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


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**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.
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

• Improves with practice
  • Steeling 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


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

- 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?”

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.

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.

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](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents.htm)
- [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)
- [http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/)