

Issue Overview

Each and every day, youth are faced with adversity and life challenges that can undermine mental health and interfere with learning. Typical challenges may include:

- Academic difficulty or pressure to succeed
- Family problems
- Peer relationship struggles or conflict
- Bullying
- Health issues
- Pressure to use drugs or alcohol
- Poverty
- Crises

What is it that allows youth to overcome and bounce back from these challenges? The answer is resiliency. You have the capacity to build resiliency in your child and in this issue, we hope to give you a framework for beginning to do that.

Your School Psychologist

Resiliency: A Key Skill for Life Success and Enjoyment

Resiliency is the capacity to overcome adversity by responding in healthy and productive ways to successfully meet life's challenges. More simply, it is the ability to bounce back. This ability to recover quickly from setbacks is a necessary skill in order to reach success. All youth have the capacity for resiliency that can grow and change over time. Building resiliency in youth is a critical strategy in the prevention of negative behaviors and the promotion of positive outcomes.

People bounce back in two ways. One is by relying on internal protective factors or our developmental assets. This refers to a common set of personal strengths or identifying characteristics associated with positive developmental outcomes. The more assets a youth has, the better, as possessing these assets help youth reach their ultimate potential.

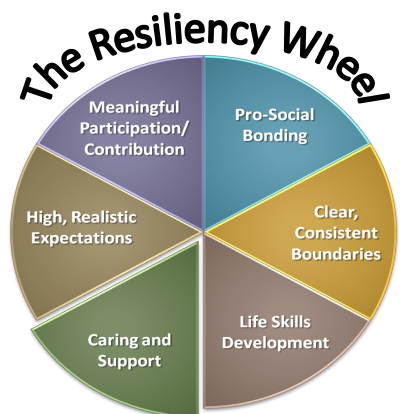
A second way that individuals bounce back is being wrapped with external protective factors or resiliency builders. These are external conditions that schools, families, and communities provide for youth to support them now and in the future. Fairfax County Public Schools adopted the Resiliency Wheel by Nan Henderson as a model for fostering resiliency. The wheel identifies six resiliency builders that research has shown to be effective in helping youth successfully meet the stress and challenges they face in their lives. The more resiliency builders or protective factors a youth has, the greater the likelihood they will make good choices and engage less in risk behaviors. Above all else, it is vital that youth have at least one caring, trusted, and supportive adult relationship in their life. We invite you to consider how you might be that trusted adult for a youth in your community.

FCPS Has Gathered Resiliency Resources for You

Last school year, Fairfax County Public Schools developed a website on resiliency for parents and educators. This website provides general information on resiliency with numerous links to resources in helping you put in place resiliency builders for your child.

FCPS Resiliency Website: <http://www.fcps.edu/dss/ips/resiliency/index.shtml>

You can find further information on resiliency and the Resiliency Wheel at Nan



Four Steps to Fostering Resiliency: A Toolkit for Parents

1) Communicate the Resiliency Attitude

The words we choose to say send clear messages to our children.

- “You are important to me.”
- “You have what it takes to get through this.”
- “What is right with you is more powerful than anything that is wrong.”

2) Adopt a Strengths Perspective

Fostering resiliency places a focus on your child’s strengths instead of deficits. Making use of your strengths is key to high achievement and happiness. Teaching children about their strengths and suggesting how they can be used in the future (specifically in problem-solving) leads to increased motivation to change.

3) Create a Protective Web using the Resiliency Wheel

Surrounding children with elements of the Resiliency Wheel serves as a safety net to help them bounce back when adversity arises. Here are some ideas for putting in place the six resiliency builders:

Caring and Support

Providing your child with unconditional positive regard, love, and encouragement.

- Ensure that your child has a positive bond with at least one caring, trusted, and supportive adult (i.e., mentor)
- Create a welcoming environment
- Build in opportunities for personal discussion
- Provide a good listening ear without judgment
- Provide kindness and celebrate successes

High, Realistic Expectations

Providing your child with an understanding that they can be successful.

- Tell your child you believe in them
- Help set attainable goals and a strive for mastery
- Praise efforts and recognize improvements
- Encourage and support trying new challenges
- Encourage cooperation over competition

Meaningful, Participation/Contribution

Providing your child with an opportunity to demonstrate their competence and eagerness to contribute to others.

- Get your child involved in community service and volunteer opportunities
- Tackle a shared learning project
- Give youth a collaborative voice in decision-making
- Share responsibilities and provide opportunities for leadership roles

Developmental Assets

All youth possess strengths. Help your children discover their personal ones.

- Relationships
- Service/Helpfulness
- Life Skills
- Humor
- Inner Direction
- Perceptiveness
- Independence
- Flexibility
- Positive View of Personal Future
- Love of Learning
- Self-Motivation
- Competence
- Self-Worth
- Spirituality
- Perseverance
- Creativity

Pro-Social Bonding

Providing your child with the establishment of positive relationships in the community.

- Promote a sense of family and community belonging
- Create a warm positive environment where youth can gather
- Encourage involvement in extracurricular activities
- Foster the development of talents and special interests
- Focus on building teamwork

Clear, Consistent Boundaries

Providing your child with clear guidance for acceptable behaviors that are age-appropriate.

- Collaboratively design clear behavioral expectations
- Make use of incentives for desired behaviors
- Deliver appropriate and consistent consequences
- Teach your child to be assertive and advocate for his/her needs

Life Skills Development

Providing your child with the independent skills needed to navigate through the challenges of life and make healthy choices.

- Teach appropriate social, problem-solving, and coping skills
- Talk about positive values and healthy choices
- Allow your child opportunities to solve their own problems and recognize positive choices
- Be a role model and recognize your own errors

4) Give it Time

Developing increased resiliency does not happen overnight. It takes time. Remain patient and do not give up.



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