

Teaching Resilience

encouraging a positive mindset in your child by Jeffrey Katz, Ph.D.

Every day our children face adversity. How they recover is often a result of their mindset. The truth is that every child wants to do well. As teachers, parents, or other adults who touch the lives of children, it is our job to help them find their islands of competence—what they do well.

I recently had the opportunity to listen to Dr. Robert Brooks at the CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) international conference. Dr. Brooks has written many books about resilience in children, and he was a wonderful, inspirational speaker.

Resilience is the capacity to recover from adversity. It is a very fundamental ability that we must always seek to develop in children. Everyone will have to face disappointment and adversity during life, whether it is the disappointment of not getting chosen for a lead in the school play, making it onto the school baseball team, or facing a major illness or the loss of a family member. Some individuals, too, must face the adversity of physical disabilities, learning disabilities, or emotional difficulties.

People who are resilient have a positive mindset, which includes the beliefs

that we have about ourselves and that guides our behaviors and interactions with others. One can have a positive mindset or a negative mindset.

Too many children—and adults alike—have a negative mindset. They do not see themselves as capable individuals. They may think that they are not smart, or they may think no one likes them. They see themselves as ineffective and incapable—so when things get tough, they give up.

Children who are resilient have a positive mindset, and that positive mindset is the direct result of having adults in their lives who believe in them. Children come to understand that they are good from the adults around them, and, as a result, they develop a desire to learn and be successful. They can tap into their inner drive to be effective and learn to be responsible for themselves.

If your child brings home a bad grade, for example, berating him, blaming him, or lecturing him about what he should be doing differently does not teach him to be resilient. Rather, you should convey to your child that you know how much he wants to do well and that you are there to help him figure out what went wrong and how to make it better. You believe that he did his best, and you believe that he can

face the challenge and learn something from it.

This is another feature of a positive mindset: to believe that mistakes are expected and accepted; that mistakes are experiences from which to learn, rather than a cause to feel humiliated. A child who experiences humiliation from adults learns to avoid challenges. However, parents who understand that making mistakes is a part of life develop their child's positive mindset and capacity for resilience. Such children do not blame others when they are faced with a challenge; they believe that they can solve problems and make decisions. This promotes their sense of personal control, self-discipline, and ownership.

A child who knows that adults believe in her also learns that other people can be of support and help to her. Rather than thinking that she must solve problems on her own and feeling terrible when it does not work out, she is willing to seek the assistance of friends and adults. She has a good understanding of her own strengths and weaknesses, an acceptance of herself as a person, and the comfort of knowing that others are there for her when she needs help.

Finally, to develop a positive mindset and the capacity for resilience, we need

to have opportunities to be contributing members of our community. We need to experience the good feelings that come with sharing and helping others and making a positive difference to others.

It is up to us to provide children an environment in which they can make a positive contribution and have the opportunity to develop skills and not live in fear of humiliation. As parents, we should always convey to our children that we believe in them, we know how capable they are, and how important they are to us. ●

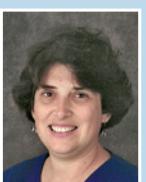
Dr. Jeffrey Katz is a clinical psychologist who practices in Virginia Beach. Dr. Katz works with children, adolescents, adults, and their families. He specializes in the evaluation and treatment of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and learning and behavioral problems. He is on the national board of Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) and is the co-chair of the national public policy committee.



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