

Resilience Age 3 Summary

Why Resilience?

As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you play an essential role in your child's success. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship; growing resilience provides a perfect opportunity.

STEP

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Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Help your child notice and name their cues to develop self-awareness and learn to trust their feelings. This includes describing and naming the pride they may feel when they have gotten through a challenging situation. Pointing out their resilience will help them notice it and know it is there when the next challenge arises.
- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, "What do you notice? How do you feel? How do you think the other child feels? What are you wondering?"
 - For example, if your child is with others who are all facing a challenging situation - such as the first day in a new childcare room - help your child notice their 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. Her running and smile make me think she is excited to check out the blocks in this new room. Do you think that she is excited?"
 - You can also point out how your child seems to feel at the end of the day and how that seems different than what you noticed at the beginning. "It seems you are happy that you met new friends and had fun playing. This differs from how you looked this morning when you were pretty uncertain about entering the room. I think you were able to get over your uncertainty and have fun today. Is that true?"
- When reading books, look at the images of people and ask your child what they notice about the people that show them being resilient. Ask, "How do you think that character is feeling? Did they get through that big challenge?" If your child does not respond to your questions, shift to narrating your observations. For example, "I think the horse feels proud. His chest is puffed up, and he has just accomplished something challenging!"
- If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe all of the feelings that occur when trying to be resilient 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 noticed other children took more time to look around and get comfortable. Was there anything that made you feel nervous?”
- “I am feeling happy to see you. How do you feel right now?”
- “I wonder how you will feel when we come back tomorrow?”
- “Is there anything we can do to remember how resilient you were today?”

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 take breaks when you need them.

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Teach New Skills

- Use your tone of voice and facial expression to help your child celebrate when they have gotten through a change, such as a new childcare 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. Do the children’s feelings change based on their experiences in the book? 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. Talk about what you notice, how you feel, why you feel it, and what signs you are giving even when it’s uncomfortable. *“I did not expect we would get home so late. I don’t know how we can clean up before our friends arrive. This mess is making me feel very worried. Maybe I will feel better after we get the toys picked up. Can you help, too? I am sure we can handle this if we work together.”*
- Talk aloud about how you respond to your 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 uses definitive language like, “I will never be able to do this,” you can respond,
 - *“Some things can feel tough, 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 to help us overcome this challenge.”*

Trap: Don't tell your child what they feel; ask instead. Three-to-four-year-olds strive for independence and may create a dispute if you are too direct about their thoughts and feelings. You might say, *"You look angry. Is that right?"*

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Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Learn about your child's development. Each new age presents different challenges, and being informed about your child's developmental milestones can offer guidance on appropriate challenges.
- Provide opportunities for your child to do more challenging things than they have done before. The goal is to create experiences that are just beyond what they are comfortable with. If they have already mastered a game, is there another slightly more challenging game you can play?
- Provide books, dolls, and other materials at home that allow children to see people who face challenges and do not necessarily get through them the first time around. Do you tell stories of someone who could not succeed initially but kept trying? Describe how that person is building resilience to get through hard times.
- Use your child's dolls or stuffed animals to act out moments of resilience-building. This is an excellent way to practice facing really big challenges that the child might be experiencing or about to experience, such as a move, a new baby in the family, or a significant medical situation. You can name the feelings the doll might feel and develop 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?

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Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Recognize effort using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed that you were nervous about going to the new center, but you got through it and had a good time. 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 your child is able to gain relationship skills over time.



Recognize Efforts

- Recognize small steps along the way. Don’t wait for significant accomplishments—like the full bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after getting through your bedtime routine, snuggle and read before bed.

Trap: It can be easy to resort to bribes when recognition and occasional rewards are underutilized. If parents or those in a parenting role frequently resort to bribes, it is likely time to revisit the five-step process.

Trap: Think about what behavior a bribe may unintentionally reinforce. For example, offering a sucker if a child stops a tantrum in the grocery store checkout line may teach the child that future tantrums lead to additional treats.

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