



ALICIA FARRELL PHD
COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGIST

How to Nurture Our Children's Grit, Resilience and Self-Confidence

- I. **Intro: Suffering is a part of the human condition**
 - A. Our suffering is closely related to how we deal with the effect that past trauma has on us in the present.
- II. **Trauma: Loss of connection to ourselves, our bodies, our families and the world.**
 - A. Occurs when our ability to respond to a perceived threat is in some way overwhelmed.
 - B. Trauma doesn't have to stem from a major catastrophe. Can be from a series of minor mishaps. What for one person can be traumatic, may be no big deal to another.
 - C. Childhood fraught with opportunity for trauma: Lack of control, knowledge, understanding, dependence and brain not fully developed.
 - D. Traumatic memory is a visual and sensory experience that hijacks the brain's basic functions (Brain stem) and emotional regulation (limbic system). Cuts off the rational brain (pre-frontal cortex) leading to a person's body, mind and spirit getting stuck in the trauma.
 - E. Toxic Stress: Chronic activation of a physiologic response to stress when no protection or support is in place to counteract it. Largest public health issue of our time.
- III. **Life, loss, trauma and the secret behind a positive attitude.**
 - A. Resilience; Psychic robustness against loss, pain and disappointment
 1. Homeostasis: How well you bounce back and fully recover from a challenge.
 2. Sustainability/Reserve Capacity: Ability to continue functioning in the face of adversity.
 3. Doesn't mean you don't experience difficulty and distress. That would mean "denial" and "avoidance" were at play.
 4. Resilience is choice which means it is under our control. Not a trait some people have and others don't. Boils down to a series of choices that ultimately determine the quality of your life.
 5. Profile of a prototypically resilient person (Resilience is measured in degrees not black and white) (General: Strong sense of self, Well-honed interpersonal skills and ability to form healthy relationships, Effective coping strategies/tools)
 - B. Effective coping strategies that feed resilience
 1. Know thyself (i.e., values, motivations, personality behavioral style, what throws you off your game, how do you respond to vulnerability, criticism, judgement, crisis, internal/external locus of control; exercise control over impulses and be able to delay gratification; Define goals, be determined, persistent and flexible; strong values)
 2. Realistic Expectations (Set expectations based on knowledge, context and reality). Research is showing that LOWERING expectations contributes to happiness.
 3. Believe change is normal and an opportunity for growth. Can identify your fear and push through it: *Pain to Power Vocabulary* (Susan Jeffers: Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway) – I can't vs I can/I won't; I should vs I could; It's not my fault vs I'm totally responsible; This sucks vs What can I do about it; I hope vs I know; If only vs Next Time; What will I do? I can't handle this vs I can figure this out. **Mantra: I know I can handle it.**
 4. Take care of yourself: eat right, exercise, meditate, employ mindfulness, make a list of your needs vs your wants. Needs are things that are non-negotiable. Set boundaries around your needs and be flexible with your wants.
 5. Positive emotion (humor/laughter etc.; forgive self and others – holding on to negative emotion is a threat to resilience. Make a list of people you need to forgive or you need forgiveness from. Decide if you need to take specific action or just decide to let go of the



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6. negative emotion/anger, shame or guilt; Possess a grateful attitude). Surround yourself with positive people.
7. Cognitive reappraisal/Cognitive Restructuring: Identify challenge, harm, threat in situation; decide if stressful situation can be changed or must be accepted; solve problems or diminish impact by taking action; Interpret threat differently to reduce negative emotions.
8. Forgive yourself and others.
9. Presence of social supports (Multi social groups; Love; Care; Strengthen Life Span relationships)
10. Sense of Purpose (Find meaning in your life; Give and receive help)

IV. Nurturing resilience and grit in our children

- A. Message from Over-Parenting: “You can’t actually be safe, secure, happy and successful without my help and expertise. – Antithesis of building resilience.
- B. Gift to our children: challenge, struggle, triumph and accomplishment
- C. How to: Love unconditionally; Structure with boundaries/appropriate expectations; Stay in charge while maintaining flexibility; don’t solve their problems for them, solve them with them; let experience natural consequences of behavior; Expect them to commit to long-term goals and persist in the face of adversity; teach them to understand and express their feelings; Don’t underestimate your children’s capabilities (Do for them. Teach them to do. Do with them. Then they do on own. – Don’t do for them what they can do for themselves.); Instill belief that fixed ability does not exist and your child can always get better at something but doesn’t always have to be good at it; reward very small increments of growth/change; Teach them to forgive and forgive yourself; Have fun; Work on your own resilience/attitude so as to prevent intergenerational transfer of Toxic Stress; Be a positive role model for compassion and empathy. Teach them an assumption of goodwill – cornerstone for civility; Build collaborations and interactive systems of support.

V. Brain Development

- A. Interactions of genes and experiences shape the developing brain.
- B. Major ingredient in this developmental process: Serve and Return (interaction between children and parents/caregivers at home and in community.
- C. Absence of responsive caregiving or if responses are unreliable or inappropriate brain’s architecture does not form as expected. Can lead to disparities in learning and behavior that follow person through life.
- D. Research does show brain can be rewired, change its structure and function, in ways restores and strengthens resilience (CBT, Mindfulness, Physical Activity, Social Support, Social integration, Develop meaning/purpose). All serve to decrease accumulative effect of stress (allostatic load) on body.

VI. How know child maturing towards independence and developing resilience

- A. I am; I do; I can; I will; I relate; I’m here (see handout for details)
- B. Healthy life includes a mix of these elements: Physical self-care; Connecting; Exploring; Relaxing; Reflecting; Contributing