



# Building confidence and resilience

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**This topic covers advice to parents themselves rather than to professionals engaging with the system.**

It includes helping a child to cope in today's pushy world, helping a child to build friendships and deal with bullying, and identify different ways to support your child to be resilient.

### Questions

Let's consider what sort of help you would like to help build your child's self-confidence.

I would like my child to:

- 'bounce back' when things go wrong.
- to understand their emotions better
- to cope better with new opportunities
- be more optimistic
- build on their strengths

### What do we mean?

We would like our children to bounce

back, be strong and resilient. Let's look at what we mean by 'resilience' and 'bouncing back' in terms of children.

### What do we mean by Resilience?

Resilience has many different definitions. We mean "being able to bounce back from, or overcome, setbacks, obstacles or disappointments, and also to keep going in the face of challenges and failure". Other words commonly used to mean resilient are 'tough', 'strong' and 'hardy'.

### What is meant by 'bouncing back'?

Bouncing back means more than coming back to where you were before the problems happened, it means being stronger than you were before. When you are resilient, you are more likely to look for new experiences and take opportunities, and even a few risks.

Risk-taking inevitably means some setbacks, but it also provides opportunities for success, which leads to greater inner confidence. So it's a virtuous circle.

## 1. Is my child resilient?

It is not always easy to spot if a child is resilient or not. Sometimes a child seems tough; they can appear to be coping well. But after a while they may have difficulties. Other children may appear very upset in the short-term, but are able to recover and move on really quickly.

The most helpful way to think about resilience is as a skill that can be learnt and developed.

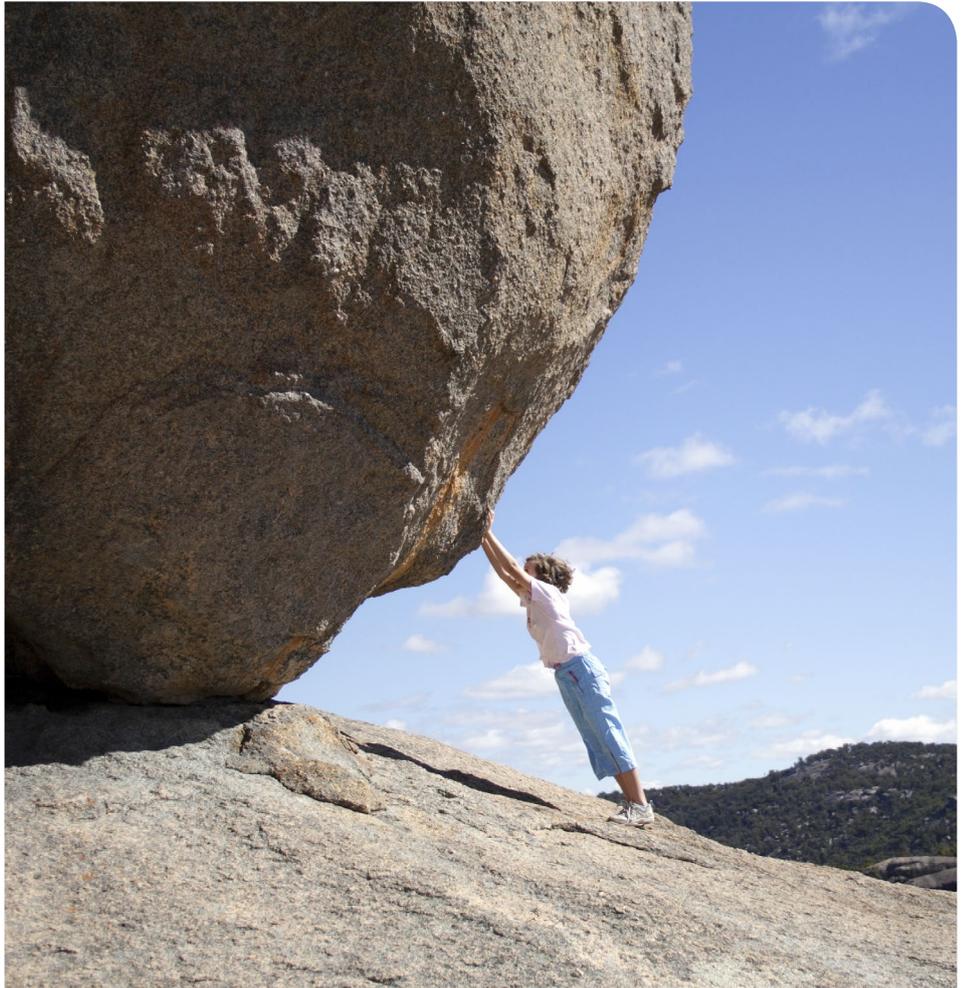
In other words, even if you feel that you are not very resilient now, you can become more resilient in the future.

