



# Resilience Summary

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## Why Resilience?

Your child's openness to engage in manageable challenges and recover from difficult experiences are essential to developing lifelong resilience. You can begin by exposing your child to challenges that are just the right size for them, offer just enough support for them to know they can trust you, and help them recognize and feel a sense of success and empowerment when they master the experience.

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

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

## Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Help your child notice and name their own cues so they can develop self-awareness and learn to trust their own feelings. This includes describing and naming the pride they may feel when they have gotten through a challenging situation.
- Each time there is an opportunity, share how you are feeling and ask your child how they feel: *"I am feeling happy; are you feeling happy?"*
  - For example, if your child is with others who are all facing a challenging situation - such as the first day in a new child care room - help your child notice their own thoughts and reactions and those of the other children. You might even name what expressions and body language you notice: *"That little girl just ran over to the block area with a big smile on her face. Her running and her smile make me think she is excited to check out the blocks in this new room."*
- When reading books, look at the images of people and ask your child what they notice about the characters that shows them being resilient. Ask, *"How do you think the horse is feeling? Did he get through that big challenge?"*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe their feelings or how others are feeling, consider asking questions, naming what you notice, and leaving plenty of quiet space after your questions so they have an opportunity to share their ideas too.
  - *"How did you feel when you first saw the new classroom? I noticed some children were very excited about the toys."*
  - *"I am feeling happy to see you. How do you feel right now?"*

- *“How do you think you will feel when we come back tomorrow morning?”*

**Tip** Grow your own resilience by creating a plan for calming down. Research shows that children cry less when their caregiver is less stressed. Secure your child’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 child 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.
- Read and “pretend play” together.
  - During reading time, select a book of faces to help your child learn to identify the different feelings of other children. Point out what you notice and how you can tell what each child is feeling. Be sure to point out moments when children successfully overcome difficulties.
  - After reading a story together, act out what feelings look like together. *“First she looked sad (make a sad face) and then she got help and looked happier (make a happy face).”*
- Share your thoughts and feelings: *“I did not expect this room to be so messy. I don’t know how we are going to be able to clean it up before our friends arrive. This big mess is making me feel very worried. Maybe I will start to feel better after we get all of the puzzle pieces picked up. Can you help too? I am sure we can handle this big mess if we work together.”*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *“It made me feel so much better to tell you how I was feeling and to ask for help.”*
- Grow optimism. In addition to growing these essential skills that foster resilience, there are beliefs and attitudes that you can promote. For example, when your child is struggling to complete a task, you can respond,
  - *“Some things can feel really hard but then it is possible to get through them after all.”*
  - *“Do you remember last time when this seemed hard? You took a deep breath, and were able to do it.”*
  - *“I wonder if we can do something that will help us get through this challenge.”*

**Tip** Establish a routine for both you and your child to calm down when frustrations or upset arise. What will you say? For example, *“I need to calm down.”* What will you do? Keep tools at hand such as a calming app, gentle music, a sound machine, stuffed friends, and soft blankets.

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

- Learn about your child's development. Each new age presents different challenges. Being informed about your child's developmental milestones offers you guidance on appropriate challenges.
- Provide opportunities for your child to do things that are more challenging than what they have done before. The goal is to come up with experiences that are just beyond what they are comfortable with. If they have already mastered a short slide, is there another playground that you can go to with a bigger slide that they can try? If it is too big, look for a medium one they can go down so it feels like a successful experience.
- Provide books, dolls, and other materials at home that give children a chance to see people who face challenges and do not necessarily get through them the first time. Do you tell stories of someone who was not able to succeed at first, but kept trying? Describe how that person is building resilience to get through challenging times.
- Use your child's dolls or stuffed animals to act out moments of resilience-building. This is a good way to practice facing really big challenges that your child might be experiencing or about to experience, such as a move, a new baby in the family, or a major medical situation. You can name the feelings that the doll might feel and come up with some strategies to help the doll feel stronger to face the challenge. Should the doll take a breath and ask for help? Should the doll bring something that will make them feel better? Does the doll have special skills that can help them in this moment?

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

- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed that you were nervous about having a new childcare provider, and you got through it and had a good time after all. I love seeing that."*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your child is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your child's ability to face the new. In a gentle, non-public way, you can say, *"Remember how last time it seemed like it would be hard but you tried it and it turned out to be fun? I thought you might like this challenge too."*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges. You can offer reflections like:
  - *"You seem worried about playing with the new kids in your class."* Offering comfort when facing new situations can help your child gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away.
  - You can also offer comfort items to help your child face new challenges. *"Would your bear help you feel better?"* Bring a comfort item with you as you face new challenges.

**Trap** Don't move on quickly if your child shows interest in a new person. Children often need more time to adjust to new individuals. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to warm up to the new person. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain relationship skills over time.

## Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. *“I notice you have gotten more comfortable coming to grandma’s house and spending the night with her!”*
- Recognize small steps along the way: *“You faced that challenge even though it was hard. I like seeking that!”*
- Notice when your child tries something new or recovers smoothly from a challenging situation. These conversations might start happening naturally during your bedtime routine or when snuggling up to read stories together.
- Build celebrations into your everyday routine. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

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