

# Building Strong Foundations: Strategies for Enhancing Resilience in Children

## Abstract

Resilience is the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity. It is "The ability to bounce back or recover quickly from setbacks" (Smith et al., 2008). In today's ever-changing world, it is important to foster resilience in children so they can overcome challenges and succeed in life. This paper highlights the importance of resilience among children. It encompasses the levels and stages of resilience. It also examines the factors affecting resilience among children and focuses on strategies for enhancing resilience in children. Finally, this article states the role of a researcher to enhance the resilience among children. This paper provides practical suggestions for parents, educators, and other caregivers. This work leads the children to develop the skills and mindset needed to navigate life's challenges with confidence and face adversity successfully.

**Keywords:** resilience; children; coping skills; growth mindset; positive relationships;

## Introduction

Children experience different types of stressors and adversities in their lives including illness and injury, parental dispute and divorce and economic hardship as well. Children who have higher ability of resilience, can better cope-up with stress. According to Luthar, (2006), resilience is the process of coping with stress and adversity that allows for the achievement of positive outcomes and maintain positive outcomes in the situation of adversity. Masten & Reed, (2002), stated that "Resilience is the capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development". This ability to be resilient can be improved if proper environment is offered to the children in family, at educational places and in society in general.

Hence, it is essential to enhance the ability of being resilient in children. If this ability is inculcated in initial years of life (childhood), children would become better citizen. Hence, this paper focuses on child resilience with respect to its importance, stages, levels and factors affecting child resilience. It also suggests the ways to enhance the ability to be resilient and states the role of a researcher in enhancing the ability of child to be more resilient.

## DEFINING RESILIENCE

The term resilience has been defined differently by different authors and practitioners from time to time. following are some of the most accepted definitions of resilience.

1. According to Seligman, M. E. P. (1998), Resilience is also defined as “the capacity to bounce back from hardships while keeping one's spirits up is known as resilience”.
2. Based on the work of Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) “maintaining one's emotional and physical health in the face of hardship is an example of resilience.
3. According to Southwick and Charney (2012), “the capacity to deal positively with hardship, difficulty, or trauma is known as resilience”.
4. Waite and Richardson, (2014), defined resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity, embrace change, and prosper under trying circumstances.
5. Masten and Narayan, (2012) stated that “resilience is the capacity to navigate difficult situations and maintain a sense of emotional balance and stability.”
6. As per Werner, (1993) "resilience refers to a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development.”
7. Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, (2000) concluded that “resilience can be viewed as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity”.
8. For Werner & Smith, (2001) "Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities in their families, schools, and communities that can help them rebound from adversity."
9. Garnezy, (1991) mentioned that "resilience refers to the capacity of a child to negotiate developmental tasks successfully in the face of significant environmental adversity".
10. Masten & Obradović, 2006, wrote that "resilience is the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being and to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways".  
Ungar, (2011) and Rutter, (2012) has seen resilience as a process and based on that following definitions of resilience are given by them.
11. Ungar, (2011) opined that "resilience is the process of negotiating, managing and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity".
12. Rutter, (2012) narrated that "resilience is not a fixed attribute but a process that changes over time as a function of both the individual's internal characteristics and the influences of external contexts and their interactions".

Success of a person in any sphere of life depends upon the level of his resilience, hence, major efforts are to be executed to enhance the ability of resilience among children since childhood.

## **IMPORTANCE OF CHILD RESILIENCE**

Child resilience is important for a number of reasons. Resilience allows children to cope with stress and adversity in healthy ways, and to maintain positive outcomes in the face of difficult circumstances. Children who are resilient are better able to adapt to change, maintain positive relationships with peers and adults, and achieve academic success. Bonanno, (2004) stated that "Resilience is evident when a child's health and development tips toward positive outcomes despite the experience of significant adversity".

According to Masten, (2018), resilience is also important for long-term health outcomes, as resilient children are less likely to experience mental health problems and chronic illness later in life. Furthermore, research has shown that resilience is not a fixed trait and can be nurtured and developed over time. By providing children with a supportive environment and opportunities to practice coping skills, we can help them build resilience and become better equipped to handle life's challenges.

One way to enhance resilience in children is by promoting a growth mindset. Children who have a growth mindset believe that their abilities and intelligence can be developed through hard work and dedication. This mindset helps children see setbacks as opportunities for growth and learning, rather than as failures.

In addition, positive relationships with caregivers, peers, and other adults can provide children with a sense of belonging and support that is essential for building resilience. Caregivers who provide children with a safe and nurturing environment can help them feel secure and develop a sense of trust in themselves and others.

