



Family Life Newsletter

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The foreign film "Life is Beautiful" touched the hearts of people all around the world. In the movie a simple man helps his child, his wife, and himself endure the horrors of a Jewish concentration camp near the end of World War II. The man convinces his young child that their "trip" is a surprise for his birthday. They have enrolled in a game. First prize is a ride in a real tank! The rules are simple: no crying, no asking for snacks, and the mean judges who yell must never see the child. Through amazing creativity and humor, the man is able to convince his son how much fun they are having. Later the son would look back and say, "What laughs we had!" The story was truly beautiful. The man's amazing ability to be resilient during such a horrible experience was aided by his gift for humor and creativity.

While our children are not sent off to concentration camps, they do face pressures everyday. These pressures include drugs, alcohol, sex, and crime. Some children are emotionally, physically, or sexually abused. Still other children live in constant poverty. Despite the adversity many children overcome and continue to succeed. As in the film, children can benefit from the ability to use humor and creativity as coping skills. Activities such as art, music, drama, reading, and imaginative play all help to teach children the skills necessary to be resilient. With the help of caring adults, children can learn to apply these skills to everyday life situations.

The newsletter focuses on issues of resiliency and creativity. Caring adults can help children become more resilient by encouraging creative activities. Included in this issue are research briefs, facts, and teaching tools that address these issues. These articles are meant to aid adults and children in building resiliency. These skills will help children overcome the pressures of life so that they are able to succeed.

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Feedback or requests for resources or training welcomed. For more resources on family life education check out the UW Extension Family Life World Wide Web site, "Dreamcatcher" at	

www.uwyo.edu/ag/ces/family/dream.html

Behavioral and Academic Adjustment

A two-year longitudinal study found higher levels of stressful life events related to lower adjustment, higher social problem solving skills and social support. White female children with higher socioeconomic backgrounds had higher levels of adjustment. Higher initial stress related to lower academic adjustment and behavioral problems two-years later. Increased social support over two years improved behavior problems, social competencies, and overall GPA's.

Dubow, Eric F & Tisak, John & Causey, David & Hryshko, Ann & Reid, Graham. (1991). "A Two-Year Longitudinal Study of Stressful Life Events, Social Support, and Social Problem-Solving Skills: Contributions to Children's Behavioral and Academic Adjustment." Child Development, 62, 583-599.

Environmental Mediators in High-Risk Adolescents

Relationships of the adaptation of positively adjusted teens living in high-risk environments were compared to their social environment. No social support measures were associated with better adjustment on any level. Scholastic self confidence is positively influenced by the student's self-perception of classroom involvement, teacher support, as well as peer relationships.

Feiner, Robert D. & Aber, Mark S. & Primavera, Judith & Cauce, Ana M. (1985). "Adaptation and

Vulnerability in High-Risk Adolescents: An Examination of Environmental Mediators." American Journal of Commun PsVcholQqV, Vol. 13, No. 4, 365379.

Resilience in Adolescence

Risk factors and resilience were studied when a healthy child was put into an unhealthy environment. Two groups, labeled "resilients" and "deviants" were studied. Both groups had been exposed to approximately the same amount of stress. They were tested on their intelligence, temperaments, and coping abilities. Also, a self-descriptive questionnaire to determine the perception of the self and a social and educational climate test was part of the study. There were differences in the personal and social resources of the two groupies. Resilient persons wert more flexible in their temperament, had more achievement motivation, were more intelligent, and faced problems more pro-actively. It was also found that if there was too much help and social support students became to dependant, which was a block to resilience.

Losel, Friedrich & Bleisener, Thomas. "Resilience in Adolescence: A Study on the Generalizability of Protective Factors." p 299-320.

Predictors of Adjustment

Data on youth adjustment obtained from the National institute of Mental Health (NIMH)/ Child and Adolescent Mental Disorders (MECA) Study links between adverse life events and maladjustment. Higher adjustment was predicted by lower levels of adverse events, living with two biological parents, good parental marital relationship, higher socioeconomic status, closer parental monitoring, higher family functioning, better physical health, higher child IQ, and higher educational aspirations.

