

BUILDING RESILIENCE - COPING

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.**

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We need a certain amount of stress to learn and grow but excess stress, when we don’t have good coping skills, takes its toll—mentally and physically. There are different strategies for dealing with stress; some are helpful and some are less so. It also depends on the individual and the problem as to what is the best strategy and those strategies evolve over time as we mature and develop. The best way to help your child develop effective coping strategies is to model them yourself. Most important is to demonstrate how much weight to give to a stressor. Unless it is a crisis where there is real danger, we can stop and think through the problem and how much impact it should have in our lives.

Connection is also critical to coping. In the worst of times, those who thrive are those who reach out to others. In routine times, those who thrive are those with strong relationships. You do your child a tremendous service by modeling how your connections are central to your ability to manage stress.

There are several key tips for fostering coping:

Identify and address the problem. Any effective approach to managing stress begins by identifying the concern and determining what can be done to solve it. Two important steps are necessary to problem-solving. The first is to make a realistic assessment of the magnitude of the problem; the second is to break it into manageable steps. This works immediately to reduce overwhelm, anxiety, and frustration.

Avoid stress when possible. We can avoid negative situations to reduce stress. Think about situations in the past that have been stressful; then pay attention to the subtle signals the body sends out to warn of a similar potential problem. When we learn to pay attention to those sensations (like butterflies, shivering, heart-racing), we can recognize what might get us into trouble and shift gears.

Let some things go. Not every problem is worth attacking. To conserve our energy for the things we can change, we need to let go of the problems we can’t fix.

Contribute to the world. When we contribute to our communities or attempt to repair the world in any small way, we put aside our own troubles. When we contribute to an effort bigger than ourselves, we gain perspective on our own stressful situations.

The power of exercise. Exercise makes sure the body is able to withstand all kinds of stress. Appropriate exercise can help alertness, focus and concentration. Exercise helps us tune into our bodies and listen



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to its signals. When young people learn to listen to their bodies and read their stress response, they become better able to take a measured approach to managing stress.

Active relaxation. We need to have down time to replenish the resources expended in constantly reacting to our environment. When we don't, we are more susceptible to fatigue, inefficiency, and even illness. Active relaxation involves consciously transforming yourself into a relaxed state. Guided meditation, breath work, mindfulness, visualization, and progressive relaxation are all useful, very simple techniques and can be tailored to appeal to your child's strengths.

Eat and sleep well. Nutrition is vitally important to children's physical growth and development. Similarly, adequate sleep is necessary to solidify newly gained memories or skills and to maintain daytime energy. A healthy body helps us manage stress. Actively modeling good eating and sleeping habits is more important than anything you say to your child about them.

Take instant vacations. We don't have to travel to take a "vacation" from the stresses of life. There are healthy ways to temporarily disengage. Visualizing a favorite place, developing a hobby, reading, walking, and taking baths are all brief pauses that can help us find needed recharge time.

Release emotional tension. It's easy to get overwhelmed by all of life's stressors. We need to help children find ways to release tension as they work through stressful situations. Creative expression is a great way to process emotions and offer joyful release as a counterpose to stress. Journaling, dancing, laughing, crying and making lists are all great options to help relieve the tension of stressful emotions.

IDEAS/TIPS for Parents and Families:

1. Have a *mountains and mole hills* conversation as a family. Talk about specific problems in each others lives and ask questions that prompt each of you to clarify the real level of stress and how much control you have over it. Remember as a parent to practice active listening and avoid lectures.
2. Create a bedtime routine that involves 5-10 minutes of breath relaxation or guided meditation. There are many free software applications that offer short guided meditations that are accessible to all ages.
3. Remove electronics from the bedroom (parents too). Charge phones and tablets downstairs. The urge to browse and the light from these devices keeps our mind in awake mode, depriving us of critical sleep time.
4. Identify a hobby or relaxing activity that you can do together as a family and commit to disengaging from all other responsibilities to do it regularly. Read a book out loud together, practice cooking a healthy dinner once a week, learn to knit—anything that feels enjoyable.

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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