

# Resilience

## Defining Resilience

“Resilience = strengths, skills and resources that help us to thrive. These qualities of the individual and the environment (especially family and social context) interrupt and prevent downward spirals; they help us respond effectively to challenges rather than become overwhelmed by them. These strengths, skills and resources enable and promote upward spirals; they help us create joyful experiences, develop and sustain close relationships, and work towards meaningful goals.”

Resilience can involve coping with major stressors, including trauma, illness, and loss. Resilience is also exhibited in how we adapt to major transitions (e.g., birth of a child). Although most of the work on resilience focuses on adaptation to severe stressors, our team believes that resilience can also involve coping with everyday stressors and challenges, such as set-backs in school or at work, disagreements with loved ones, and conflicts with peers.

### **An illustration of everyday resilience: Interrupting downward spirals**

On Wednesday, Tanya came home from school to find her favorite game broken, in pieces on the floor. She felt furious. Her younger sister, Nina, often used the game without Tanya’s permission and Tanya assumed that Nina had taken it again and broken it. Tanya often reacted to situations like this by yelling at her sister. This led to downward spirals as her sister would yell back. The yelling escalated to screaming and the sisters often ended up hitting each other. This continued until one of them stormed off or their parents intervened and punished both girls. No matter how it ended, the girls would stay mad at each other for several days.

On Wednesday afternoon, Tanya responded differently. She didn’t want to get into another fight with her sister. She recognized that the tension and heat in her face were signs of increasing anger so she decided to go to her room instead of confronting Nina. Once in her room, Tanya sat on her bed, closed her eyes, and took several slow, deep breaths. As she began to calm down, she began to think about other possibilities. Maybe Nina had broken the game by accident. Maybe Tanya had left the game on the floor and someone had stepped on it. Maybe the dog had gotten to it. Tanya also tried to put the event in perspective and to think of possible solutions. Her parents might buy her a new game. If Nina did break it, maybe Tanya could ask her to replace it. Tanya could talk with her parents about helping Nina to respect her belongings.

Resilience can be developed and enhanced. As noted in a recent American Psychological Association (2014) report, resilience “involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.” We can also support and promote resilience in others. Research suggests that one of the strongest predictors of resilience is the presence of caring,

supportive relationships. This suggests that one of the best ways to promote resilience (in ourselves and in others) is through building and sustaining positive, nurturing relationships.

## References and Further Reading

American Psychological Association (2014). The road to resilience.

- Brochure available online at the American Psychological Association website: APA.org
- Search for “road to resilience”

Aubrey, A. (2010). Emotional training helps kids fight depression. *Morning Edition. National Public Radio*

- Available online at: npr.org
- Search for “emotional training kids”

Gillham, J.E., Abenavoli, R.M., Brunwasser, S.M., Linkins, M., Reivich, K.J., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2013). Resilience Education. In S.A. David, I. Boniwell, & A.C. Ayers (Eds.) *Handbook of Happiness*. (pp. 609-630). Oxford University Press.

Luthar, S. S. (2006). Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In D. Cicchetti & D. J. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology: Vol. 3. Risk, disorder, and adaptation* (pp. 739–795). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development, 71*, 543–562.

Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist, 56*, 227–238.

## Web Resources

Harvard Center for the Developing Child. Article on “Resilience”

- Website: [developingchild.harvard.edu](http://developingchild.harvard.edu)
- Search for “resilience”

American Psychological Association. Brochure on Resilience

- Website: APA.org
- Search for “road to resilience”