Tiet, Q. Q., Bird H. R., Davies, M., Hoven, C., Cohen, P, Jensen, R S., & Goodman, S. (1998). "Adverse life events and resilience." Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent PsychiaLry 3(11), 1191-1201.

Urban Poverty and Resilience

Economic hardship was not directly related to psychological adjustment in 81hgraders but was related to psychological well-being. Identity development functions as a protective factor against poverty and higher self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and loneliness.

DeHaan, L. G. & MacDermid, S. (1998). "The relationship of individual and family factors to the pschological well-being ofjunior high school students living in poverty." Adolescence, 33(129), 7390.

DEFINITIONS:

- ! **Resilience:** An individual's ability to adjust and adapt to the changes, demands, and disappointments that come up in the course of life¹.
- ! **Survival:** When an individual continues to function after being impaired.
- ! **Recovery:** When an individual returns to the condition they were before they were impaired.
- ! **Thriving:** When an individual recovers beyond the original level of functioning, and continues to grow beyond the previous state.
- ! **Individual resources:** Personality factors that can be used to predict resilience. Personality factors can include "hardiness, coping and a sense of coherence."
- ! **Cognitive resources:** How individuals use cognition to perceive risks. Factors such as threat appraisal, perceived personal risk, and self-efficacy can be resilient characteristics.
- ! **Social resources:** Social resources can include social support, concerned teachers/ family, strong family ties, or caring community groups. These influences can affect resiliency.

THEORY BASE**Compensatory Model**

Neutralizes exposure to risk, influencing the outcomes but not directly interacting with the risk factors. Examples include optimism, internal locus of control, social interactions, and faith.

Challenge Model

Moderate levels of stress are considered to offer a challenge that when overcome can strengthen skills and help prepare a person to better overcome future difficulties. A child that learns to deal fairly and calmly with small conflicts early in life, such as having to share a toy, will learn the skills necessary to deal with later conflicts in life.

Protective Factor Model

A process that "interacts with a risk factor to reduce the probability of a negative outcome." ²The protective factor seeks to indirectly influence outcomes versus the compensatory and challenge model that directly influences outcome. Some protective factors might include higher IQ scores, social skills, higher socioeconomic status, family support, and better parental monitoring.

Desensitization

Repeated exposure to a stressor can cause a person to be less effected by the occurrence. The person has the skills to reduce the tension and cope in a more efficient manner.

Enhanced Recovery Potential

After the first experience with a stressor, repeated exposure may increase ability to quickly return to baseline.

! Taking It to a Higher Level

Continuous resilience under stress can lead to individuals who thrive at a higher level.

Carver, Charles (1998). Resilience and thriving, issues, models, and linkages. Journal of Social Issues 54(2),245.

Joseph, J. M. The Resilient Child New York Plenum Press, 1994.

O'Leary, V E. Strength in the face of adversity individual and social thriving. Journal of Social Issues. 54(2), 425.

"Our greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in risking every time we fall"

--Oliver Goldsmith

What Motivates You?

From "Power, Mental Energy, and Inertia" by Fanita English.

The Theory of Existential Pattern Therapy is the theory that there are three main drives which motivate us. These are the Creative or excitement drive, the Survival drive, and the Sleep drive. Mental energy flows through all of these and all of an individual's actions are motivated by any of these drives in combination with each other. This theory is related to Freud's theory on drives.

Freud believed in the presence of only two main drives. These were the life drive and the death drive. All actions dealing with self preservation and sexual energy are included in this drive. The death drive is motivated by "an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state," according to Freud. Risk taking, exploring, and fascinations with danger all stem from this drive.

The Existential Pattern Therapy is a bit more in depth than Freud's theory however. In it there are three drives...

