

Tips on Promoting Resilience in Children

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Promote Belonging

Resilience is the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life. It is the strongest antidote we know of for self-harm, depression and drug abuse and it's built on our sense of belonging.

Have some mooch time

We live in a world that suffers from attention deficit disorder. We rush children from activity to activity, from lesson to lesson and from one organised event to another. Then we wonder why, when there is a lull that they say "I'm bored". Be a counter-revolutionary. Find some time each week just to be at home without anything structured happening.

Rediscover some family rituals

It doesn't matter whether it is the family walk after dinner, the Sunday roast, the Friday night pizza or the Saturday morning clean up; rituals are highly protective. The best rituals often cost nothing. These are the activities you hope that later on your children will reminisce and say "Mum always made sure we did." or Dad always made sure we did."

Spontaneity and curiosity

Spontaneity and curiosity are the building blocks of good mental health. You cannot tell someone how to have better mental health and you can't give it to them by getting them to read a book.

So the really hard message here is that if you want to raise your children to have mentally healthy lives you are going to have to have a good time yourself. If you want your children to succeed you need to show them that success is worth having.

Love kids for their differences

When families' function well people are allowed to be different and to be loved for those differences. We all know that children take on different roles. A father of three said "it's as if they have a planning meeting once a year and say 'you be the good kid, I'll be the sick kid and the other one can be the trouble-maker'! And then just when you think you've got it figured out they change roles again" Having children who are strongly individual and who have a sense of who they are is a sign of good parenting. The problem may, of course, be that they will then express their independent spirit in ways that you don't like. The ideal is someone who has their own independent nature but is comfortable enough with themselves to allow inter-dependence.

Make it is clear who is in charge

Families do not work well as democracies. In fact they seem to work best as benevolent dictatorships in which the parent or parents consult a lot with their children but at the end of the day, the parent has the final say. Some parents fear

that if they take charge they will lose the friendship of their children, but often the reverse is true.

Consistency

Consistency is the ideal. Having parents' who agree on rules and standards and who convey the same sorts of messages and who value compassion over coercion, clearly have the best outcome in terms of children's well being. It is also important that parents not be open to manipulation; rather they work together as a team.

Sometimes parents have different value systems or can't come to a consistent way to handle particular areas. In these situations, a second possibility is to for one parent to take charge of a particular area.

Teach the skills of Self-esteem

Families that work well seem to praise one another a lot. Compliments are made, positive efforts are commented on. Optimism is in the air. Even in these families, teenagers still shrug and say, "yeah Mum" or "yeah Dad" whenever a compliment is made.

Teaching the skills of self-praise is useful. One way of doing this is to ask questions about any achievement or accomplishments. Asking questions like "How did you do that?" "How come you did so well at that test?" and "Have you been doing homework behind my back?"

Know how to Argue

Families that work well know how to argue. It seems strange to say this because we all have the sense those families that work well don't have conflicts. The family is really where we learn to resolve disputes fairly. The way that parents teach children to resolve differences of opinion with their brothers and sisters provides the basis for sharing, negotiating and problem solving in the world beyond the family. While differences of opinion should be allowed to be expressed, children also need to learn that they will not be able to win at all costs

Parents are reliably unpredictable

With young children it is important to provide consistency and predictability. This allows them to feel secure. As they get older it is important to have structure and consistency but it is also useful to act in ways that your children wouldn't expect. This keeps them interested in learning from you or least wondering what you are up to.