It may be useful to think about your own upbringing. What did you learn from your parents and others about how to respond to difficulty? Your child is quite likely to copy the way you react to problems – you are their role model.

As a parent it is natural to want to protect your child as much as you can but wrapping children up in cotton wool is not necessarily a good thing. They need to experience difficulties to develop the skills to overcome them.

For more information look at Kenneth Barish's blog 'How can we help children bounce back?' [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kenneth-barish-phd/how-can-we-help-children-bounce-back\\_b\\_3215185.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kenneth-barish-phd/how-can-we-help-children-bounce-back_b_3215185.html)

Some really useful information can be found in this article '10 tips for raising resilient kids' <http://psychcentral.com/lib/10-tips-for-raising-resilient-kids/>



## 2. I want my child to learn to understand their positive and negative emotions

Feelings can be positive or negative. Positive emotions help you to do activities or connect with other people or make you happy whilst negative feelings can be useful to help you act differently or protect yourself.

For any child, a useful first step is to be able to identify their feelings. This helps children:

- to learn the name what they are feeling
- to know they can change negative to positive moods.
- to recognize other people's feelings and empathize with them.

One way to do this is to ask your child how certain music or films or pictures make them feel. This can include happy

and uplifting feelings as well as music which makes them feel sad or anxious. By learning to name feelings, your child will have the words to discuss how they feel. This can be really important in helping them to master their feelings. Asking children to name the feelings that characters in books/films might be feeling in certain situations is a good way to build up empathy skills.

You can ask your child to list their difficult or uncomfortable feelings. Once they have listed those feelings, talk to them about why it is useful to have those feelings.

For instance, talk about how feeling unhappy with their mark in a test can help them study more next time. Or how feeling scared can help them avoid risky situations. Give them an example from your own life; it can help them get the idea.

Sometimes you have to wait. Try not to talk this through in the heat of the moment when they are very upset or angry.

The following sites will give you more information on emotions and how to talk about them with children.

Talking to children about feelings:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/mentalhealth/Pages/talkingtochildren.aspx>

Dealing with child anger:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/dealing-with-angry-child.aspx>

My Emotions:

a site that has lots of useful information and tools to help talking about emotions – <http://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/my-emotions>

### 3. Relationships

#### How does your child develop healthy relationship?

Healthy relationships are important because they make you feel happier, more confident and resilient, but it isn't always easy to get on well with others.

We aren't born with good social skills – we have to learn and practise them. In a healthy relationship there is give and take on both sides in roughly equal measures.

One of the most important things is learning to think about the other person's rights and feelings, as well as your own.

Remember children watch what you do. This isn't the whole story but it is something you can change.

So empathy, kindness, co-operation, listening, sharing, being supportive, a sense of humour and finding common interests are important skills. Even so, things may go wrong from time to time. What matters is how you solve these problems.

It is important to teach children and young people that they can learn to solve their own problems, rather than you (the parent or carer) taking control. If they have a problem with a friend, ask them what they could do to put things right themselves. As your child learns to solve their own problems it will contribute to their resilience and confidence.

Useful information can be found on the following websites.

Tips on Helping your Child Develop Empathy:

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/social-emotional-development/take-a-walk-in-my-shoes.html>



How Children Make Friends – Dr Eileen Kennedy-Moore:

About 'the key ingredients that underlie friendship formation' there are three parts to this article – <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/growing-friendships/201209/how-children-make-friends-part-1>

#### Worried about bullying/unhealthy relationships?

See the topic Bullying and What to do as a Parent for more detail information.

### 4. I want my child to be more optimistic

#### What can I do to help?

Resilience and optimism are linked. Having 'realistic optimism' (rather than blind optimism) helps us keep going when things are tough. Like resilience, we can learn to become more optimistic.

It is important to know that the way

we feel about a difficulty or a challenge is affected by the way we think about it. This means that if we change the way we think about it, we can change how we feel.

Being pessimistic is linked to giving up. It can also lead to other problems, such as depression. This is why it is so important to learn 'realistic optimism'.

Optimism can be helped by the way we think about the causes of events, in other words, how we explain things that happen to us.

#### What actions can you take?

As a parent or carer, you can role-model realistic optimism. So, take care not to explain bad things as always being your/their fault. It is not "What always happens". Remember, things can change and improve in the future.

If you have to criticise your child, focus on what they have done rather than on them as a person.

Make sure your criticism is accurate and specific rather than general or exaggerated.

Let's look at some sentences and think about which are optimistic and which are pessimistic.