1. *Survival* or the self-preservation drive. The wish to life and the fear of death, also the motivation to prevent danger to oneself.
2. *Creative* or excitement drive. This has to do with the overall preservation of the species. Sexual energy, as well as adventures, artistic interests, exploration and risk taking all fall under this drive.
3. *Sleep* drive, or the desire to rest. The letting go and relaxing, restoring of energy and offsetting stress.

The survival drive can show itself in many ways. For example, feeling over sure or unsure, the emotions of fear and shame, the wish to please and to fit in, as well as aggressiveness are all aspects of the survival drive. The creative drive is not an individual-oriented drive; it is more involved with the furthering of the entire species. Sexual interest is an aspect; however, the propagating of the species is not the only way a species furthers and preserves itself. The curiosity drive has given rise to invention, discovery, arts and languages. The negative aspect of the creativity drive is its part in risk taking and discovery, which can lead to disaster and death. Also, aggressiveness can originate from this drive as well. The sleep drive is very important because the body and mind need to rest and regain energy. This is related to Freud's death drive; sleep can be seen as the desire to let go of problems and worries or as desire for death and eternal rest. This drive can be seen as resting and restoring, relieve from stress, and fortifying one's mind and body so that the other two drives can function normally.

In the ideal situation, all three drives would be working in balance and harmony, with no two out weighing the third. However, when only two operate at once, the third can negatively draw away energy from the others. A healthy individual must have all three drives working in harmony to function. English, Fanita. (1987). *Power, Mental Energy, and Inertia*. *Transactional Analysis Journal* 17, (3), 91-98.

FYI: Facts about Resiliency and Creativity

There are many factors that can help or hinder a child's creative ability and resiliency to stress. Some especially important factors are a child's family life and their school environment. There are many ideas out there about resiliency and creativity in children. Keep in mind however, that too much of a good thing can be detrimental.

Did You Know?

- ! Socioeconomic status is an almost irrelevant factor when you are talking about resiliency and creativity.
- ! Higher levels of stressful life events are related to lower levels of adjustment in children.
- ! Family cohesion is the most reliable predictor of positive adjustment and resiliency. Cohesion includes affectionate parents and a strong relationship with one's mother.
- ! Children should always feel they are accepted and loved. Creative children also tend to have parents who respect them as individuals and who do not restrict their freedom overmuch.
- ! Creative children have a large amount of humor in their homes between them, their siblings, and especially their parents.

Facts Continued...

- ! Creative children grow up in households that place a strong emphasis on values and morals, not on rules.
- ! Resilient adolescents tend to be more intelligent, face problems pro-actively, have better self-esteem and a larger social network on which to fall back on.
- ! Resilient youths tend to be more flexible in their temperament, have reduced helplessness, and have higher achievement motivation. Their drive to achieve lies not only in school, but also without in extracurricular activities, music lessons, clubs, or any other organization in which the child participates.
- ! A resilient youth should have a sense of power and a feeling of some amount of control of the world around them.
- ! A resilient youth should have tendencies more towards cooperation rather than defensiveness or aggressiveness. This goes along with having a strong capacity to develop intimate relationships with others within and without of their immediate family. Friends are very important to a child's mental and physical health.

"Success is relevant to coping with obstacles ... but no problem is ever solved by those who, when they fail, look for someone to blame instead of something to do."

-Fred Waggoner

Too Much of a Good Thing...

Certain factors can enhance resiliency, however as with many things, more is not always better.

- ! An increase in social support can improve behavior problems, social competencies, and GRKs. However, too much help and social support can lead a child to become dependent an(this can reduce resilience.
- ! Time inside the classroom is very important for children. Positive scholastic self-image is very important and can be improved by strong teacher support, positive associations with classmates, and by becoming more actively involved in classroom activities. This is very positive, however the opposite is true as well. Strong classroom structure and task orientation, along with higher standardized test achievement scores are associated with lower levels of self-esteem and creativity in students. An encouraging classroom environment is key.
- ! Stress is necessary to achieve. Without obstacles there would be no need to strive for anything higher. There is a fine balance though, if there is too much stress in a child's life then stress can be very detrimental and cancel out the child's motivation for achievement.
- ! Most of the very influential people of this century faced many obstacles in their childhood. All of these people either overcame or used this adversity to their advantage. The list includes people such as Samuel Clemens, Albert Einstein, and George Bernard Shaw among others. However being "influential" does not mean that a person had to be influential to the century in a positive way, Adolf Hitler is on the list as well.

