

RAISING A RESILIENT CHILD

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND PARENTS DISCUSS HOW RESILIENCE LEADS TO CONFIDENCE AND THE ABILITY TO OVERCOME SETBACKS.



MAIN PHOTO (From left) On Ellie: Striped tee Crayon, Playsuit & sneakers Cotton On Kids, Socks & sun visor Kookiesandmilk.com. On Raelene: Dress COS, Wellies Stylist's own. On Khadija: Romper Kookiesandmilk.com. Slip-ons H&M. On Idena: Jacket, pants & tee Crayon. Sneakers Talent's own. On Arman: Polo tee & pants Talent's own. Sneakers Kidstyle. On Aisyah: Tee Crayon, Denim pinafore Marks & Spencer. Shoes Stylist's own. PAGE 3 On Lillian: Floral dress H&M.

Young children encounter various obstacles in their daily lives. For instance, toddlers whose motor skills are still developing may have difficulty putting on their socks and shoes independently. When faced with stumbling blocks, some children may be frustrated and anxious, while others are able to rise to the challenge to find a solution or make several attempts to complete a task.

The good news is that resilience, the ability to bounce back from setbacks or stressful situations, can be nurtured and developed. Guided by patient and supporting adults, children become more confident, mentally stronger and are better able to cope with failures and disappointments, and do not give up easily.

How, then, can children develop resilience? What should we bear in mind so as not to derail this learning process? *Beanstalk* asked parents and educators what resilience means to them and for their tried-and-tested strategies.

“Resilient children are able to deal with the stresses and strains of daily life, and exhibit self-confidence and self-esteem.”

MS LILIAN FOO, 53
Principal,
Grace House @ Tanglin



HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE RESILIENCE?

Lilian Foo: Resilience refers to one's ability to recover from problems and challenges. With resilience comes the confidence and the ability to manage problems.

Prisca Teng: Resilience is having a 'never-say-die' attitude. Resilient children are able to keep trying — with or without help — to complete a task that may appear too difficult for them.

PARENTS, WHY IS DEVELOPING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN IMPORTANT?

Ivy Lee: We need to let our children make mistakes so that they can develop coping mechanisms and recognise their strengths, weaknesses and limits. Most importantly, children need to learn how to recover from setbacks and overcome their fears.

Gopinath Rengarajan: Children who are resilient will be able to press on in stressful situations and recognise that a setback is not necessarily the end of the road. Learning to be resilient is an ongoing process. With this, children become open to learning and taking on challenges.

TEACHERS, HOW DOES RESILIENCE AFFECT A CHILD'S CONFIDENCE?

Prisca: By completing a task after a couple of attempts without giving up, children will be motivated to try again in a similar situation. Being resilient helps them understand that they are responsible for their own actions and are capable, which helps boost their confidence and 'feel good' factor.

“Give children easier tasks to accomplish and increase the difficulty level progressively.”

MS PRISCA TENG, 26
Teacher,
Green Pastures Child Centre



TIP THE SCALES

One tool used by parents and teachers to measure resilience in children aged 3 through 5 is the **Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Preschoolers, Second Edition (DECA-P2)**. Comprising

27

positive behaviours and

11

problem behaviours, this behaviour rating scale identifies children's strengths and areas of need for building social-emotional health and resilience.

Lilian: Children are under enormous pressure to perform well in their early years. Resilient children are able to deal with the stresses and strains of daily life, and exhibit self-confidence and self-esteem. They don't give up easily during setbacks and learn how to develop essential skills to move forward and find ways of resolving problems.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DAILY CHALLENGES THAT CHILDREN HAVE TO DEAL WITH IN THE PRESCHOOL SETTING?

Prisca: During meal times, children can get frustrated when they are unable to hold a spoon properly to scoop their food or feed themselves. The typical reaction would be to give up and not finish their meal or wait for the teachers to do it for them. The children may think, "I have tried my best, but I still can't do it. Do I still try?"

Lilian: In a preschool environment, there are rules and routines for children to follow. This may be different from their experiences at home, where parents may give in to their demands or do the tasks for them. The different expectations in the two settings may cause children to feel confused or frustrated. For instance, in preschool, children would need to learn how to share or negotiate in a group activity while this may not be necessary at home. Their anxiety can be expressed through crying or aggressive behaviour, such as biting or kicking. Internally, they are unable to cope with the stress as they are learning to adapt to situations as well as understand the emotions they are experiencing.

