

# Stress, Resilience, & Accountability

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# Resilience

Resiliency is the ability to spring back from and successfully adapt to adversity.

"Bouncing back from problems and stuff with more power and more smarts."

Resilience has been variously defined as: *normal development under difficult circumstances, or the human capacity to face, overcome and ultimately be strengthened by life's adversities and challenges.*

# Three Trends in Resilience Studies

## ♦ Real Resilience

- ♦ Individuals who have ***relatively*** good psychological outcomes despite suffering significant risk experiences that would be expected to bring about serious negative results (Rutter, 2006).

## ♦ Ordinary Magic

- ♦ Resilience is common and arises from normative functions of human adaptation (Masten, 2001); “Hard-wired to bounce back” (Henderson).

## ♦ Inoculated Resilience

- ♦ Enhancing our *psychological immune system*
- ♦ “Smooth seas do not make for skillful sailors”- African proverb
- ♦ Views vulnerabilities as resources
- ♦ Capacity to turn adversity into triumphs/Pain into Purpose

# Are American kids becoming more fragile?

- A national, representative, face-to-face survey of more than 10,000 teens ages 13 to 18 found:
  - About 20 percent reported that they suffered from a mental disorder with symptoms severe enough to impair their daily lives.
  - 11 percent reported being severely impaired by a mood disorder (e.g., depression or bipolar disorder).
  - 10 percent reported being severely impaired by a behavior disorder such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or conduct disorder.
  - 8 percent reported being severely impaired by at least one type of anxiety disorder.

# A Cultural Shift?

- The Price of Privilege, M. Levine
- The Blessings of a Skinned Knee, W. Mogel
- The Self-Esteem Trap: Raising Confident and Compassionate Kids in an Age of Self-Importance, P. Young-Eisendrath
- A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting, H. Estroff Marano
- Raising Unselfish Children in a Self-Absorbed World, J. Rigby

# Cultural Factors That Undermine Resilience

- Breakdown of “authoritative communities”
- ♦ Perfectionism in children & parents
- Over-protective parenting (doing too much)
- Permissive parenting (doing too little in terms of character development)
- Performance-based identity & competitiveness
- Technology and the *virtual umbilical cord*
- Culture of immediate gratification, consumerism, and planned obsolescence
- Affluence: Advantage as Disadvantage

# How to interfere with the development of a robust psychological immune system



# Other ways to interfere with the development of a robust psychological immune system...

- ◆ The Fairfield County Paradox of Adultification and Infantilization
- ◆ Not teaching children to tolerate discomfort/frustration
- ◆ Overfunctioning/Underfunctioning relationships
- ◆ “The Power of NO”
  - ◆ “When we can no longer change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” V. Frankl
- ◆ Overemphasizing “cheap” self-esteem
- ◆ Not preparing children that life involves trials & tribulations
- ◆ Overvaluing achievement at the expense of prosocial values such as kindness and caring for others (“tending and befriending”)



“When mothers and fathers are seen as disproportionately valuing achievements: Implications for adjustment among upper middle class youth.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*  
Luthar et al.

- ♦ “In order to foster well-being and academic success during the critical years surrounding early adolescence, our findings suggest that parents should accentuate kindness and respect for others at least as much as (or more than) stellar academic performance and extracurricular accolades.”

# The Value of Stress

- ◆ Acceptance that stress is part of the human condition
- ◆ Mindset One: Stress is Harmful
- ◆ Mindset Two: Stress is Enhancing
- ◆ Avoidance
- ◆ Acceptance
- ◆ “Post-Traumatic Growth”
- ◆ Building the psychological immune system:
  - ◆ When dealing with current suffering, 82% say they are drawing on strength developed from past stressful experiences.

# Characteristics of Resiliency

- ♦ *Choosing* an attitude or “growth mindset” (Dweck) that:
  - ♦ Accepts that life involves pain
  - ♦ Belief in ability to cope/self-efficacy through experience
  - ♦ Hope
  - ♦ Rejects “victim mentality” looks for areas of control
  - ♦ “Internal locus-of-control”
    - ♦ To be able to define what one has control over (and what one does not) and to focus one’s time and energy on these areas of control
    - ♦ “What is it that I can do differently to change the situation?” rather than wait for others to change first, or blame others.

# Resiliency Characteristics (cont'd)

Finds hope, *meaning or purpose* in suffering or hardship

- ♦ “He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.”
- ♦ Capacity for acceptance of “what is”
- ♦ Perspective
  - ♦ To avoid self-pity: Attitude of Gratitude
- ♦ Belonging/Connectedness
  - ♦ Service
  - ♦ Responsibility to/for others
  - ♦ “Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships.”

- Dr. Suniya Luthar

# Boosting Resilience in our Children: It Begins with Us

- ♦ “If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.” – Carl Jung
- ♦ “Who we are and how we engage with the world are much stronger predictors of how our children will do than what we know about parenting.” –Brene Brown
- ♦ “Let me *be* the change I wish to see in the world [or in others].” - Gandhi

# Parenting to Boost Resilience

## ♦ Parenting stance

- ♦ Parenting philosophy, beliefs, style, and values:
  - ♦ Do you believe in the capacity of your child to meet challenges, overcome adversity, and become resilient?
  - ♦ Challenging the myth of the fragile child

## ♦ Parenting strategies

- ♦ Teaching problem-solving & coping skills
- ♦ Praising children for the qualities they can control (e.g., effort) rather than “traits” (e.g. intelligence).

# Parenting to boost resilience

- ♦ Believe in the capacity of your child to meet challenges, overcome adversity, and become resilient
- ♦ Model resilient characteristics
- ♦ Communicate that mistakes are opportunities from which to learn
- ♦ Allow your child enough room to make decisions to bolster confidence
- ♦ Help your child set *realistic* goals
- ♦ Connect your child to community that teaches what it means to be a good person
- ♦ Give your child responsibilities and opportunities to contribute to the family and the larger community
- ♦ Give your child opportunities to practice problem solving
- ♦ Embrace vulnerabilities and imperfections
- ♦ Value hard work, perseverance & respect (of oneself & others)

# “Hardwired to Connect”: The Importance of Community

- ♦ Caring creates resilience
  - ♦ “Tending and Befriending” instinct
  - ♦ Oxytocin: neurohormone for bonding and inhibits the fear centers of brain increasing
- ♦ Social support and the buffering hypothesis
- ♦ Isolation Kills
- ♦ Transform self-focus into greater-than-self goals
  - ♦ What do you want to contribute to the world?



# One last thought...

- ♦ *“The purpose of life is not to be happy—but to matter, to be productive, to be useful, to have it make some difference that you lived at all.”*

♦ Leo Rosten

# Thank you!

## Contact Information:

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