- Ellie, you're a bad girl!
- Ellie, you tease your little brother too much
- Tom, you're so untidy! Why don't you ever pick up your things when I ask you?
- Tom, I asked you to pick up your things. Why didn't you do what I asked?
- Your marks are awful. You'll never do well at school!
- You need to practise your Spanish more.
- I can see that you take after your mum in sports – she was terrible.
- You need to focus more on the ball when it's coming towards you.
- You're so selfish!
- I'd like you to share your sweets with the other kids

## 5. Bad things can happen

Sometimes, bad things happen for several reasons. When this happens to your child, for example, they lose their lunch money at school, they may see it in a very black and white way.

Rather than blaming themselves (or other people) outright, you can explore with them:

- how much of the situation is down to them
- how much is down to other people and
- how much is down to bad luck

### Here are some suggestions to help.

Remember, try to praise your child far more frequently than you criticise them. Whether you praise or criticise, be specific.

It may be hard to start with but you can train yourself to notice the good things they do.

## 6. Other techniques

Here are some other techniques your child can try.



### Get some distance

Counting to 10 helps to reduce the immediate bad feelings and gives you a bit of breathing space.

### Distract yourself

Doing something different to take your mind off things.

### Dispute

Don't just accept your first thoughts - look for facts.

### Reframe

Look for alternative, more positive, explanations.

### What's the best/worst/most likely case?

Think about each possibility.

### Where to go if you are worried?

Your child's pessimistic outlook will have developed over time so it unlikely to change overnight. Learning realistic optimism takes time and practice. However if you are worried about your child, consider talking to a professional at school or your GP. Remember, that it may be a sign of your child being depressed – see session 'Sad, bored or Isolated' in the MindEd Core Curriculum.

### Optimistic v Pessimistic thinking

Watch this YouTube Learned optimism

by Carol Craig to learn more about optimistic and pessimistic thinking and how it can be learned. <https://youtu.be/DCtzYgLUkLg>

### Further information

See Resources to download the document 'How to help a child develop optimism'

3 Handy Ways to Help Your Child Overcome Negative thinking: <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2011/07/17/3-handy-ways-to-help-your-child-overcome-negative-thinking/>

## 7. I want my child to build on their strengths

### How do you do this?

Strengths include things we're good at, gifts or talents – the things that describe us at our best. Everyone has strengths of some type or another. We know that using our strengths can make us happier and more resilient, as well as making us better at what we do.

Without being modest, what are your own strengths? What do you feel passionate about? What do you love doing? What are you good at? Make a list.

Often we are encouraged, at school and at work, to focus on our weaknesses. We are told to improve them. Recent studies suggest that we would do better to find our strengths and play to them.

It may be immediately obvious to you that your child has a strength, gift or talent in a particular area. It might be maths, acting, football or singing. One way you can tell is by the way they light up when they talk about it; they may show enthusiasm - you don't even need to remind them to practise their skill. So listen to the way your child talks. Watch their behaviour.

You can give your child opportunities to try things out. But don't force them – a key aspect of starting to develop a strength is the feeling that you have chosen to do it. It's not something that someone else wants for you.

Strengths can also be personal characteristics, such as kindness, curiosity and forgiveness. You could help your child do a free online assessment here [www.viame.org](http://www.viame.org) to identify their character strengths. Then help them find new ways to use their strengths.

Why not ask your child's teachers to name their strengths and see what they say?

### **Example: Let's see what Adam's teacher spotted.**

It was Adam's teachers who spotted in Y2 that he was good at building complex models out of Lego, cardboard, clay etc. Being an only child, his parents thought it was something all kids could do.

### **Strength to strength**

Take time to observe your child at rest and at play, and focus on noticing when they are doing something well. Even at a young age they may be good at helping others, explaining things, or leading the group.

Set up a strengths-spotting evening with other parents. You can help spot strengths in each other's children, and you may discover ones you had not thought of.

Ask other people who are close to your child, such as other family members, their sports coach or youth club leader, what strengths they have observed.

## **What Else?**

### **MindEd for Families**

You can learn more by looking at the following MindEd sessions:

- Talking to my child
- Bullying and what to do as a parent
- Motivation and empowerment
- Sad, bored or isolated
- Avoiding school and social isolation
- The worried child

## **Websites**

10 Tips for Discovering Your Child's Strengths: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jenifer-fox/10-tips-for-discovering-y\\_b\\_288460.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jenifer-fox/10-tips-for-discovering-y_b_288460.html)

Your Dictionary gives examples of words that indicate strength: <http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-strengths.html>

YoungMinds: <http://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

## **Information**

The following documents and leaflets are available to download from resources:

- Resilience: helping your child to 'bounce back'.pdf
- How to help a child develop optimism.pdf
- Top Tips.pdf
- Discover your child's potential.pdf
- Character Strengths.pdf
- Good relationships.pdf