## **STAGES OF RESILIENCE**

The term "resilience" is used to describe a person's capacity to bounce back from difficult situations. the most common four stages of resilience developed by Ungar, M (2011) are as given below.

**Survival** - This is the first stage of resilience, which focuses on meeting basic needs such as safety, shelter, food, and water. During this stage, individuals are primarily focused on addressing immediate needs and may have limited resources for coping with stress and adversity.

**Adaptation** - In this stage, individuals begin to develop coping strategies and resources to manage stress and adapt to their environment. This may include building social support networks, developing problem-solving skills, and improving emotional regulation.

**Mastery** - The third stage of resilience is characterized by a sense of mastery and control over one's environment. Individuals at this stage have developed a wide range of coping strategies and have a strong sense of self-efficacy, which enables them to overcome challenges and setbacks.

**Growth** - The final stage of resilience involves using adversity as an opportunity for personal growth and development. Individuals at this stage are able to find meaning and purpose in their experiences and may even thrive in the face of adversity.

With the right support and resources, individuals can develop and strengthen their resilience over time.

## **LEVELS OF RESILIENCE**

If we think about levels of resilience, Fletcher & Sarkar, (2013) has conceptualized three levels: individual, group, and community. At the individual level, resilience refers to the ability of an individual to successfully adapt and recover from adversity. At the group level, resilience pertains to the collective capacity of a group or organization to navigate challenges and maintain effective functioning. At the community level, resilience refers to the ability of a community or society to respond and recover from large-scale adversity or disasters".

From the view point of intensity of resilience, resilience can be categorized as low, moderate, high and exceptional resilience. These levels are detailed below.

**Low Resilience:** Children with low resilience tend to be easily overwhelmed by stress and may have difficulty coping with adversity. They may feel hopeless, powerless, and may give-up easily when faced with challenges.

**Moderate Resilience:** Children with moderate resilience are able to cope with most stressful situations, but may struggle with major life events or trauma. They may have some coping skills, but may require additional support and resources to bounce back from adversity.

**High Resilience:** Children with high resilience are able to adapt to change and bounce back quickly from adversity. They have strong coping skills and are able to maintain a positive outlook even during difficult times.

**Exceptional Resilience:** Children with exceptional resilience not only bounce back quickly from adversity, but also use their experiences to grow and flourish. They are able to find meaning and purpose in their struggles and use their resilience to help others.

Resilience is not innate, and it may be cultivated and strengthened through training and social reinforcement.

### **FACTORS AFFECTING CHILD RESILIENCE ADVERSLY**

Numerous factors influences children's resilience. They consist of personal qualities, social networks, and material opportunities. Some of the factors that influence resilience level of the children.

1. Overprotection by parents
2. Academic pressure and excessive focus on grades and marks
3. Overuse of electronic devices
4. Lack of physical exercise and outdoor activities
5. Over-scheduling of activities
6. Limited exposure to failure and adversity
7. Over-reliance on technology for problem-solving
8. Unhealthy eating habits and poor nutrition

9. Sleep deprivation
10. Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression
11. Social isolation and loneliness
12. Lack of emotional support and nurturing
13. Helicopter parenting
14. Negative parenting styles such as authoritarianism and permissiveness
15. Inadequate preparation for challenges and setbacks
16. Unrealistic expectations and pressure to succeed
17. Lack of resilience-building opportunities in schools
18. Poor role models
19. Economic and social inequality
20. Bullying and cyberbullying
21. Low self-esteem and self-confidence
22. Discrimination and prejudice
23. Limited exposure to diverse experiences and perspectives
24. Parental conflict and divorce
25. Negative peer pressure
26. Lack of community support
27. Limited opportunities for creativity and self-expression
28. The pressure to follow the social norms
29. Excessive fear of failure
30. The need for instant gratification
31. Overuse of medication for mental health issues
32. Lack of exposure to diverse cultures and traditions
33. Overuse of social media and technology
34. A lack of opportunities for proper risk taking
35. A lack of opportunities for independent decision-making and leadership
36. The impact of chronic illness or disability
37. A lack of opportunities for mentorship
38. A lack of opportunities for team-building and cooperation
39. The impact of cultural and religious intolerance
40. The impact of discrimination based on gender
41. A lack of opportunities for conflict resolution
42. The impact of homelessness and displacement

43. A lack of opportunities for character development
44. The impact of addiction on families
45. A lack of opportunities for experiential learning

## **STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN**

Overall, enhancing resilience in children requires a holistic approach that involves education, support and positive experiences. Fergus & Zimmerman, (2005) mentioned that "resilience promotion efforts should build on young people's strengths and provide opportunities for skill development, empowerment, and community engagement". By building these skills and providing children with the resources they need to overcome adversity, we can help them develop into strong and resilient adults. Here are some strategies to enhance resilience in children.

