

FAMILY RESILIENCY

Qualities of families that survive and thrive

prepared by

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resilient (ri-'zil-yent) *adj.* [*<L. re-back + satire, to jump*] 1. *springing back into shape, etc., elastic* 2. *recovering strength, spirits, etc., quickly*

Everyday is full of little hassles—rushing to school or work, being teased, having to do unexpected homework or fulfill job demands, hitting all the red lights, etc. Some days bring bigger hassles—getting fired, arrested, divorced, or injured. No one welcomes these stressors, but everyone can learn how to handle them. Many problems can be **prevented** (not drinking and driving), **reduced** (avoiding sarcasm that fuels conflict), or **not repeated** (learning from mistakes).

Children, adults, and families who develop healthy lifestyles and stress coping skills and supportive relationships most often reduce stress and increase their enjoyment of life.

To learn more about resiliency and “bouncing back,” read on!

Traits of Resilient Individuals

Insight: See things “as they are,” are not afraid to ask questions, avoid acting on fear or anger.

Independence: Become one’s own person, not caught up in others’ hang-ups, focusing what can be done.

Relationships: Connect with peers, mentors, and friends in ways that build self-worth and belonging.

Initiative: Find work or casual interests to develop talents, confidence, and leadership.

Humor: Are able to laugh at self and with others through jokes, play, and recreation.

Creativity: Use art, drama, writing, sports, and compassionate living to express one’s uniqueness.

Traits of Resilient Families

Commitment: Keep promises and commit to caring and doing what it takes to follow through.

Cohesion: Stick together but allow a balance of affection, support, and respect for individuality.

Adaptability: Blend tradition and consistent rules with flexibility, help kids think for themselves.

Communication: Speak for themselves, are open, listen with care.

Spirituality: Act with a sense of purpose, practice faith and service to others.

Connectedness: Keep in touch with family and friends, share in community activities and responsibilities.

Time together: Set aside family time daily, celebrate special occasions that build memories.

Efficacy: Stress family pride and optimism, help family members explore and achieve.

Awareness Building Activities on Resiliency

- Read one of the following books together:

Phoebe Gilman. (1992). *Something from Nothing*. New York: Scholastic Books.

Saga of a grandfather's resourcefulness and its effects on his grandson.

Bill Martin Jr. & John Archambault. (1987). *Knots on a Counting Rope*. New York: Henry Holt.

Tale of a grandfather's role in helping a blind Navajo boy grow strong and confident.

- View one of these Disney films:

Pinocchio. (1954). Classic animated feature about a puppet who comes to life as “a real live boy.”

Looking for Miracles. (1991). Story of a single mom and her two sons who must grow up during the Great Depression. Canada.

- Discuss:

How individuals and families in the story demonstrated one or more of the resiliency traits described on this fact sheet.

How characters handled difficulties and became more capable and confident.

How your 4-H club or family can use lessons in the story to become stronger.

- Activities:

Build a “snow fence” by wiring eight large tongue depressors together. Discuss how snow fences do not stop snow or wind (stressors), but rather channel drifts out of roads or homes and direct melting snow into fields and towns for use. Note how each of the traits of family resiliency helps turn trouble into triumph when everybody works together.

Construct a braid of eight strands (one for each of the seven resilient traits and one for the individual). Give examples that show how each trait contributes to a whole person and how, when all are woven together, the braid, which represents life, becomes even stronger than each of the strands.

Club or family members tell about a family experience that illustrates an individual or family strength. Include humor or drama to heighten interest. Record stories and make copies for members. Possible topics: birth/adoption, preschool “expressions,” kindergarten, pets, learning to drive, dating, cooking disasters, vacation fun, worries that have been overcome, and friends.

Club or family members brainstorm activities to build resiliency and apply them to community service projects. For instance, relationships and support may be promoted by a one to two year preschool or nursing home visiting/activity program. Family time together may be enhanced by including relatives and friends in club or school events.

Don't forget: 4-H projects provide great opportunities for families to take time together, communicate with one another, build closeness and confidence, and improve decision-making skills.

Read more about it

Joy Dryfoos. (1990). *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Richard Louv. (1990). *Childhood's Future*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Charles A Smith. (1990). *From Wonder to Wisdom: Using Stories to Help Children Grow*. New York: Penguin.

The Consumer Information catalog offers information on how to order booklets that discuss space, reading, music, science, and geography activities that families can do together. Send requests to Consumer Information Center-3A, P.O. Box 100. Pueblo, CO 81002.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Edna L. McBreen, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wyoming, Laramie 82071.

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