



The Family Place Parent Child Center

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Resiliency in Children

Understanding the Importance of Protective Factors

When we think about our young children and how they are growing and developing, and wondering if they are developing the skills they need to succeed, we often look to developmental milestones. We look at how and when skills develop in areas such as motor development, cognitive and language development and self help skills like feeding and dressing. Although it is very important for children to develop in these areas, there is another area that we as parents and educators often do not spend enough time considering, and this may be the most important area of all!

With the explosion of information and understanding of infant brain development, there is now powerful evidence that social and emotional development is critical to overall healthy development. We need to insure that children develop positive feelings about themselves, their world, and the people in it. How can this be done? It is not as simple as using a checklist to see if a child is sitting, crawling, or pulling to stand as we do to monitor the development of gross motor skills.

This is where resiliency comes in. The term refers to the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. It is something within the child or adult that gives them the strength to “bounce back” from challenges. Emmy Werner is probably the most well-known resiliency researcher, In her Kauai Longitudinal study she has been able to study children who came into this world with significant risk in their lives, yet have grown to become caring, confident, and competent adults. She has discovered that these individuals as children, possessed some common inner strengths also called “protective factors” that had the power to buffer them from stressful life events. These children were often described as affectionate, cuddly, good-natured, alert, responsive, independent, determined, friendly, and self-confident. As infants, they were able to engage with adults and elicit shared positive emotions. As toddlers they demonstrated a responsiveness to the world and strong signs of independence and autonomy. These internal child protective factors were powerful enough to offset risk factors arising from family circumstances, economic factors or environmental conditions.

Imagine the power of these protective factors if they can support resiliency in the face of adversity, and how powerful their impact can be for the children born into the world with challenges! As we look to the social-emotional development of our young children and are wondering if they are reaching their developmental milestones, we also need to look for signs of attachment, self-control, and initiative.

Attachment encompasses the mutual strong and long-lasting relationship between a child and the important people in his life. It typically develops during the first year of life. Over time a child can develop strong attachments with many people. Attachment leads to trust, giving the child the confidence to explore his world.



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Self-control is the child's ability to experience a range of feelings and express them using the actions and words that society considers appropriate. Children who have self-control experience emotions and impulses but learn how to regulate them. This allows them to cooperate, make decisions, solve problems, and follow rules.

Initiative is the child's ability to use independent thought and action to meet his needs. Young children can show initiative by exploring, experimenting, using creativity, asking questions, and making and carrying out plans.

Families do many things naturally that promote these factors. There are several areas to focus on when working toward building a foundation of protective factors.

1. Read with your child everyday so he will learn to understand himself, think of reading as a pleasant activity, and become a life-long learner.
2. Help your child recognize and learn acceptable ways to express a range of feelings so he will learn that all feelings are okay, recognize others' feelings, learn self-control.
3. Teach your child about your family and culture, so he will learn important family values, build a sense of self, begin to appreciate other cultures.
4. Enjoy your child's company so he will learn to feel good about himself, learn to express love and affection.
5. Use positive strategies to guide your child's behavior so he will learn what is and is not appropriate behavior, develop self-discipline, be successful .
6. Accept your child as a unique person so he will grow and develop at his own rate without being compared to others, and explore his special interests and talents.
7. Encourage your child to be both independent and cooperative so he will balance his own needs with those of others, set goals and work toward them, play, learn, and live with others. - *Anne-Marie Darsney*



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