Resilience: helping your teenager ‘bounce back’

When young people are resilient, they cope better with difficult situations. They ‘bounce back’ when things go wrong. Young people need resilience to navigate life’s ups and downs, so building resilience is an important part of adolescent development.

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to ‘bounce back’ after a tough situation or difficult time and then get back to feeling just about as good as you felt before. It’s also the ability to adapt to difficult circumstances that you can’t change, and keep on thriving.

When you’re resilient, you can learn from difficult or challenging situations and get stronger.

Your child needs the personal skills and attitudes to help her bounce back from everyday challenges such as making mistakes, falling out with friends, moving to a new school or losing an important sporting match. Your child might also face more serious challenges such as family breakdown, adapting to a stepfamily, the illness or death of a family member or bullying.

How resilient you act and feel can go up and down at different times.

You might be better at bouncing back from some challenges but not others. Some young people face more challenges than others because of learning difficulties or disabilities, or because they have more anxious personalities. The more challenges young people have, the harder it is for them to be resilient.

But all young people can build the personal skills for resilience.

Building resilience: how you can help your child

Resilience for young people is built on a foundation of strong positive relationships with parents.

Children can also gain strength from other caring adults, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles or teachers who might act as mentors. Friends and classmates can be great sources of support too.

You can help your child build the ability to bounce back from difficult situations by giving him the opportunity to learn and practise important values and skills such as:

- self-respect and other personal values and attitudes
- social skills
- helpful and optimistic thinking
- skills for getting things done.

As a parent you can’t stop your child from experiencing problems or tough times. But you can play a big role in helping your child to be more resilient. And the earlier you start, the more likely it is your child
will develop skills for resilience.

**Personal values and attitudes for resilience**

**Self-respect** is a great building block for resilience.

Self-respect grows out of setting standards for behaviour. If your child has self-respect, she believes that she matters and should be treated respectfully by others. She’s also more likely to protect herself by avoiding risky behaviour and situations. A strong sense of self-respect will also help your child be less vulnerable to bullies and bullying.

**Empathy, respect for others, kindness, fairness, honesty and cooperation** are also linked to resilience. This includes showing care and concern for people who need support, accepting people’s differences, being friendly and not mistreating or bullying others.

If your child shows these attitudes and behaviour towards others, he’s more likely to get a positive response in return. This helps him feel good about himself.

![](image)

Having a **strong, loving relationship with you** and **staying connected** are the basis for all these qualities and values in your child. If you show your child love and respect, she’ll be more likely to care for herself and others.

**Social skills for resilience**

Social skills are another important building block for resilience. They include the skills needed to make and keep friends, sort out conflict, and cooperate and work well in a team or group.

When your child has good relationships at school and gets involved in community groups, sports teams or arts activities, he has more chances to develop connections and a sense of belonging.

![](image)

You might like to read more about **teenage friendships** and how to support them. Our articles on **keeping teenagers active**, **extracurricular activities** and **getting teenagers into community activity** also have lots of ideas to help your child make social connections.

**Helpful and optimistic thinking**

Resilience is about **being realistic**, **thinking rationally**, **looking on the bright side**, finding the positives, expecting things to go well and moving forward, even when things seem bad.

When your child is upset, you can help her keep things in perspective by focusing on facts and reality. For example, you could try gently asking, ‘Does this really matter as much as you think it does? On a scale from 1-10, how bad is it really?’

You can also help your child understand that a bad thing in one part of his life doesn’t have to flow over into all parts. For example, if your child gets a poor exam result, you could point out that it won’t stop him playing his weekend sport, or going out with his friends.

A sense of humour can help you both keep things in perspective and stay calm.

If your child is being hard on herself – for example, ‘I’m going to die of embarrassment speaking in front of my class’ – you could suggest **more helpful self-talk** instead. For example, your child could try saying, ‘Public speaking isn’t my favourite thing, but I’ll be able to cope’.

Your child is more likely to feel positive if he can see that difficult times are a part of life, that they’ll pass, and that things will get better. You might be able to help your child with this by talking about how you, people you know, or even famous people have gone through tough times.

Talking and working together to find solutions can help your child be more resilient. And having a **problem-solving method** is one way for your child to feel she has the power to get through challenging
No matter how upbeat your child is, there'll be times when he feels anxious, scared or angry. If he’s resilient, he’ll be able to ride out these adolescent ups and downs.

Ways to turn low moods into better ones include:

- doing things you love and enjoy
- spending time with friends
- helping someone else
- talking with friends or a support person
- exploring activities that help you relax
- going for a vigorous walk or doing some kind of physical activity
- going over some good memories by looking through photographs
- watching a funny TV show or DVD, or reading something funny.

You’re a role model for your child. Let her see and hear you being positive and optimistic. You can do this by thanking other people for their support, saying ‘Things will get better soon and I can cope with this’, and expecting that good things are possible.

Skills for getting things done

Feeling confident, capable and ready to get things done are big parts of resilience. Important skills in this area are goal-setting, planning, being organised and self-disciplined, being prepared to work hard and being resourceful.

You can foster these skills in your child by helping him work out his specific strengths and limitations. Then you can encourage him to set goals that put his strengths into action, and that help him to focus on what he’s good at.

For example, if your child is good at singing or music, you could suggest she join the school band, or even start her own band. If she’s good with young children, you could suggest she look into some babysitting work or coaching junior sport.

Supporting your child to take on new or extra responsibilities – a leadership role at school or even a part-time job as he gets older – is a great way to build your child’s confidence and sense of what he can do.

Challenges are a normal part of life, and young people have to learn to cope with them by themselves. Let your child have a go at sorting out her own problems and fighting her own battles before you step in. Fumbles and even failures are part of the process.

Key messages for building resilience

You can create a positive family environment that fosters resilience by communicating some key messages to your child in your daily life together:

- Life is mainly good, but now and then everyone has a difficult or unhappy time. It’s a normal part of life.
- Things nearly always get better, even though they might sometimes take a bit longer to improve than you’d like. Stay hopeful and work on the problem if you can.
- You’ll feel better and have more ideas about what you can do if you talk to someone you trust about what’s worrying or upsetting you.
- No-one’s perfect. We all make mistakes. We all find out there are some things we can’t do so well.
If you can find something positive or funny in a difficult situation, no matter how small, it can help you cope better.

Take fair responsibility for what you did or didn’t do to cause a difficult or unhappy situation. But don’t blame yourself too much – circumstances, bad luck or other people all played a part too.

If something can’t be changed, you just have to accept it and live with it. Don’t make yourself miserable by making it worse or by assuming that the worst possible scenario is the one that will happen.

When something goes wrong, it will usually affect only one part of your life. When this happens, focus more on the things in your life that are still going well.

Everyone gets scared sometimes, but not always about the same things. Facing your fears can help you grow stronger.

Don’t let yourself be ‘hijacked’ by your feelings so that you’re not in charge of yourself. Find a way to calm yourself down so you can think of the best way to deal with how you’re feeling.