PARENTS, HOW DO YOU HANDLE IT WHEN YOUR CHILD HAS A MELTDOWN AT HOME?

Gopinath: My son Arnan gets upset and cries whenever he loses a game we play at home. Although our first reaction is to tell him not to cry, my wife and I also do not want to brush aside his feelings. Instead we comfort him by saying, "It's okay, Arnan, Mummy won this time, but you can try again next time." Nowadays, whenever my wife or I lose a game, Arnan will pat us on the back and assure us it is okay!

Ivy: I find that when the unexpected happens, for instance, when plans get cancelled, this often leads to Iden throwing

a tantrum. I give him space to calm down before negotiating a new arrangement. I encourage him to articulate his thoughts and help him work through the issue. If he whines and complains, I will teach him to reframe his words in a more polite manner.

TEACHERS, WHAT ARE SOME DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN DEAL WITH FRUSTRATION AND BUILD RESILIENCE?

Lilian: Focus on the child's strengths. Offer praise when a challenging or difficult task or activity is completed. When we model such positive coping strategies, children can experience the process for themselves. I feel these strategies work even better when educators and parents share their strategies and experiences. Similar ideas can be reinforced both at home and in preschool so that the child experiences consistency.

Prisca: Give children easier tasks to accomplish and increase the difficulty level progressively. Talk about the process and identify the attributes the children have exhibited. For instance, you can say, "I noticed that you kept trying" or "you showed patience". This affirms their ability and boosts morale. Remind them of their past achievements and talk about how they felt then.

WHAT ARE SOME OBSTACLES OR DERAILERS TO DEVELOPING RESILIENCE?

Prisca: Overprotective or impatient adults who rush to the rescue instead of letting

“Children who are resilient will be able to press on in stressful situations and recognise that a setback is not necessarily the end of the road.”

MR GOPINATH RENGARAJAN, 40
Events Manager,
father of Arnan Gopinath, 3

RESILIENCE IN TEACHERS



ECDA Fellow Ms Shirley Tan, Executive Director, Catholic Preschool Education (Singapore), shares some ways for educators to stay resilient on the job.

Teaching is a professionally rewarding and fulfilling career, but like any other job, it can lead to stress and burnout. When faced with such challenges, it is important that our preschool teachers are resilient and have the strength to renew their passion for nurturing children. How can our educators stay resilient and not let obstacles derail their passion and commitment to the EC profession? Ms Tan offers some strategies.

- **ACCEPT CHANGE**
Recognise that change is the norm. This will lead to a constructive shift in mindset and behaviour. Do not be hindered by the belief that you cannot adapt to changing circumstances. Keep thriving by seeking alternative behaviours and activities.
- **FOCUS ON WELLNESS**
Alleviate stress by engaging in wellness activities and practices such as exercising, meditating, healthy eating, as well as developing and maintaining a support network. Be grateful to all things big and small; find ways to contribute to the wellbeing of others.
- **LAUGH MORE**
Don't lose your sense of humour. To quote the writer Mark Twain: "Humour is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away and a sunny spirit takes their place."



THIS SPREAD On Prisca: Tee & midi skirt; H&M. On Aman: Shirt; Talent's own. On Gopinath: Polo tee & plaid jacket; H&M.

children complete the task on their own. For instance, a caregiver who constantly feeds the child instead of letting him finish a meal independently will deny the child the opportunity to handle setbacks and frustrations. Perhaps the child may think, "If I don't do it, someone will do it for me." This can lead to a negative pattern of thinking and habit formation which we want to avoid.

Lilian: Some adults will do anything to ensure their children do not experience hurt or disappointment. They believe their support is crucial to prevent struggles that their children may face in the future. However, if children don't encounter or try to manage challenges on their own, it could lead to disempowerment, low self-esteem and anxiety, which may affect them in their later years.

PARENTS, WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WHEN TRYING TO TEACH YOUR CHILD TO BE RESILIENT? WHAT ARE YOUR STRATEGIES TO BUILD RESILIENCE?

Ivy: There are times when my child is reluctant or afraid to try and accomplish a task. I have learned to take a step back to give him the time and space he needs. My husband and I try our best to be encouraging without being forceful. If Iden is receptive, we guide him through his thought processes with prompts like, "What do you think is the worst that could happen, and if so, what can we do?"

Gopinath: Building resilience in a child does take time and patience. At times, it can even sap your energy! But we need to be consistent in our practices and messaging. Sometimes, other family members or caregivers may have views on child minding that do not align with yours. This can lead to your child adopting a hands-off approach instead of working through a challenging situation.