**Emotional Regulation Skills:** Teaching children how to recognize and regulate their emotions can help them develop resilience. This includes skills such as deep breathing, mindfulness, and positive self-talk.

**Problem-Solving Skills:** Children who are resilient are able to find solutions to problems and overcome obstacles. Teaching problem-solving skills, such as brainstorming and decision-making strategies, can help children develop these skills.

**Social Skills:** Children with strong social skills are better able to form positive relationships with others and seek out support when they need it. Teaching children effective communication, conflict resolution, and empathy can help them build social skills and resilience.

**Foster positive relationships:** Strong, supportive relationships with parents, caregivers, and peers can help children develop a sense of security and belonging, which can enhance their resilience.

**Growth Mindset:** A growth mindset teaches children that challenges and failures are opportunities for learning and growth. Encouraging children to see challenges as opportunities and to persist in the face of adversity can help them develop a growth mindset and enhance their resilience.

**Coping Strategies:** Children who are resilient have effective coping strategies for dealing with stress and adversity. Teaching children coping strategies such as exercise, relaxation techniques and hobbies can help them develop resilience.

**Provide a safe and nurturing environment:** Children who feel safe and secure in their environment are more likely to develop resilience. Make sure that children have access to a safe and nurturing environment, free from physical or emotional harm.

**Encourage Positive Self-Talk:** Teach your child to use positive self-talk. When they face challenging situations, they can say to themselves, "I can do this," or "I am strong." This helps them to stay positive and focused on finding solutions.

**Practice Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is the practice of being present and aware of one's thoughts and feelings. Encourage the child to practice mindfulness by taking deep breaths, paying attention to their surroundings, and taking breaks when they feel overwhelmed.

**Celebrate Achievements:** Celebrate child's achievements, no matter how small. This helps them to develop a sense of accomplishment and self-worth, which contributes to their resilience.

**Encourage healthy habits:** Encourage children to eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly to help build their physical and mental resilience.

**Build self-esteem:** Encourage children to take on challenges and praise their efforts and successes to build their self-esteem and confidence.

**Practice gratitude:** Encourage children to focus on the positive things in their lives and express gratitude for them regularly.

**Encourage creativity:** Foster creativity and imagination in children to help them think out of the box and find new ways to approach challenges.

**Teach them to set goals:** Teach children how to set realistic and achievable goals, and help them track their progress and celebrate their successes.

**Building Resilience through Curriculum:** Educational institutions can build resilience in children by integrating resilience-building concepts into the curriculum. For instance,

teachers can teach about resilience as part of social studies, health, or psychology classes. This approach helps children understand the importance of resilience and how it can be applied in various aspects of their lives.

### **ROLE OF A RESEARCHER TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE IN A CHILD**

As a researcher, there are several ways to contribute in enhancing resilience in children. Here are a few:

**Conducting research:** By conducting research on factors that contribute to resilience in children, researchers can identify interventions that are effective in enhancing resilience. Research can also identify risk factors that undermine resilience and help develop strategies to counteract them.

**Disseminating research findings:** Once the research is conducted, researchers can disseminate their findings to a wider audience, including parents, educators, policymakers, and other researchers. Dissemination can take many forms, including publications, presentations, workshops, and online resources.

**Collaborating with practitioners:** Researchers can collaborate with practitioners such as psychologists, social workers, and educators to develop and test interventions that enhance resilience in children. Collaboration can also help researchers better understand the needs of practitioners and develop research questions that are relevant to real-world problems.

**Advocating for policy change:** Researchers can use their findings to advocate for policy change that supports the development of resilience in children. For example, they can advocate for policies that support early childhood education, access to healthcare, and community-based programs that promote social and emotional well-being.

**Providing training and education:** Researchers can provide training and education to practitioners, parents, and educators on the importance of resilience in children and the strategies that are effective in enhancing it. This can include training on the latest research findings and evidence-based interventions.

Overall, researchers play a crucial role in enhancing resilience in children by conducting research, disseminating findings, collaborating with practitioners, advocating for policy change, and providing training and education.

## CONCLUSION

Resilience in children is a complex and dynamic concept that is impacted by many different factors. Several factors may have an impact on children's resilience. These include the children's access to resources, the support they receive from their families and communities, the children's self-esteem, and the children's optimism. Ability to cope with stress and adversity, as well as the retention of positive results and the achievement of long-term health outcomes, are all strongly connected with a child's degree of resilience. Fostering resilience in children and promoting their healthy development is made easier when parents, teachers, and other caretakers are knowledgeable of the factors that contribute to resilience.

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