



# Resilience Summary

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## Why Resilience?

Your infant's openness to engage in new things and recover from difficult experiences are essential to developing lifelong resilience. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-infant relationship while forming a trusting, loving attachment that will grow resilience and establish foundational life skills in the future.

**Tip** These steps are best done when you and your infant are not tired or in a rush.

**Tip** Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parenting relationship will support these steps.

## Step 1. Getting to Know and Understand Your Infant's Input

- Consider how the distinct sounds of your infant's cries connect with their body language. It is okay if you are unsure or don't know what your infant is trying to communicate with you. Every infant is unique, and it takes time to learn. Check out these common cues and see if they match your infant's feelings and associated needs.
  - If infants are uncomfortable, they may issue a less intense, short, whiny cry like "eh, eh, eh."
  - If infants are in pain, their eyes may be closed or may open for a second and look blankly into the distance. Parents often feel a greater sense of urgency with this cry. If it's gas pain, they may scrunch up their face and pull their legs up.
  - If infants are scared, their eyes may remain open. Their head may move backwards. They may have a penetrating look and an explosive cry. They might suddenly extend their legs, arch their back, and then curl up again -- an involuntary startle response.
  - If infants are tired, they may rub their eyes while they open and close them. They may pull at their ears and yawn.
- Working to identify their specific cries and physical cues can help you be responsive to their needs. For example, if an infant is uncomfortable, respond by loosening or changing clothing or swaddling or changing their position and see if it helps to soothe.
- If your response to your infant's cues doesn't seem to help, that's okay. Test another response and see if it helps to soothe. It takes time to learn what your infant is communicating with you.

As you practice, you'll get better at recognizing their style of communication. They will feel a greater sense of your understanding and responsiveness, so that your interactions become more two-way instead of one-way.

**Tip** Grow your own resilience by creating a plan for calming down. Research shows that infants cry less when their caregiver is less stressed. Secure your infant's safety, then close your eyes, and breathe deeply. Crying creates stress in adults so be sure and take breaks when you need them.

## Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Use your tone of voice and facial expression to help your infant celebrate when they have gotten through a change such as a new child care arrangement, sleeping in a new place, trying a new food, and so on.
- Model resilience while interacting with your infant. Modeling resilience can be one of the greatest teaching tools.
  - Share the focus. As you spend time with your infant, follow their lead. They likely will signal with a short cry or simply change their attention when they need to shift their focus.
  - Notice gestures and listen for thought and feeling. Attempt to figure out what your infant is trying to tell you through their sounds, gestures, and facial expressions.
  - Infants require your attention to thrive. So, why not build a special time into your routine when you are fully present to listen to what your infant has to tell you? Turn off your phone. Set a timer if needed. Then, notice your body language. Ask yourself, "What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating that I'm listening?"
- Ensure daily face-to-face interactions.
  - Talk up close to your infant. Make a point when they are in a high chair, crib, or stroller to get down on their level. Narrate what's going on around you or talk about overcoming a challenge.
  - When encountering new people or situations, get on eye level and introduce your infant to those new experiences to help them feel safe.
  - Express love up close. Children need to hear they are loved at every age. Start now and get in the habit of assuring your infant they are loved no matter what.
- Hold your infant close regularly. Infants require close contact with their parents. Skin-to-skin contact reduces stress and promotes immunity to disease. Heart rates sync up as well as emotions when infants are held closely.
  - Rocking in a rocking chair is a soothing way to connect and hold an infant.
  - Baby carriers offer a way to move about with your infant close to your heart.
  - Share the holding. Enlist other trusted family members or friends to share in holding your infant close.

## Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Your infant will thrive with a predictable daily routine. Help your infant learn their daily routine and point out moments when the routine will change. *"Tomorrow, grandma is coming! We will wake up early to meet her at the bus station. It will be dark outside. We will get up early and go."*
- Retell your story of overcoming a change in routine. *"Do you remember when grandma came early in the morning and we woke up when it was still dark outside? Waking up early was different for us, and we did it. And now grandma is here!"*

- Narrate your day as you go about your household chores or run errands. This narration fosters connection with your infant and provides lots of opportunities to share how to overcome challenges.

## Step 4. **Support** Your Infant's Development and Success

- Learn about your infant's development. Each new age presents different challenges. Being informed about your child's developmental milestones offers you guidance on appropriate challenges.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed that you were able to take a nap in a different room. I love seeing that."*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your infant is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your infant's ability to face the unfamiliar. In a gentle, comforting voice, you can say, *"You tried something like this before, and it was fun. It's OK to try this."*
- Actively reflect on how your infant is feeling when approaching challenges. Offering comfort when facing new situations can help your infant gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away. *"You seem worried; let me hold you so you feel more confident."*
  - You can also offer comfort items to help your infant face new challenges. *"Would your blanket help you feel better?"* Swaddle your infant or you may use a pacifier to offer comfort

**Trap** Don't move on quickly if your infant shows interest in trying something new. Infants often need more time to explore new things. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain skills over time.

## Step 5. **Recognize** and Celebrate

- Smile at your infant.
- Make eye contact.
- Use caring facial expressions.
- Be physically gentle and caring with your infant.
- Use words to celebrate and encourage: *"I notice you were looking at our new neighbor. It was fun to meet someone new."*
- Build celebrations into your everyday routines. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

**Tip** The first year is filled with amazing changes -- and not just for your infant. Don't forget to recognize and celebrate your own development and milestones as a parent.

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