

## *Turning Adversity into Resilience*

“The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having a problem is a problem.”

– Theodore Rubin

**T**ELL YOUR CHILD A STORY about a time when you asked a friend to play and she said no, or the day you got sick and missed the big field trip. The idea isn't to impart a moral lesson about how well you handled these situations but to show her that you understand her feelings. The stories we tell children about ourselves today tend to be more compassionate than teaching tales of the past.

Remember the old saying “I used to walk three miles in the snow to school,” which meant “Don't complain, just ‘suck it up’ the way I did”? We need to discuss adversity with children in empathic ways that bolster children's self-confidence. Learning to handle difficult situations is a crucial part of their development.

Today we know children need tools to help them build strength and optimism in the face of adversity. As Frederick Douglass once said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Luckily, psychology has developed a whole field of research on this topic, called resilience. Resilience means the strength to recover or bounce back, an invaluable trait for making one's way through life. We can't simply tell children to be resilient. Here are some ideas for nurturing those abilities.

**Support children's resilience during times of change.** When a child shows signs of stress, offer extra support. Come to pick him up early. Mark on the calendar when you're going to have a special date together. Provide a journal for your child to write down feelings or dictate them to you.

**Applaud the expression of feelings.** When a preschooler was crying loudly about being left at school, “Mr. Sean” Twohig said with enthusiasm, “He's really learning about his deep feelings.”

**Become a helpful witness.** Instead of trying to solve your child's problem (“Why don't you find someone else to play if your friend is with someone else?”), listen empathically to her feelings but with confidence in her abilities to handle them. Avoid being over solicitous (“That sounds terrible”) or dismissive (“That's not a big deal, get over it”).

**Teach optimism to establish positive thinking.** If your child does well on a test, emphasize the preparation she put in, even if she says she did well because “it was easy.” Research shows that optimists credit themselves when situations go well rather than attributing the happening to chance.

**Tell a story about a difficult situation and have your child suggest the ending.** It's easy to communicate our own anxiety if we insist on suggesting the ways our child should handle a situation. Think of your child as a capable problem solver, and praise her for resourcefulness.

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