Building Resilience –
Helping children help themselves

The capacity that people have to recover (or bounce back) after they have experienced difficulties or tough times is what we commonly refer to as resilience. Being resilient is an important life skill that children need to develop in order to lead happy and healthy lives. Having the skills to cope with ‘setbacks’ in life has been proven to reduce the onset of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression and also reduce the chances of young people engaging in maladaptive coping strategies such as substance abuse (McGrath & Noble, 2003).

There are many educational psychologists and scholars in Australia who have developed programmes for helping children build resilience. Lyn Worsley and Michael Grose are two people who I have been fortunate enough to hear present at professional development courses and are leaders in the area of resilience training. They claim that there is a great deal we can do as parents to assist our children in becoming more resilient and able to cope when they experience sadness, difficulties and hard times.

Lyn Worsley is a Clinical Psychologist who has developed a tool called the Resilience Doughnut which “is a model for building resilience that considers both the internal qualities of a resilient person as well as the factors in the person’s environment which support and interact with those internal qualities.” http://www.parentingideas.com.au/Parents/resilience

In her research, Worsley (2010) found that much work had been done on trying to find out why children are not coping in life but there was not a great deal of literature that focused on defining the common qualities of children who are resilient. The Resilience Doughnut focuses on seven factors that have the potential to enhance positive beliefs within a person which, in turn, will help develop resilience. People use the Resilience Doughnut to identify factors in which they are strong and weak. Suggestions are then provided for how to enhance each factor.

On Michael Grose’s “Parenting Ideas” website he states that parents can promote a lasting sense of resilience in their children by;

1. Having a positive attitude yourself. Your attitude as a parent impacts on their ability to bounce back from some of the difficulties they face. Make sure you model a ‘you can do it’ attitude for your child when he meets some of life’s curve balls.
2. Look for teachable moments. Many kids’ learning opportunities are disguised as problems. Make the most of these opportunities so that kids can grow and learn from some of the challenges they face.
3. Make kids active participants in the family. Active participation in a family develops the self-help, problem-solving and independence skills of kids that are necessary for resilience.
4. Build kids’ coping skills. There are plenty of strategies you can pass on to kids to help them cope when life doesn’t go their way, including acceptance, getting away for a while, and normalisation. http://www.parentingideas.com.au/Parents/resilience

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