

BUILDING RESILIENCE - CONNECTION

We are all born with resilience inside of us, that ability to recover from adversity. We all have the mental, emotional, and physical capacity to bend and flex and then come back to our original form. When raising children, our work is to recognize, nurture, and encourage the qualities that strengthen resilience—just like exercising our muscles to grow physically stronger. Using Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg’s model for raising resilient children and teens, there are 7 Crucial C’s (7Cs), or characteristics that we can foster in our children—and in ourselves as role models. These seven integral and interrelated components are: **competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control.**

CONNECTION

Human connection provides reassurance that we’ll be OK despite tough times, and it gives us a deep-seated security that convinces us we can take chances. Connection to other people tells us, “We can get through this together.”

When children know without a doubt that they are loved no matter what, they will connect with others more comfortably. Those without that secure base may turn inward and focus more on their own needs or do whatever it takes to connect with others, even if it is not in their best interest. As important as increasing independence is as children move into adulthood, we also want them to recognize that the healthiest adults remain interdependent on family, friends, and community.

Empathy is an important starting point in making human connection. Empathy is protective and preventive. When we are empathetic towards children, we create an emotional safety net. They feel secure in coming to us with problems. They know they will be heard without criticism or judgement. They are more likely to let us guide them toward solutions, and they will feel safer in working out their own strategies to prevent the problem from becoming worse.

There are several key tips for fostering connection:

The art and importance of listening. Making sure children know they are truly heard is one of the most important aspects of being an effective parent. Whether they come to us with serious troubles or everyday matters, we can create a safe zone by listening patiently and nonjudgmentally, without interrogating them or interrupting with a solution or advice. Otherwise, they are likely to shut down, tell us nothing, or lie to defend themselves and get us off their backs.

Strengthening family ties. To parent our kids we must know them. For us to know them, they must reveal themselves. As children age we tend to spend less time with them and assume when we do have time with them we need to be focusing on the big stuff like grades, scores, results. Creating family rituals that don’t take much time, such as cooking and eating meals together, is helpful in preserving the connection that more time together offers.

Widening the circle. Outside of the nuclear family, children need connections to multiple groups of friends, relatives, community and the world. Think of it as a chain of interlocking circles—the more



Adapted from *Building Resilience in Children & Teens* by Kenneth Ginsburg, MD

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circles build the chain, the more they feel a sense of belonging and support. These include friendships, relatives and neighbors that offer multi-generational relationships; community connections like civic and religious organizations and social and recreational clubs; school connections with teachers, guidance counselors and other students; and even nature and knowing their connection and place in the natural world as stewards of our planet.

Some cautions about connection. At the same time that we are remaining mindful of sustaining our connection with our children as they grow older, we must also balance this with allowing them to build their independence. As they get older and more competent, we loosen the reins gradually.

Nurturing connections offers protection against the effects of trauma. Resilience in the face of trauma is promoted by the presence of adults who listen to children, believe them, and help them know they can get through situations with their support.

IDEAS/TIPS for Parents and Families:

1. Eat at least one meal a week together—though more is better. There are so many benefits to eating together. Be mindful of everyone’s schedule but make a commitment and make sure everyone sticks to it.
2. Family meetings are great but also look for spontaneous opportunities to connect. Remember that many boys prefer talking while doing something else and/or where eye contact isn’t required like riding in a car or while cooking together. Be mindful of body language as well – get to eye level, take deep soothing breaths to manage increasing stress, avoid folded arms, finger tapping, and make sure to offer and give lots of hugs.
3. Encourage and role model connections to others in your community. Participate in your annual town meeting or volunteer at a local organization and bring your child along. Demonstrate the value and enjoyment that comes from knowing and engaging with your neighbors.

The **Ok. You’ve Got This** project is a collaborative, county-wide public education campaign to increase resilience among Addison County youth. For more information and resources visit okyouvegotthis.org.



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