

Nurturing Resiliency

As resources parents we may not be able to “undo” what children in our care have been through but we can nurture the skills, supports, and characteristics that have helped them survive – and even thrive – despite what they’ve been through. Building resilience is therefore not only about healing from the past but also improving the future.

Here are a few common characteristics found in resilient people:

- Independence, confidence, curiosity
- Strong problem-solving and communication skills
- Internal sense of control (for example: if I work hard, I’ll get ahead)
- Have stable, caring relationships
- Routines, rituals, and predictability
- Feel a sense of belonging and that they have a purpose

As you think about nurturing these characteristics, think about the following:

- How might you take a child who is constantly “into everything” and channel that curiosity in a way that builds his/her confidence?
- Is there a way to break some challenges into steps so that a child can learn to solve problems?
- What efforts and successes – no matter how small – might you notice and celebrate?
- Can you create rituals and routines to create predictability and a sense of belonging?
- Who else in the community can you get involved in a child’s life?
- Learning to communicate is like learning to play catch – you need to practice. Are there moments you might be able to practice together?

Why we are interested in resiliency

The following real-life examples show how two resource parents have helped the children in their care by focusing on building resilience. Notice that the parents don’t stop focusing on challenging behavior; however, by shifting their focus to building resilience, they lessened some of the difficult behaviors and helped build skills their children needed for future success.

1. My son has been struggling for a long time. He really doesn’t see himself as lovable or good at anything and it shows in his behaviors! One day, however, we noticed how well he played with my grandsons. He got down and played cars on the floor with them for over an hour even though most teenagers his age wouldn’t dream of doing that! The next day I mentioned to him how impressed I was that he was so caring and patient with the boys. I didn’t make a big deal of it, I just mentioned it in passing but my son absolutely beamed about it! A few weeks later we added to his IEP that he’d spend an hour a week reading to younger students

and he loves it. Finding and noticing something he is good at made a world of difference to him and all of us trying to help him.

2. I recently started caring for a 5-year-old girl named Maya, who I suspect has experienced quite a bit of chaos in her life. She seems to walk around waiting for something bad to happen and just seems always on edge. Fairly quickly we realized that she wasn't going to make it in school without immediate help because she was running away from her class almost every day, and if she wasn't running away, she was hitting another student. Fortunately, her teacher and I have a great relationship from having worked together before. The first thing I did was start teaching Maya belly breaths and then began spending a few minutes each night doing guided relaxation with her. At first she didn't like it but it only took a week or so before she started to notice how her body felt different when she was calm. At the same time, her teacher put up a small tent in the back of the classroom and told Maya that whenever she started feeling like she wanted to run away or hit, she could go and sit in the tent for as long as she needed to. I know it sounds silly but it works! I believe that giving her the skills to calm herself down with options at school to practice making her own choices not only helped her stay in her classroom but is building her ability to handle the move to her aunt's home.