Barnard, C. P (1994). Resiliency. A shift in our perception? The American Journal of Family Therapy, 22(2), 135-143.

Arnabile, T M. Growing Up Creative. Crown Publishers, Inc., 1989.

Children face pressures everyday to engage in illegal and harmful behavior:

Resilient people have the coping skills, social support, and strength necessary to resist participation in these activities.

Nine percent of 8th grade students, 18% of 10th grade students, and 25% of 12th grade students reported smoking on a regular basis in 1997.

In 1997, fifteen percent of 8th graders, 25% of 10th graders, and 31% of 12th graders reported drinking more than five or more consecutive alcoholic beverages in the past two weeks.

Thirteen percent of 8th graders, 23% of 10th graders, and 26% of 12th graders reported use of illicit drugs in 1997.

The rate of serious violent crime victims in youth between the ages of 12 to 17 was 33 out of 1000 in 1996.

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Blum, Deborah (1998). **Finding strength: how to overcome anything.** *Psychology Today*, 31(3), 3245. *ChildStats.Gov.*
[Http://www.ChildStats.gov/ael998/summary.htm](http://www.ChildStats.gov/ael998/summary.htm).
 America's Children 1998. Joseph, J.M. *The Resilient Child*. New York: Plenum Press, 1994. e
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RESILIENCY: "an individual's ability to adjust and adapt to the changes, demands, and disappointments that come up in the course of life."

Children can become more resilient by enhancing these areas:

COPING SKILLS

- ! Resilient children use proactive approaches: they plan ahead.
- ! Resilient children view experiences in positive and constructive ways.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

- ! Resilient people ask for help when needed.
- ! Resilient children are less likely to try and overcome things on their own.
- ! Resilient youth have families that support and encourage them.
- ! Resilient children tend to be good natured and easy to get along with.

GOALS

- ! Resilient people set goals and plan for the future.

SELF-ESTEEM

- ! Resilient people believe in themselves.
- ! Resilient children recognize their own strengths.
- ! Resilient children feel in control of themselves.
- ! Resilient people have faith.

CREATIVITY CAN ENHANCE RESILIENCY'

- ! Creative activities can teach coping skills, give direction for goal setting, increase self-esteem, and provide an environment for social interactions.

ART, MUSIC, WRITING, DRAMA, AND PLAY CAN:

- ! Teach valuable skills which increase competency and coping skills.
- ! Act as stress relievers by diverting attention away from pressures.
- ! Provide options for expression.
- ! Are enjoyable.
- ! Lead to goal setting and feelings of accomplishment.
- ! Act as a doorway to more creative activities, which increases children's skills.
- ! Result in pride.
- ! Provide praise.
- ! Provide opportunities to work with groups which enhances social skills, communication, and problem-solving techniques

LAUGHTER A CREATIVE WAY TO BUILD RESILIENCY

"Creativity and humor are identical, they both involve bringing together two items which do not have any obvious connection, and creating a relationship."

- William Fry, M.D. (Doskoc1996)

Laughter, it does a body good:

Three minutes of deep belly laughing is equal to three minutes on a rowing machine

-) Laughing uses every large muscle in your body.
-) Laughter increases your respiratory rate
-) Laughter makes you breathe faster and your lungs expand
-) Laughter causes your blood pressure to go up and then down.
-) Laughter acts as a stress reliever
-) After you laugh blood pressure and heart rate drop so you feel relaxed
-) Laughter causes relaxation of the muscles which leads to a release of tension
-) Laughter releases pent-up energy
-) Laughter releases endorphins, which are our bodies natural pain killers

Laughter: what's good for the body is good for the mind

Laughter is an expression of emotion: joy, surprise, happiness, nervousness

-) Laughing allows us to share our moods with ourselves and with others
-) Laughter helps us sort out our moods

