

14 Ways to Teach Your Kids Resilience

📅 April 8th, 2008 | 🧑 Author: [Ronit Baras](#)

Life is not about what happens to us
but what we do about it
- Ronit Baras

As much as we would like to defend our kids from the difficulties in life, from experiencing crisis, change or loss, we cannot! However, we can give our kids the tools to recover from difficult times when those hit.

Many people say to me, “They are just kids. What horrible things can possibly happens to them?” My answer is, “Let’s not wait to find out”.



For children, what seems like a simple thing might be a horrible problem. We have good friends whose 18-year-old son took a gun and shot himself in the head because he was not accepted to the course he wanted. After it happened, it does not help any of us to ask why a successful, normal, gentle kid, with a wonderful family, decided that not getting into a course is “the end of the world”.

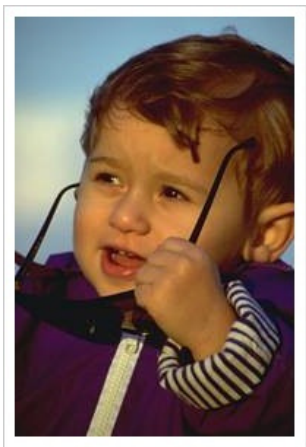
For kids, changing seats in the classroom, a friend saying, “I’m not your friend anymore”, or not being invited to play during a break can be “the end of the world”. Still, the way kids (and adults) deal with these difficulties is what sets kids apart. In the article [How you can become more resilient](#), published in the Summit Daily News, Psychologist Dr Barbara Leffler says, “Resilience can be learned and developed”.

Resilience is part of our emotional intelligence. When faced with a problem, resilient people focus on finding a solution rather than getting depressed and feeling like victims. Resilience is another name to emotional strength.

According to Dr Leffler, everyone is born with a different temperament and, depending on how it interacts with life experiences, this can determine how resilient they become. However, resilience can also be learned.

Since we cannot control many of our life experiences, we can only control our response to them. As parents, our role is it to help our kids respond positively and with strength.

14 ways to help your kids develop resilience



1. One major obstacle to forming resilience is negativity. Negative thinking makes people look badly at people, actions and behaviours and attracts the wrong experiences. Negative people use many [pink elephants](#) in their language. Watch how you talk to your kids!
2. Teach kids to trust their instincts (gut feelings). They might be clumsy at first, but they will improve and stop being so influenced by what others expect of them. You are probably saying, “But I want them to be influenced by theme”. Well, this is a Catch 22, because if they are too influenced by you, they are likely to be influenced by others, so you have to choose. If you have teen kids and you want to gently encourage them to develop resilience, give them my book “[Be Special, Be Yourself for Teenagers](#)“.

3. Teach flexibility. Flexible kids adjust well to different ideas and changing situations. Teach them to try different kinds of food, listen to different kinds of music and expose them to different cultures, different social groups and different hobbies.
4. Teach responsibility. When your kids blame someone else or circumstances for poor outcomes, help them understand that when they do this, they give the other person or the circumstances the power over their life. When they feel bad about something, ask them, “What can **you** do to feel better?” and “What can you **learn** from this?”
5. Teach emotions. From as early as 2 years old, offer your kids emotional words to express themselves. Teach them to say “I don’t like it”, “I’m not happy”, “I want”, “I prefer”, “I will be happy if”, “I’m upset” and “I was sad”. Increase their emotional vocabulary by having a big vocabulary yourself and using mirroring like “Are you sad that they didn’t invite you to play?”
6. Teach positive focus. Find good in every situation. Make a habit of saying one good thing about every bad situation. If your kids fail in math, make them find something good that can come out of it, such as, “I know **now** what I need to work on” or “I’ve learned the power of practice”. Seeing good in everything will help them respond better to loss, change, major illnesses or any other challenge.
7. Level your expectations. When your expectations are too high, your child experiences less success, feels more out of control and may give up, Dr Leffler explained. If you are not sure about where to set your expectation, try to remember yourself at that age and compare your behaviour to your kids. If you cannot remember exactly what you did at that age, hanging around other parents, preferably positive parents, can give you a good indication to what to expect. Bear in mind there is no such thing as a universal biological clock, so if your friends’ daughter makes her own lunch at the age of 4, this only means it is possible, but it does not mean that all kids should be able to make their own lunches at the age of 4.
8. Help your kids master a skill. Being good at something gives kids a very good feeling and confidence. Help them find something they like. People can do better at the things they like. This can be art, sport, math, reading, dancing, music, languages, drama... When kids are good at something, they know the making of success. For example, they know that in order to become successful in drama, they got through many rejections but survived. They also get many positive feedbacks for their achievements and hard work and it motivates them to keep moving forward even if they have difficulties.
9. Expose your kids to inspiring people who have won against all odds. If you have such people around you, make sure your kids spend a lot of time with them. You can always tell your kids the real stories about successful people (artists, business people, actors, singers...), including the parts about getting over obstacles and difficulties. Find stories from your life that are good examples of how you recovered from hard experiences.
10. Tell your kids they always have a choice. In every situation, every person has a choice about what to do, how to respond and how to feel. Tell your kids that there are many options to do, respond or feel and the difference between people going through the same crisis is in the way they do, respond and feel. For example, two people with a serious illness can respond either by feeling fear and giving up or by learning, getting support and aiming for health.
11. Teach gratitude. Grateful kids are more positive. If they appreciate what they have and focus on it rather than what they do not have, they will not treat not getting what they want as “the end of the world”.
12. Teach your kids to reward themselves. Unfortunately, kids live in a society in which their rewards are external and they reach a point where they depend on such rewards. This dependency does not give them control over life but a huge need for others to give them a kind word, tell them they are good and encourage them. If they can say, “I did well”, “I was great” or “I’m a good friend”, this will give them a lot of strength.
13. Having a purpose is an important factor of resilience. According to Abraham Maslow, purpose is a high-level need. For kids, having a purpose is a bit big and overwhelming. The easiest way to explain purpose is to talk to them about the big picture, about the big world, about considering others, about making a

difference. The first step of teaching kids about purpose is to encourage them to give their time for the “greater good” of society. They can help by volunteering their time, skills or money (if applicable) to what they consider a good cause, and use the good feeling as their reward.

14. Finally, help your child remember that setbacks, obstacles and difficulties are part of our lives here on earth. Through our faith and trust in God, we can do all things! God has promised to be with us and help us and wants for us to cast all our anxiety on him.