Ivy: We decided not to have a live-in domestic helper because we wanted



SNUGGLE UP!

Research shows that skin-to-skin contact between parent and newborn immediately after birth has an enormous positive impact on parent-infant bonding, and in the long term, bolsters resilience on both sides.



our children to learn to be responsible for themselves and be resourceful. When we were growing up, my husband and I also took part in both competitive and leisure sports. It's the best place to learn resilience, so we expose our children to as many sporting activities as we can.

Gopinath: Take time to listen to your children. Allow them to express their emotions, so when they are overwhelmed, they know they can still turn to you.

Ivy: It is important for children to feel that the home is always their safe haven. Let them know that they can be brave to go out to explore, even though they may fall down sometimes. We may not be able to catch their fall, but home is where they can come back to recover and heal their wounds, then go back out and try again.

TEACHERS, WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO RESILIENCE-BUILDING?

Prisca: It's important to provide affirmation, care, moral support and patience. Be consistent in your responses. Focus on building warm and trusting adult-child relationships.

Lilian: Spend quality time with your children and stay connected to what is important to them. Show affection and teach them to verbalise their feelings. Research has shown that the one vital factor needed for children to develop resilience is the positive support from at least one parent, caregiver or educator.

“Take a step back to give your child the time and space he needs. Be encouraging without being forceful.”

MDM IVY LEE, 36
Homemaker,
mother of Iden Lee Imran, 5

EARLY START

DR PETER L MANGIONE ON HOW ADULTS CAN GUIDE RESILIENCE DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS.

WHY IS DEVELOPING RESILIENCE IN THE EARLY YEARS VITAL TO HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS AND TODDLERS?

Developing resilience starts in infancy and is vital to a person's wellbeing throughout life. The ability to manage stress increases as an infant develops emotionally secure attachments. We can try to moderate stressful experiences, but we can never fully eliminate them — an infant may become ill or suffer an injury, for instance. If an infant is developing emotional security in a relationship, that infant is already starting to build resilience to manage stress and adapt to difficult circumstances.

HOW CAN WE HELP INFANTS DEVELOP COPING SKILLS?

An empathetic, responsive relationship is essential for infants to develop resilience. Infants need us to be sensitive and responsive. If an infant expresses discomfort, we observe the child and wonder: "Is she hungry? Sleepy?" We try a response and see if it works. When we discover what the infant needs, we help her regulate. Through repeated experiences, the infant gains confidence in our care, begins to co-regulate with us, and eventually self-regulates during stressful moments.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES GUIDING INFANT RESILIENCE DEVELOPMENT?

- > **Focus on being consistent.**
If we are predictable in our care, the infant learns to anticipate our responsiveness during difficult moments.
- > **Being responsive does not mean we have to be perfect.**
What matters is that most of the time, the infant can count on our being attentive and responsive.
- > **A calm, open approach is what infants need from us.**
How we are is as important as what we do.



TIPS FOR EDUCARERS

- **Be a sensitive observer so you can be more responsive.** Continuity of relationship creates an opportunity to observe an infant with increasing sensitivity and, at any given moment, discover the response the infant needs from you to regulate.
- **Develop understanding, supportive relationships with the infants' families.** Share with families what sensitive, responsive care looks like. Discuss with them what makes their child unique. The educator and family can learn together what helps the infant develop self-regulation and the capacity to adapt during stressful moments.



HOW DOES RESILIENCE AFFECT HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT, PARTICULARLY FOR CHILDREN WHO MIGHT BE MORE VULNERABLE?

Research on temperament indicates that some infants are more vulnerable to adverse experiences, but they also especially benefit from nurturing relationships. For example, children who tend to become frustrated and angry thrive in an attentive, responsive relationship. Another group that especially benefits are infants who react strongly to unexpected situations. We want to provide responsive relationships to all infants. By doing so, we are supporting some infants who are particularly vulnerable. ●



Dr Peter L Mangione

Director, WestEd's Center for Child & Family Studies, USA

Dr Mangione is one of the principal developers of the Programme for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC), an internationally recognised model for early childhood professional development. He has led the creation of early learning standards, programme guidelines and early educator competencies. In 2012, Dr Mangione and his team worked with ECDA to import and customise PITC to Singapore via a series of masterclasses and workshops.

THIS PAGE On Ivy: Shirt dress Mango. On Iden: Jumper & denim pants Crayon. Sneakers Talent's own.