

BUILDING PARENTAL RESILIENCE RIGHT TIME VIDEO

Key Points

General Information:

- The definition of “resilience” is to withstand stress, problems and trouble as well as to continue to cope and to do what is needed. It also means to rebound, recover and go on.
- For parents, this means bouncing back from challenges, solving problems, building trusting relationships, keeping a positive attitude and getting help when needed.
- The children in your care likely will require extra support, more patience, extra guidance and greater understanding than most children need. This means requiring more of your time, effort and energy.
- How well you are able to take care of them and to react in trying situations depends heavily on how well you take care of yourself.

Part 1: Definition of Parental Resilience

- “Parental resilience” is all about flexibility and optimism in the face of adversity. It is not a trait we have from birth but rather qualities that can be fostered through behaviors, habits and mindset.
- Parental resilience is critical when you are caring for a child who has experienced separation, grief or trauma or a combination of those.

Part 2: Parenting Challenges

- Many of the children who are in foster care or who have been adopted have been exposed to adverse experiences that impact how they view the world. Often the behaviors that helped these children to survive abuse and neglect are the behaviors that can be challenging for parents who are fostering or adopting the children.
- The children’s needs may not be noticeable to others who casually interact with these children, such as neighbors, teachers, etc. Instead of recognizing that some children have unique needs, these acquaintances may focus solely on the behavior (unaware of the reason for the behavior) and give you well-intentioned but ultimately unhelpful advice about parenting.
- There is no magical formula that will cure the trauma, grief or separation felt by a child. It takes consistency, patience, attunement, structure and love, day after day, no matter what. That is where resilience comes in for parents who are fostering or adopting: The love and caring must remain constant, no matter how challenging situations become.



- Think of resilience as a supply that you need, like a glass of water on a hot day. Some people will start the day with a full glass, but others may start with just a half glass if they're not focused on the importance of self-care. As the day goes on, you'll need that water. If your supply didn't start out full, it probably will be drained by the afternoon when you need it to get through the rest of the day. If you start the day with a full glass though, you still will have a reserve to get through the whole day even when there are challenges.
 - Example: Let's say that a child in your care has a hard time sleeping and wakes up with night terrors. Maybe the child also is struggling at school; and you are getting calls to pick up the child, which requires you to leave work early. Other common examples include not eating, complaining about the food you prepare, and hoarding food in the child's bedroom.
 - Each of these behaviors will require your time, energy and patience.
 - Parents who start with only half a glass of resilience will have less reserve to handle these challenges in a nurturing, comforting and calm manner.
 - Once your glass is empty, it is almost impossible for you to provide the nurturing and high-quality parenting that the child needs from you.

Part 3: Four Building Blocks of Parental Resilience

- Parents who are resilient need a sense of belonging and connectedness, which may or may not come from family and friends. Relationships may need to change, or new ones may need to be built. Parents need a network of persons who understand the challenges that may come from parenting challenging youth.
- There is no perfect parent. The journey of parenting requires self-acceptance, self-love and a sense of self-efficacy. The child you are fostering or adopting is not going to validate you by saying, "Thank you so much for caring about me" or "I love you." You will have to validate yourself and to know that you are doing the best you can through structure, consistency, commitment and adapting to the needs of the child. When you believe you know what you are doing, it will be easier for you to brush off criticism.
- Parents also need a sense of identity: knowing who you are and what you can achieve. It takes a strong sense of identity to be able to give without expecting or needing the child to give back. A strong sense of identity helps parents to tolerate criticism and judgment from others.
- "Self-regulation" means a parent's ability to manage one's own thoughts, emotions and reactions during times of stress. Staying regulated is easy to say but very challenging to do. Create a list of coping strategies that can help you to stay regulated. Think of this as your emergency list that you have prepared for those times when the child in your care is expressing behaviors that tend to trigger your emotions. How can you quickly tune in to yourself and become regulated? Identifying what works for you will be important to maintaining your resilience.



Part 4: Strategies for Self-care

- It is not unusual for parents to set aside their own needs when caring for a child with high needs. Just as we are instructed when traveling in an airplane to secure our own oxygen masks before assisting others, we have to secure our own well-being before we can attend effectively to the well-being of others.
- It is critical that parents come to fostering or adopting with a full “glass of resilience” and find ways to refill their glass regularly. You can do this by following these three steps:
 1. On a regular basis, assess how full or empty your self-care cup is. Watch for signs that your cup of resilience is getting low. It is common for our lives to get out of balance. Parents can become stressed or can experience a sense of being overwhelmed as a result of the expectations and needs of the children they are parenting. Step back if this happens to you, and recognize that you may need to take some time for yourself.
 2. Create a plan for self-care, just as you do for every other aspect of your life. Make certain that you are sleeping, eating, exercising and doing the activities that you enjoy. Parenting can become all-consuming, which results in us forgetting that we have needs, too. Your self-care plan does not have to be complicated or time-consuming. It should not add stress to your life or further deplete your “cup of resilience.” Instead, taking care of yourself should involve activities that energize you. Create opportunities to provide time for yourself every day, even if only for five minutes.
 3. Put your plan into action. If you take care of your physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, you will be a more resilient parent who is equipped to take care of the children who need you.