It is impossible to feel rage, depression, or anxiety while laughing

-) Laughter automatically invokes a positive attitude
-) Laughing requires complete focus, while laughing it is impossible to think of anything else

Humor ultimately leads to a positive mood

-) A good laugh can refocus attention from bad to good
-) The laughter sticks in your head which can stay with you all day long
-) Laughter can often change a rotten mood

Laughing makes you more resilient:

Laughter gives you perspective

-) Laughter helps you stay alert and cope with a crazy world.
-) Laughter is mental flexibility
-) Laughter allows you to see several truths at the same time
-) Laughter encourages out-of-the-ordinary ways of looking at things

Laughter gives us control over a situation

-) When you choose to laugh, you are not letting the situation get the best of you.

Reasons to smile and laugh:

Laughing is easy, it is:

-) free
-) easy to access
-) non-fattening
-) has no ill side effects, and
-) makes the world fun

Laughing can make you popular

-) Smiling and laughing puts people at ease
-) Women and men alike find a smile attractive
-) Telling a joke makes you 'one of the crowd'

Smiling is easy: it takes only 17 muscles to smile while it takes 43 to frown.

A dose of laughter every day

How to create humor in you life

-) Laugh long and loud
-) Admit that humans are silly creatures.
-) Up the amount of times you laugh in a day.
-) Smile as many times in one day that you can.
-) Be funny everywhere--it helps put people at ease
-) Laugh at yourself-it gives you power and control in all situations.
-) Laugh at the situation not the person-it saves everyone from embarrassment
-) Hang your favorite jokes where you'll see them: your bathroom mirror, the front door
-) Keep a collection of comic books handy at your house

Doskoc, P (1996). Happily ever laughter. Psychology Today 29(4), 32.

Grensing-Pophal, L (1999). Getting your dose off laughter. Nursing, 29(2), 56.

Why laughter is the best medicine. (1998). Jet, 94(9), 14.

SOCIAL SKILLS

While many factors influence resiliency, one factor remains consistent. Resilient people have strong social networks.

Resilient children

- , Have at least one caring adult in their lives
- , Have social support
- , Are good natured and easy to get along with
- , Are good natured and easy to get along with

A strong social network is an important part of resiliency. Strong social networks provide opportunities for love, support, and advice. Social networks can also lead to higher self-esteem. Support, advice, and self-esteem can help children deal with life's pressures. It also provides children with the skills necessary to succeed. To build social networks children need to develop social skills. Social skills involve self-awareness skills, communication skills, role-taking skills, and problem-solving skills.

Help your child develop these skills:**Self-Awareness Skills:**

- , Encourage expressions of feelings.
- , Evaluate children realistically
- , Teach them the value of their unique talents
- , Help children examine their weaknesses
- , Remind your child everyone has weaknesses
- , Share your own strengths and weaknesses
- , Stress the importance of accepting others' strengths and weaknesses

Communication Skills:

- , Teach your child to listen actively
- , Talk about ways to express feelings
- , Provide opportunities for your child to practice communication skills

Role-Taking Skills:

- , Encourage behavior that is helpful and shows concern for others
- , Children who observe empathetic behaviors will be more likely to be empathetic
- , Engage in role-play activities that help children examine others' points of view
- , Provide feedback to your child about appropriate behaviors
- , Teach your child how to be polite

Problem-Solving Skills

- , Remind your child of how she coped with bad moments in the past
- , Help your child focus on larger goals
- , Act as a role model by using problem-solving skills
- , Be honest with your child, white lies will not teach your child to be realistic

FRIENDSHIPS

Friendships can help children develop social skills. Positive friendships can also increase resiliency by providing support, fun, and opportunities to learn from each other.

