Resilience & the Brain

Image: Brain Links logo of two profiles back to back with brains overlapping.

RESILIENCE IS THE ABILITY TO BOUNCE BACK AFTER ADVERSITY.

Resilience, mental health, physical health and brain health all interact and affect how long we live.

Image: Background behind text is an abstract blue, yellow and green sunrise with sun rays that stretch across the page.

Hardship in our lives can be very helpful, believe it or not. Hardship can make us more resilient by creating Post Traumatic Growth. It can create:

Image: Blue and green top view of brain.

Improved relationships

New possibilities

Greater appreciation

Greater sense of personal growth

Spiritual development

How is resilience related to the brain?

Your brain will change with stress. This change will be negative change UNLESS you are resilient. If you ARE resilient, there will be even MORE change, BUT it will be GOOD change and help your brain.

Resilience helps you to quiet the overly emotional part of your brain to boost the thinking part of your brain during stress. This boost to the prefrontal cortex area of your brain, allows you to think of the best solution to get out of the stressful situation.

Studies have shown that people who are sick but are optimistic live longer than people who are realistic.

People who live to be very old:

Handle stress better than the average person

React less negatively, with less hostility

Accept change as a part of life, even if it seems negative at first.

Stress is helpful or harmful...depending on what we believe it is!

If we believe stress is helpful, then it is and it actually helps us to live longer. BUT...If we believe stress is harmful...then it is!

Stress will shorten our lives.

Image: three different doors in a row – blue, teal, yellow.

How Do We Become Resilient?

There are many doors to resilience.

Image: row of yellow dots

Building Resilience in Children

Help them build social connections.

Teach them that asking for help is okay.

Teach them to face their fears with support.

Exercise strengthens and calms the brain.

Even the support of one caring adult helps!

Build executive functions (this strengthens the front part of the brain)

Set routines

Build problem-solving skills

"What's worked before?"

List all ideas, even silly ones

Break down steps to the problem

List pros and cons

More Ways to Build Resilience in Children

Teach them to do deep breathing.

Role models help, even superheroes.

Let them talk.

Don't rush in too fast to fix things for them.

Give them some independence; let them disagree.

They may offer other solutions. Let them make some decisions.

Build feelings of competence: "You can do this!" "You are good at this!"

Nurture optimism: "What's good about this situation?"

Teach to reframe: "What's another way to look at this?" "Could there be anything good about

this?"

Meet them where they are. They may need time to be sad or angry before moving on.

Let them know they are loved unconditionally. "I love you always, even though I'm not so happy

with your behavior right now."

Model resilience; model healthy relationships. Promote faith, optimism and strength during hard

times.

Image: Young boy with red shirt, red boxing gloves, blue mask over his eyes, blue cape with hands raised.

A resilience tip for all ages

Image: an abstract yellow set of lines that looks like the left side of a sun’s rays.

Meditation

Proven to be helpful for many conditions, including depression, anxiety and ADHD.

Improves the brain by quieting brain chatter and improving memory.

Play

Creative play

Board games

Memory games

Image: profile of a young boy sitting with legs crisscrossed, eyes closed and hands resting on knees in a meditation pose.

Ways to Build Resilience in Teens

The same things that work for children are good for teens, but here are a few more.

Having a safe place, like a bedroom. Having some alone time.

A way to express themselves - music, art, writing.

Help them to get good at something; develop a passion.

Get professional help to reframe earlier trauma.

Become aware of stressors and how to deal with them.

CONTINUE TO MODEL RESILIENCE, EVEN IF YOU THINK THEY ARE NOT WATCHING!

Image: a multicolor line drawing of a person smiling, eyes closed, headphones and music note around head.

More Ways to Build Resilience in Teens

Image: a young woman with teal shirt, white hat, pulling brim down over her eyes and smiling.

Relaxation and self-care

Set reasonable goals

Take breaks

Consistent routine

Accept change

Volunteer or get a job, try new things

Build self-reliance and initiative

Humor and optimism in difficulty

Build morality: "Do the right thing."

Image: Two smiling young adults, with other hands coming from each direction, with hands together overlapping. Their shirts have “volunteer” printed on front.

Ways to Build Resilience in Adults

The same things that work for children and teens can work for adults, but here are a few more.

Music, singing, dancing - they promote relaxation, recovery and brain health

Eat healthy food: whole foods that are plant-based

Faith has many components that build the brain and resilience

Prayer

Meditation

Giving and receiving

Sabbath (taking a break from regular life)

Concepts/life perspectives: "Everything happens for a reason."

Exercise!

Sleep

Positive self-talk

Manage stress

Image: Woman and teen girl are singing with hairbrush in a kitchen.

For More information on Brain Health

And Supporting a Healthy Brain, follow the link below:

https://www.tndisability.org/brain-health

Image: Three fresh blueberries with leaves.

References:

Willcox, B.J., Willcox, D.C. & Suzuki, M. (2002). The Okinawa Program: How the world's longest-lived people achieve everlasting health - and how

you can too. Harmony/Rodale.

Tedeschi, R. G. & Calhoun, L G. (1996). The posttraumatic growth inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. Journal of Traumatic Stress.

Image – Brain Links logo

<https://www.tndisability.org/brain>

ACL logo – Administration for Community living logo.

TBI SPP logo – Traumatic Brain Injury State Partnership Programs

Tennessee Disability Coalition logo

Kidcentral TN logo

Brain Links is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under Grant No. 90TBSG0051-01-00 and in part by the TN Department of Health, Traumatic Brain Injury Program.

April 2023