

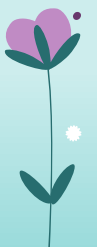
The Rubber Band Phenomenon: Building Resilience in Young Children

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Summer 2020



Objectives

- Review different types of stress and their impact on children.
- Define resilience and describe its benefits.
- Identify individual, family and community factors associated with resilience.
- Discuss research-supported ways to build resilience in young children.



Positive Stress

- Body's stress system activated
 - Short period of time
 - Caring and responsive adult helps with coping
 - Normative stressors
 - Daily frustrations
 - Developmental transitions
- **Growth promoting**
 - Provides opportunities to observe and practice adaptive responses



Shonkoff, J.P. & Garner, A.S. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), 232-246.

Tolerable Stress

- Body's stress system is activated
 - For a longer time
 - Greater magnitude of stress
 - Due to non-normative events
 - Off time developments
 - Initial awareness or diagnosis
 - Unexpected or unusual events
- **Ability to cope depends on degree of support from caregivers and child's sense of control**



More than half of children ages 2-5 have experienced a severe stressor in their lifetime.

Shonkoff, J.P. & Garner, A.S. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), 232-246.

Chronic Stress

- Body's stress system is activated
 - Very frequently
 - For a prolonged period of time
 - In response to persistent stimuli
- May have detrimental effects on brain and behavior
- **Up to 90% of all illness and disease is stress related (CDC, 2012)**
 - Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and other physical illnesses, depression, anxiety



Biology

- Gene expression
 - Genetic variants = production of proteins to control stress response
 - Sensitivity of genes to environmental influences, both positive & negative
- Brain structure & function
 - Chemicals like oxytocin & vasopressin (social behavior)
 - Fear & reward circuits (emotion regulation)
 - Neural connections among brain regions (capacity for recovery, behavioral control, emotional wellness)
- Immune-related responses
 - Elevated inflammatory responses
 - Exposure to bacteria & viruses



Coping I

- **Process of managing and enduring stressor events**
 - Managing emotions
 - Direct actions (e.g., finding resources, learning new skills)
 - Cognitive strategies (e.g., reframing the problem, altering perceptions of event)
- Problem focused = change the situation
- Emotion focused = change the self
- **Flexible use of many strategies associated with better coping**
- Coping may be maladaptive, maintain the status quo, or promote growth and positive change

Coping II

SURVIVE

- Improves with practice
 - Stealing effects—engagement with stress prepares child for better adaptation
 - **Overprotection undermines the development of independent coping skills**
- Many threats are ambiguous; children look to adults for help making sense of them
- Self-blame associated with greater maladjustment
 - Autonomy granting is negatively associated with self-blame
- Challenge appraisals = adaptive



The Three Cs

- People who manage stress (cope) best have:
 - **Control**—a belief in their ability to take charge and influence outcomes
 - **Challenge**—a view of mistakes as opportunities for growth
 - **Commitment**—an active engagement in activities that give meaning to life



Kobasa, S.C., Maddi, S. R., Puccetti, M.C. & Zola, M.A. (1985). Effectiveness of hardiness, exercise and social support resources against illness. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 29, 525-533.

Resilience I

- **Ability to steer through serious life challenges; a pattern of positive adaptation in the face of adversity**
 - Only identifiable when one is challenged
- Definitions of risk and resilience influenced by culture and context
 - Situation specific, rather than a trait applied in all contexts
- Exposure to multiple risks is common
- Assets, resources, or compensatory factors vs. protective factors
 - Same effect across all levels of risk vs. added or special effect when risk was high

Resilience II

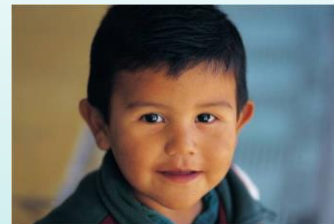
THRIVE

- Everyone is born with capacity for resilience (ordinary magic)
- Cultivated throughout life—starting in infancy
- Requires **outside supports** and **inner strengths** working together
- **Most children, even after severe acute or chronic adversities, show resilience in some form!**



Benefits of Resilience

- Better health and longer life
- More success in school and work
- Happier relationships
- Less depression
- Ability to deal with stress and adversity
- Ability to overcome childhood disadvantages
- **Ability to seek and embrace new opportunities**