How children can develop friendships:

- , Take the initiative to get involved in activities. Introduce yourself to others
- , Pay attention and show interest.
- , Give positive feedback
- , Play cooperatively
- , Meet and play with others
- , Show concern and empathy
- , Share toys, activities, and attention
- , Be friendly
- , Accept others
- , Be joyful and positive
- , Respond to ideas
- , Keep confidentiality
- , Be flexible and cooperative

For more information:

Blum, D. (1998). Finding strength: how to overcome anything. *Psychology Today*, 31(3), 32-45. Joseph, J.M. *The Resilient Child*. New York: Plenum Press, 1994. Lawhorn, T (1997). Encouraging friendships among children. *Childhood Education*, 73(4), 228-232. Katz, L.G. (1990). Helping kids cope with frustrations at school. *Instructor*, 106(3), 95-99. Tiet, Q.Q., Bird, H.R., Davies, M., Hoven, C., Cohen, P., Jensen, P.S. & Goodman, S. (1998). Adverse life events and resilience. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 37(11), 1191-1201.

Helpful Teaching Tools:

Creativity - Problem Solving - Resiliency

The connection between creativity and resiliency is not always readily apparent. However, they are definitely linked. The characteristics that describe very resilient and very creative people are actually quite similar. Also, there are connections between creativity and self-esteem, which is linked to resiliency as well. Creative thinking can help a person handle stress, which again, is associated with resiliency. The most important relationship though, is through problem solving. Problem solving skills are essential throughout any child's lifetime. Decision-making is a life-long process. Problem solving skills can be greatly improved by increasing the capacity for creative thinking. When problem-solving skills are increased, resiliency is increased. Parents and teachers should promote problem-solving skills at home and in the classroom. Children should be given time to try to find their own solutions to problems **rather than having adults trying to** solve all their problems for them. A resourceful person who can problem-solve with a more open mind, originality, and creativity should be able to cope better during more stressful life events.

Here are some ways to promote creativity and resiliency...

- , Encourage your child to get involved and be supportive in everything your child tries. Self-confidence and self-esteem can be greatly increased by academics, extracurricular activities, clubs, organizations, and sports.
- , Open discussion, debates, and brainstorming should be practiced at home and at school.
- , Encourage artistic expression, whether this is through drawing, painting, sculpting, and singing, playing a musical instrument or writing creative stories.
- , If a child needs some extra help at school or at home, peer tutoring and mentoring is often available, don't be afraid to use them.
- , Help your child learn to relax. The healthy habits of a daily nap, breathing exercises, or even yoga will help your child better deal with stress.
- , Remember: Learning Is Fun! Help your child to cultivate that feeling and to become an active and interested learner.

Watch for creative activities at on different ages. While the children will initiate the activities their own, parents, teachers, and other adults can encourage and cultivate the activities.

Ages 2-3

Music: Children repeat songs and make up their own verses. And make believe playing instruments.

Drawing: Play with colors, lines, and shapes. All children need is crayons and paper.

Building: Legos, Lincoln logs, or simply blocks are used to create different structures.

Ages 4-5

Painting: Water colors or finger paints can be used to experiment with combining colors in new ways.

Word Play: Combining new words and sounds together as well as meanings.

Creative Thinking Relieves the Stress and Boredom from Everyday Life

Most children have an innate ability for creative thinking. This ability shows itself in many ways throughout a child's early years. Parents can stimulate creativity and creative thinking in their children with easy and inexpensive activities. Here are some activities to watch for and to cultivate throughout your child's life...

- , Encourage your children to make their own Christmas and Birthday gifts for their friends and family. They can be as creative as they want to be.
- , Throw creative "theme" parties. Some suggestions (and the sky is the limit!) are Hawaii in December, A day in Mexico, Decade Parties, or anything else that comes to mind.
- , Turning classical music on and having your child paint or draw the music. There are no right or wrong ways to go about this!
- , Storytelling between family members and friends.
- , Playing "Dress Up."
- , Anything else creative YOU can come up with!

Dancing: Becoming more comfortable with their own bodies, moving their bodies in new ways and experimenting with movement to express feelings or emotions.

Fantasy: "Playing pretend" or having an imaginary playmate fall into this category.

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