of talent and interest

Get them involved in sports or physical activity, acting, the arts, develop hobbies

Scholastic aptitudes

Intelligence

Do your best to ensure they have a good education and stay in school

Ability to pursue personal achievement

Goal setting

(Crosson-Tower, 2014,)

What Makes a Child Resilient

- **Positive peer relationships**
- **Child's problem-solving abilities**

- Problem-solving skills (Resiliency Resource Center)

1. Identify the problem
2. Generate solutions
3. Evaluate the possible solutions, decide on the best course of action, and put it into action
4. Evaluate the outcome (If problem not solved, step 2)

- (Crosson-Tower, 2014)



What Makes a Child Resilient?

- **Social competence**

Teach them social skills; flexibility, empathy, caring, communication skills, and having humor (Martinek & Hellison, 1997).

- **Spiritual grounding/faith**

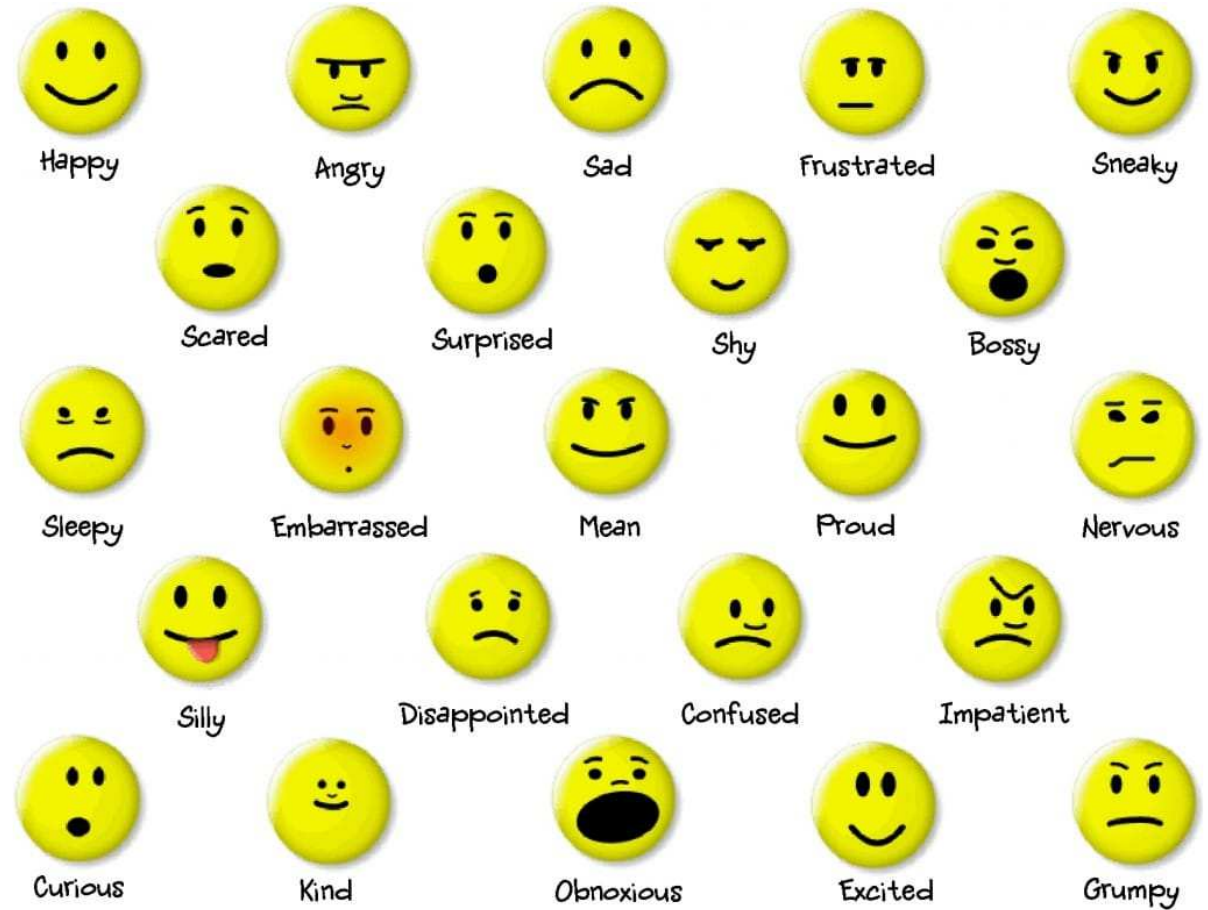
- **Ability to connect with the environment through means such as domestic or work activities, church, and other social organized institutions.**

Connect them to neighbors, church, community centers

(Crosson-Tower, 2014)

What Makes a Child Resilient?

- Ability to express range of emotions



What Makes a Child Resilient?

- **Adopt a philosophy of life that leaves them open to learning and growth**

Critique in front of them

- **A philosophy that helps them use their abuse to learn and grow**
- **The ability to reframe one's experience into useful lessons**

Let them talk about their experiences and how it has affected them

- **Ability to develop creative ways to survive, such as finding secret hiding places**

(Crosson-Tower, 2014)

What Makes a Child Resilient?

