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Disponible en français.



The information in this brochure has been adapted from **Growing Up Resilient: Ways to Build Resilience in Children and Youth** (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2007)

3663 / 01-2009



RAISING RESILIENT CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulties or change—to function as well as before and move forward. Many refer to this as “bouncing back” from challenges.

Enhancing resilience

Young people’s resilience is determined by the interplay of their individual characteristics (including skills they have developed), the characteristics of the families in which they live, and the characteristics of their physical and social environments.

Everyone needs skills and supportive people in their lives to help cushion them from problems they may encounter. Introducing even a few positive elements into their lives can shift the balance and help many children and youth flourish.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Everyone has individual factors that help make them who they are and determine their levels of resilience.

- ▶ **Temperament**
 - Children are born with a particular temperament, but it will be affected by their environment.
 - Infants and children treated with warmth, care and sensitivity are more likely to become resilient, well-adapted children and youth.
- ▶ **Learning strengths**
 - Young people’s learning strengths are a combination of their inborn intelligence and the knowledge and skills they develop through formal and informal education.
 - Exposing young people to a variety of learning environments helps them develop awareness, imagination, know-how, initiative and decision-making skills.
- ▶ **Feelings and emotions**
 - How young people express their emotions and react to other people’s emotions is determined by tendencies they are born with and by their early life experiences.
 - Families who talk about how they feel help young people learn to identify their own feelings and communicate them to others.
 - Managing difficult emotions (such as anger or anxiety) builds resilience.

► Self-concept

- People’s concept of themselves is influenced by their family and environment.
- Young people who grow up in a society, and with adults, that accept and appreciate them the way they are, and the way they want to be, are more likely to feel good about themselves.

► Ways of thinking

- Young people’s ability to think positively is affected by their temperament; their life situations; and their interactions with family, friends, teachers and others.
- Teaching young people to have more positive thoughts about themselves can help them to reduce stress, improve their performance (for example, at school, in sports) and have fewer mental health problems.

► Adaptive skills

- Young people develop skills through the support of others.
- Teaching children and youth to be flexible; to make decisions; to solve problems; and to set appropriate goals and persevere to attain them builds resilience.

► Social skills

- Young people cultivate social skills through their experiences—by co-operating and interacting with others and making friends.
- Positive peer relationships in childhood are one of the best predictors of good mental health in adulthood.

FAMILY FACTORS

Healthy, well-functioning families provide many of the elements young people need to succeed in life.



► Attachment

- To be resilient, young people need a strong, positive emotional attachment to a caring, loving adult throughout childhood and adolescence.
- If a parent is unable to fill this role, other significant adults in young people’s lives (such as a grandparent or family friend) could provide them with the attention, guidance and support they need.

► Communication

Good communication involves all family members talking regularly to each other about their feelings and concerns and about what’s happening in their lives.

► Family structure

Canadian families are increasingly taking different forms. Regardless of the structure of the family, children develop resilience when they feel that they have consistently supportive and nurturing adults in their lives.

► Parent relations

Healthy partnerships—supportive, stable relationships, with an open display of love, warmth and good communication between parents—foster resilience in young people.

► Parenting style

The following are some resilience-promoting aspects of an effective parenting style:

- being warm, nurturing and loving
- providing firm, clearly defined rules and the reasons for the rules, while being flexible as needed
- having appropriate expectations
- praising children for their efforts and accomplishments
- comforting children when they’re upset
- using reason and persuasion, instead of verbal or physical abuse
- accepting and respecting teens’ increasing need for independence.

► Sibling relations

Healthy relationships between brothers and sisters, or siblings, develop when families encourage sharing and co-operation, and discourage competition.

► Parents’ health

Parents who experience good physical and mental health are more likely to be able to respond well to their children’s needs and to develop a caring relationship with them.

► Support outside the family

Supportive family networks and other resources are essential for young people’s healthy development.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

The characteristics of the environments in which people live can profoundly affect their health, growth and resilience.

► Inclusion: Having a sense of belonging

- Inclusive social communities embrace and accept everyone and create opportunities for each person to reach his or her potential.
- To be resilient, young people need to feel included and respected (for example, in terms of their gender, sexual orientation, culture and religious or spiritual beliefs).

► Social conditions

Social conditions that enhance young people’s resilience include:

- social supports that ensure each family can get healthy food and decent housing
- safe neighbourhoods
- access to services, such as health, education and recreation
- freedom from racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination
- seeing positive images of young people like themselves in the media.

► Youth involvement

Meaningful participation in the home, school and community contributes to the resilience of children and youth: it increases their sense of connection while decreasing their sense of isolation.