Outside Resources

- Caring relationships
- Positive role models in families and communities
- Community resources



Inner Strengths

- Self-control
- Thinking skills
- Optimism
- Confidence
- Responsibility and participation



Critical Abilities I

- **Emotional regulation**—ability to keep calm under pressure and express emotions in a way that helps the situation
- **Impulse control**—ability to stop and choose whether to act on the desire to take action; the ability to delay gratification and follow through on goals and plans
- **Causal analysis**—ability to analyze problems and accurately decide what the causes are
- **Empathy**—ability to understand the feelings and needs of another person

Critical Abilities II

- **Realistic optimism**—ability to keep a positive outlook without denying reality
- **Self-efficacy**—belief that one has the ability to solve problems, handle stress and persevere
- **Reaching out**—ability to embrace new opportunities and reach out to others



Caring Relationships



- Comfort children when they're upset.
- Ask about their feelings and thoughts. Listen with interest.
- Put yourself in their shoes. Use and model empathy.
- Read or tell child stories about people who show compassion, kindness and understanding for others.
- Teach children how to make & keep friends.
- Give them attention and affection. Smile, play and laugh with them.
- Model reaching out for support when needed.

The Child and Family Partnership, 2011

Self-Control



- Teach children how to take deep breaths, calm down, and focus their attention.
- Model the importance of eating properly, exercising and resting.
- Build in unstructured time during the day to allow child to be creative.
- Help them practice waiting for what they want.
- Encourage them to keep on trying when they're faced with obstacles.
- Show them there are no magic solutions to problems—solutions may take time and effort.

The Child and Family Partnership, 2011

Thinking Skills

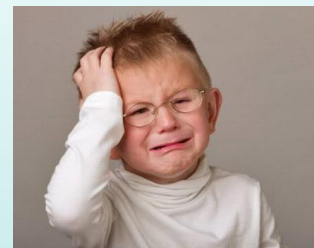
- Help children talk about their worries and frustrations.
- Gently challenge their negative thinking and help them find other ways to see the situation.
- Ask for their ideas about how to solve problems. Encourage flexible thinking.
- Help them see that most problems are temporary and have solutions.



The Child and Family Partnership, 2011

Changing Explanatory Styles

- **From internal to external**
 - This is not my fault.
- **From global to specific**
 - This is one small thing; it is not my whole life.
- **From permanent to impermanent**
 - I can change this situation; this stress will pass.



“What are you saying to yourself?”

“What are you thinking inside your head?”

“What is your brain telling you?”

Seligman, M. E. P., Reivich, K., Jaycox, L. & Gillham, J. (2007). *The optimistic child*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Positive Outlook & Optimism



- Celebrate and share stories about life's simple pleasures.
- Teach children to see beauty all around them, especially in nature.
- Use books and movies to show that life goes on after bad events.
- Model gratitude. Show them how to express appreciation every day for the positives in life.
- Help child see that change is part of life and teaches us new things about ourselves.
- Help them celebrate their culture and heritage.

The Child and Family Partnership, 2011

Confidence



- Point out their strengths. Every child has them!
- Tell them mistakes are OK—and mean it. Mistakes are part of learning.
- Offer encouragement. Help them take small steps and see their progress.
- Offer choices. Making choices helps children feel some control and learn to make decisions.
- Have a plan in place for emergencies and share it with the child so she knows that there are decisive actions she can take.

The Child and Family Partnership, 2011

Responsibility & Participation

- Give children responsibility for doing things you know they can do.
- Find ways for children to help family, neighbors, and others in the community.
- Describe how your child's actions contribute to the well-being of others.
- Nurture their interests and hobbies.
- Encourage children to participate in school and community activities.



The Child and Family Partnership, 2011

Summary

- Stress, adversity, and challenge are inevitable parts of daily life.
- The way we think about stress makes a substantial difference in how we cope with serious challenges and daily bumps in the road.
- A resilient perspective is based on accurate and flexible thinking.
- **Resilience includes a set of skills that can be taught.**
- We can build resilience by changing how we think about challenges and opportunities.

Selected References & Resources

- <http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents.htm>
- www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx
- www.developingchild.harvard.edu
- <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

