

Building Resilience by Modelling It

We are continuing to revisit a frequently requested topic because we regard it as extremely important for the young and the not so young too. In his recent book, *The Good Life*, Dr Hugh Mackay, Australian Social Analyst and Researcher writes about the importance of building resilience and the vital part it plays in the pursuit of happiness. Resilience is the ability to adapt to all kinds of adversity including trauma, tragedy, threats, setbacks, stress and disappointments. Without resilience one is unable to reach his/her potential and finding happiness as an independent person without resilience is almost impossible. Highly important is the modelling of resilience by the family. This article focuses on parents as role models while acknowledging the difficulties faced when aiming to be the best role models possible.

What is good parental role modeling and what does good parental role modelling look like specifically for the development of resilience?

Good parental role modelling is behaving in a way that serves as an example to children in how they should behave, speak and engage with others. As we know children take mental pictures of everything they see. They play these observations back to you in words and actions.

- Express your own feelings positively and constructively. Consider how you express feelings like love, affection, anger, frustration, hurt, disappointment and conflict. Is it constructively or destructively? Children will learn to manage their feelings by how they see parents/caregivers respond to these same feelings. Saying 'I am really upset about what happened at work today' is better than saying 'My colleague is a'. The latter is likely to encourage a child overhearing this, to use the same negative language about someone who is upsetting them. Statements which begin with "I", followed by an identified feeling are safe and clear expressions of emotions and are an important role model because when children copy this expression they will be understood by others and are likely to be empathised with.
- Teach resilience in coping with disappointments, hurt and frustrations. Things may not go well sometimes but it doesn't have to be that way all the time. Teach children that feelings are transitory—they come and go, so even bad feelings do pass. For example, students in the Junior School will learn of their new class grouping this week and may find that some of their friends are in the other class. The feeling of disappointment will perhaps be expressed and to help with developing resilience, be a feedback loop for that feeling of disappointment. Name the feeling and then find a positive in the situation. For example, "I can see you are feeling disappointed that is not in your class next year, but isn't it great that ... is with you." Children can be encouraged to learn from experiences of disappointment. They may like hearing about your own difficult experiences as a child and what positive things you learnt from them.
- Encourage children to use problem solving skills at all ages. When your child experiences a dilemma or personal difficulty help them by asking them to look at the options available, suggest different options if they are flummoxed and then choose one together that you both think will work best. This helps children to have a sense of empowerment in their lives and also teaches good problem solving skills, which will help in all areas of their life.

- Talk about showing courage when there is fear or apprehension, and encourage facing fears in a positive way, step by step, within the child's capacity and age. You might tell them you have felt the same way at times and use an example in keeping with the child's concerns and level of understanding. They will feel less isolated more supported, and hopefully show more courage to face their own fears.

- Role play scenarios, such as saying 'stop' to a bully, what to do when someone takes something that belongs to you, or joining in a game with others in the playground. Parents and children can act out lots of different styles of behaviour—good and bad—on how to do things. Children can try out how to do things in the safety of the home, playing out possible different scenarios. In Grade 4 we have been thinking about the idea of making a positive comment about a game (“Your game looks fun!”) rather than asking to play (“Can I play?”). It can be a fun family activity and can really help children to build their confidence too.

Resilience is like other personal attributes; it requires teaching, practice and continued refinement. The byproduct of this developed skill is that your child will be more receptive to the feelings of others when they are faced with difficult challenges. Modelling the desired behaviours and commenting on the effort made by your child will enhance your relationship with him/her while assisting them to navigate and bounce back from tough times and move forward to better times.

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