

# BUILDING RESILIENCE - CONTROL

**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.**

## CONTROL

Control, in the context of building children’s resilience, is about helping them gain control of their actions and subsequently, the outcomes of their actions. Children who learn inner control by making decisions and facing the consequences gradually become more independent and ultimately more resilient. Children who understand that they have control over their lives take responsibility rather than blame others for problems and failures. Children who routinely blame someone or something else for adversity will see themselves as victims and will be passive in the face of difficulty because they do not believe that an action they take will make a difference.

The development of resilience depends on parents’ relinquishing tight control in favor of guidance, attention, and support so that children have opportunities to test their inner control. Parents can enhance children’s growing sense of self-control by observing, offering a steadying hand, and guiding children rather than controlling their every action.

There are several key tips for fostering control:

**Aim for an authoritative versus an authoritarian style.** Parents with an authoritative style sets reasonable limits, expects good behavior, offers a lot of love, and encourages kids to make choices and be independent. That said, when it comes to the big issues it’s, “Do as I say.” Authoritative parents balance warmth and support with parental control when necessary.

**Boundaries are critical.** Children crave boundaries so they can learn what is acceptable behavior and what isn’t. Boundaries allow teens to experience and test their limits while knowing deep down that they will be protected. As teens get older you can build in more freedom based on that experience. There will always be push back and rarely any thank yous. You can remind them that it’s nonnegotiable but also temporary and based on their behavior.

**Keep kids talking.** How do we get our kids to tell us what’s going on? First, we listen, rather than react. Second, we make every effort to be responsive to their needs, rather than being inflexibly strict. If a reasonable request, accompanied by detailed planning that demonstrates responsible thinking is denied, your teen will stop talking and take up lying instead.



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

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**Use positive discipline strategies.** Try and see discipline as an ongoing responsibility to teach. Hold high expectations and give reasonable consequences or allow them to occur naturally. When you do have to use a punishment, then make sure that it's appropriate to the crime so that your child understands the direct consequences and how to correct their behavior going forward and then stick to it regardless of how persistently they try to negotiate with you about it.

**Avoid lose-lose situations.** Lose-lose situations are when we have made and repeated requests and then threats with no success in getting our child to obey and we become so frustrated that the punishment is too harsh. You can avoid this by making the initial command clearly and have immediate consequences for not complying. Do remember to pick your battles. Part of growing up is learning to negotiate boundaries and figuring out what you can handle so make some room for that.

**Use family meetings for prevention.** Family meetings provide an environment to discuss potential situations and to agree in advance about the criteria and consequences for future decisions. Having input, the child will have some ownership of the terms before there is a specific incident at hand. This process will help your child clarify the purpose of the rules and to understand your limits and flexibility.

**Delay gratification.** Every parent knows it's an ongoing challenge to teach children that they often must wait to get what they want, and sometimes they never get what they want. It is a critical part of a child's developing self-control. This is a developmental process that develops over time. We do an injustice to our younger children if we expect them to have well-developed impulse control. The knowledge that an investment of time and effort also produces desirable results is also a key to choosing positive coping strategies instead of easier, quick-acting, but dangerous ones that perpetuate stress.

### IDEAS/TIPS for Parents and Families:

1. Keep a diary for a week and note all your interactions with your child. When he wants your attention, how does he get it each time? Begin to recognize that many of his annoying or undesirable behaviors may be attention-seeking ploys. How do you respond? Once you become more aware of your pattern, you'll be better able to replace negative with positive attention.
2. Sit down with your child and explain that you and she can come up with a plan that serves you both by ensuring 2 things: her greater freedom and privileges and your need to be sure she's safe and responsible. Together, you draw up lists of what you each want and need. You'll discuss these, negotiate, put them in writing, and come up with a written contract.
3. Remember to forgive your child for their human impulses. No one can delay gratification all the time and they need to understand it's a learned behavior that takes practice. We don't want our kids to grow up feeling guilty for allowing themselves pleasure. Balance is key.

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](http://okyouvegotthis.org).



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