- **The ability to seek and make use of professional or self-help therapeutic activities**

Individual, group therapy, support groups and books

Let them tell their story, when the narrative is well built with a coherent story and a positive self-image, assessing one's role in the adversity in terms of degree of control, feeling guilty or responsible, and being active or passive, it can reduce PTSD (Stepp, 2008).

What Makes a Child Resilient?

- **Ability to assess reality for what it is and have some concept of “self” as a valuable identity**
- **The “will” to have something better than in the past**
- **Hope (teach them to dream)**a future oriented belief
- **Siblings/Pets**

(Crosson-Tower, 2014)

Study of Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse

- Ability to find supportive relationships outside the family of origin.
- Developed a sense of positive self-regard.
- Used spiritual grounding, sometimes in the form of religion, to bring them through the difficult times.
- Recognized their own personal power.
- Brought their locus of control inward while contributing blame and responsibility rightly to their abuser.

(Valentine & Feinauer, 1993)

Additional Ways to Build Resilience

Teach them coping skills (99 coping skills)

Connect them to websites that give education and support

<http://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/Pages/ways-to-get-help.aspx>

Mobile apps (mindfulness, coping skills, resilience, anger management, problem solving, often with games)

Work with the child to build their self-esteem, build them up instead of tearing them down.

Mindfulness

The practice of using our breath to focus our minds and bodies to make good choices.

The practice of noticing the present moment.

Mindfulness rewires and strengthens the brain.

Training our mind is like developing a muscle.

Self-regulation of mind and body.

We can choose not to get attached to our thoughts but learn to observe them.

In our pause of awareness, whereby we witness our thoughts, we can choose to respond wisely to them, rather than react blindly to them.

(Nance, 2018)

What mindfulness isn't

The stopping or our thoughts and feelings.

**blocked
feelings
are the
worst**

(Nance, 2018)

Be Mindful

- Teach children to be aware of their bodies, what happens when they are scared, angry and upset, how can they teach their bodies to relax (breathing exercises, counting to 10 or maybe 100, take a walk, talk to a friend).
- Have realistic expectation for children who have been maltreated.
- Remember to measure success differently.
- “Children who have been abused and neglected need nurturance, stability, predictability, understanding and support” (Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care, 2000).



Trauma- Informed Mindfulness

Grounding Exercise

*For use during a panic attack,
when you need to stay calm,
or anytime you feel "disconnected" from your body.*

Look around you. Identify + name:

5 things you **see**

4 things you **feel**

3 things you **hear**

2 things you **smell**

1 thing you **taste**



Mindfulness

Reduce Anxiety by Grounding Yourself

A mindfulness practice.
Sharon Martin, LCSW

1. Rate your anxiety on a scale of 1-10.
2. Sit up straight and tall. Place your feet on the floor. Relax your shoulders.
3. Breathe slowly and deeply.
4. How many windows are in the room?
5. How many electrical outlets do you see?
6. What does the chair or couch you're on feel like? Is it soft? Rough? Smooth?
7. What color are your pants? Your shoes?
8. What do you hear?
9. What material is the floor made of? Is it smooth or bumpy? Soft or hard? Dirty or clean? What imperfections can you see?
10. Name your favorite TV shows.
11. Name all of the types of shapes you can think of.
11. Rate your anxiety on a scale of 1-10. If it is still over a 5, repeat the grounding exercises.

Children Placed in Out of Home Care

- Keep siblings together if possible, unless the sibling relationship is abusive or negative.
- If separated from siblings, ensure there is as much natural contact between them as possible.
- Keep children in their communities and school if this is one of the child's positives.
- Place children within their own ethnicity and race if possible.
- Be attentive to children who identify as LGBTQAI, they need to be accepted for their sexual identity and orientation, ensure the home is adequately trained and accepting.

Things to be careful about.

- Focusing on pathology is not helpful to the child.
- Watch for labels “at risk” or “impoverished”.
- Being punitive is not helpful.
- Not all children can be resilient, or if so, not at the same level, do not compare and contrast, accept.





Remember

Children need to be “bought in”, what works for someone may not work for someone else.

Children need to be involved in their own planning.

The goal is not to address the problem one time but to teach them to be resilient through out their life, don't give them a fish teach them to fish.

The Marvel

“When will we also teach them what they are?”

- **We should say to each of them:**
- **Do you know what you are?**
- **You are a marvel. You are unique.**
- **In all the years that have passed,**
- **there has never been another child like you.**
- **Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers,**
- **the way you move.**
- **You may become a Shakespeare,**
- **a Michelangelo, a Beethoven.**
- **You have the capacity for anything.**
- **Yes, you are a marvel.**
- **And when you grow up, can you then harm**
- **another who is, like you, a marvel?**
- **You must work; we must all work,**
- **to make the world worthy of its children.” (Pablos Casals)**

10 Ways to Build Resilience

1. Make connections.
2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.
3. Accept that change is a part of living.
4. Move toward your goals.
5. Take decisive actions.
6. Look for opportunity for self-discovery.
7. Nurture a positive view of yourself.
8. Keep things in perspective.
9. Maintain a hopeful outlook.
10. Take care of yourself

(Jordan Institute for Families, 2006)

Don't give up.



Take Away

- Can you each tell me three things you can do in a normal day in your family, neighborhood and community to help build resilience in the children who are a part of your journey?



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