

Nurturing Resilient Families

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reduce stress & connect with your family

Over the past few weeks, I have had a lot of families reach out, asking about the long-term effects of displacement, being quarantined, change of routines, and familial stress. Understanding **stress** and **resilience** can help you navigate these uncertain times.

Stress can manifest itself in different ways. The long-term effects of stress are determined by how we face and manage that stress. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child outlines a continuum of stress that is broken down into three main areas, **Positive**, **Tolerable**, and **Toxic**.

Stress is not the same for everyone; what might be **Positive** for one person may be **Tolerable** for another person. **Toxic** stress however, is the result of strong, frequent, and/or prolonged biological responses to obstacles in ones life, which can cause long-term damage to brain architecture.

How can we make sure this current situation does not turn into Toxic stress for our families?

Nurturing and supportive adult responses to stressors are the primary ways to keep Toxic stress at bay. Creating an environment that supports the development of resilience is what helps us navigate the negative experiences in our lives and continue to move forward.

Resilience is a person's ability to face and overcome stressful events that occur biologically, physiologically and in their environment.

Resilience is not something we are born with; ***resilience is a skill we must work to develop***. While some might people's temperament may lend them to be more adept, resilience is developed over time when children (and adults) are faced with stressful situations and overcome them. *We are able to overcome stressful situations by learning how to manage our thoughts, behaviors, and actions in supportive environments.*

What strategies can we use to promote resilience?

The strategies Paula Davis-Laack (author of "Seven Strategies for Building Your Family's Resilience") outlines can be applied to our current situation to help combat stress and build resilience.

Shut Down Catastrophic Thinking

This downward-spiral style of thinking invites panic, anxiety, and overwhelming stress. This type of thinking may make it feel impossible to take action. ***Try to base your thinking on facts.*** Modeling this for your children will help give them the skills they need to be resilient in times of uncertainty. Working to avoid this kind of thinking will help you stay calm and rational, even in the toughest of situations.

Create a Strengths Family Tree

Take an opportunity to discuss and highlight what each family member does well. ***Have a family meeting and come up with a list of each person's strengths.*** It does not matter how old your child is, they all have a strengths-baby cuteness and giggles are some of the best strengths! When a stressful situation arises, have a discussion about how you can each use your respective strengths to come to a collaborative solution.

Grab the Good Stuff

Practice optimism. No really, practice it! Our brain can take us down a dark path; looking for the silver lining may seem silly, but putting this into practice can help you find the good in the dark. Studies show that making this activity a habit can lead to higher levels of happiness and optimism. ***Creating a gratitude journal with your kids is a great way to model grabbing the good stuff.***

Encourage Positive Risks and Discuss Lessons Learned From Failing

I have yet to meet a perfect person, someone who has never made a mistake. Mistakes happen to everyone and should be treated as learning experiences. Fear of failure often leads to fear of trying at all, which may inhibit you or your child from reaching for goals. Successfully failing is an art; it requires reflection, self-improvement, and forgiveness. ***Create a safe place for your children to discuss their failures where they are not judged, but rather, these skills are modeled to help them learn.***

Rejuvenate Regularly

It is crucial to remember that you cannot take care of anyone else if you are not taking care of yourself. This is one of the hardest lessons we all have to learn. Personal health and wellbeing are crucial to fostering resilience. Make sure you are taking the time to work out, meditate, whatever you need to allow yourself to rejuvenate. ***You can check out free classes from [Z&B Fitness](#), both live and archived.***

Be There For Each Other When Things Go Right

When good news arrives, your response can play a significant role in shaping how your family members take in the news. In the current climate, it may feel like good news is few

and far in between, so seize it! Focusing on the positive and celebrating those moments can strengthen family bonds and lay a foundation of optimism.

Allow Family Members to Replicate Success

For example, instead of saying, "Great job on that assignment, you're so smart!" Try, "You really showed that you understand the material, and I can tell you really did your best! I'm so impressed!" The latter praises your child's specific effort, which is in their control, rather than the result achieved, which may be less so. While at home, you can do this for chores, e-learning, or for younger ones, exploring and developing.

Resilience is not built overnight. This is a skill we work on our entire lives. The beauty of resiliency is we learn from the worst and come out better and stronger.

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