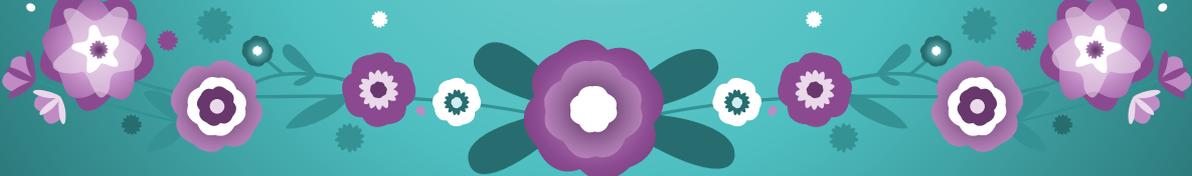




# The Rubber Band Phenomenon: Building Resilience in Young Children

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## 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](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx)
- [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)
- <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

