

JANUARY
2021

Coach's Corner



Resilience

Written by Meghan Pallante, Delaware Stars Technical Assistant

Resilience. It's a word that has been used a lot when discussing effects of the events of the past year. But when we describe a person or community as "resilient", what are we saying about them? Many times resilience is used to mean that a person is "tough" or "handles adversity well". This may be true but there is much more to resilience.

Resilience is defined by the American Psychological Association as, "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of threat". One of the aspects of resilience that is discussed often is, whether resilience is something we are born with or is something we develop throughout our lives. The answer is both! There are some genetic factors that can contribute to resilience and there are environmental effects as well.

Building Resilience

Knowing that resilience is a combination of nature and nurture, what can we do to support children in building resilience? According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the most important factor in developing resilience in childhood is stable relationships with caring and supportive adults. This is another reason on the long list of why early childhood educators are so important!

It is important for educators to understand each child's life outside of the early childhood education program. Regardless of quality early childhood education programs, a child's home life has the most profound impact on their development. For children and adults, a healthy amount of stress can actually help strengthen resilience (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University). An example of positive stress for a child would be learning to ride a bike. This is something that the child wants to do but they may be nervous about it. There is no threat attached to positive stress. In contrast, prolonged periods of toxic stress can lead to unhealthy coping in children. Examples of toxic stress include, abuse, poverty, or homelessness. If we can recognize these factors early on, we can better support the child and connect their family with any needed resources. If a child is experiencing toxic stress we want to provide them with healthy coping strategies.

Supporting Resilience in Children

- Focus on fostering supportive relationships with each individual child. We want children to learn to form healthy attachments at a young age. This is why continuity of care is so important. By utilizing primary caregivers in programs, we are supporting the formation of educator/child relationships. The familiarity of having the same educator present each day is comforting to the child and supports healthy attachments.
- Provide opportunities for healthy risk-taking behaviors. This can include climbing on play equipment, riding a bike, or asking a new friend to play. These are examples of things that can be intimidating to children but will also build self-confidence.
- Talk with children about their emotions. Young children are not always able to label their emotions. We can help them with that! Remember that children are allowed to be angry, sad, or frustrated. It is important for educators to recognize and validate these emotions. Once we have identified these emotions we can help the child to work through them.
- Encourage children to problem-solve. This one requires some patience! Children need to have time to work through their frustrations, both with themselves and with their peers. Help them recognize the problem and figure out some potential solutions. With younger children, this is also a great time to point out emotions. "I see you are feeling sad about something. I wonder if we can find a way to help you to feel better."

These are just a few of many ways to support resilience in children. See the resources at the end of the article for more tips!



There is a lot going on in our world and our children are more perceptive than we may realize. As early childhood educators, we should be prepared to have open conversations with children (and their families) about how they are feeling.



Supporting Resilience in Families

Providing opportunities for families to engage in different program aspects is key. Children thrive when families and educators work together. Consider the families in your program and the community in which your program is located. What resources are needed? What resources are available?

- Communication with families- Conversations with families do not always have to be about child progress and goals. During initial interviews, conferences, surveys, or family meetings consider asking what challenges they face or what resources would be helpful to them.
- Family events- Throughout the year, offer opportunities for families to come together. This promotes a sense of community within the program. To boost attendance, try doing a poll to see what days/times work best. During this time of COVID restrictions consider doing some virtual events! One positive aspect of virtual events is that they are typically more convenient!
- Connect with community organizations- Reach out to community organizations that provide various supports to families. Ask about receiving updates or newsletters. Networking in the community is always good for referrals too!

Current Events

Over the past year there have been many events that could cause children to feel afraid or confused. Many families have been under financial or emotional stress due to the pandemic. This can have an effect on the children in our programs. We should be mindful of the adversities that families may be facing. In addition, it is important to encourage our children to talk about how they are feeling. There is a lot going on in our world and our children are more perceptive than we may realize. As early childhood educators, we should be prepared to have open conversations with children (and their families) about how they are feeling. More than ever, it is important for our early childhood community to come together to support Delaware's children and families.

Professional Development

Engaging Families Virtually (LIVE Virtual Training)- DIEECDP

Mindfulness: A Resilience Practice (Virtual Training)- DIEECDP

Supporting Children When They Are Homeless- DIEECDP Online

You can register for these Professional Development workshops by going to: www.dieecpd.org/registry/calendar

Resources

[What is Resilience?](#) – Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

[Building Resilience: The Power to Cope with Adversity](#) - Zero to Three

[Building Resilience to Cope with Stress and Trauma](#) - Head Start