

Ten Tips for Building Resilient Children

These 10 tips developed by Lyons can assist you in raising a resilient child. Building resilience from a young age gives your child the ability to be strong and confident when solving the many problems life faces us with. Though we wish we could, it's not possible to protect our children from all the bad things in the world, so the best thing you can do is equip them with the skills that they need to endure adversity, but come out the other side of it stronger.

The road to resilience is actually one that can be paved by parents. Resilience is not a birthright; it is something that is developed and parents can have a considerably influential role in this.

Challenges are simply a part of life, they cannot be avoided and in many cases parents trying to protect their children from difficult situations can do more harm than good. However this doesn't mean that kids should be completely left to fend for themselves. Lynn Lyons, an internationally renowned psychotherapist reminds us that a parent's job is not to be there for children all the time (as this is not what life will be like when a child leaves home), it is to teach them how to handle uncertainty and to problem solve. Lyons suggests 10 tips on building resilience within children.

1. Don't Accommodate every need

Resilience is the ability to figure out how to strive in a bad situation, but a child can't learn this skill while their parents are fixing everything for them.

2. Avoid eliminating all risk

Give your child age-appropriate risk, naturally a parent wants to protect their child from situations that have risk of failure, pain, injury or difficulty but a little bit of risk is actually good. Allowing children to be in a 'slightly risky' situation means that they can learn the own limits which is important for when you are not around.

3. Teach them to problem solve

If your child is in a circumstance where they feel nervous or scared, perhaps it's their first time staying at a friend's house - you can assist them in their problem solving by asking them how they can practice being brave on their own. This might be that they would like to take their favorite toy to keep them company.

4. Teach your kids concrete skills

If your child is shy, you can assist them by teaching them how to greet people and introduce themselves, the more practice they get in doing will help them.

5. Ask "how" not "why"

Asking how to solve something instead of why it's a problem will promote resilience by teaching children to think about how to solve a problem at hand instead of why there is a problem. For example if your child falls over and hurts themselves and is crying, instead of asking why your is crying over a little fall, it's suggested by Lyons to ask how they are going solve this problem, the answer is likely to be "a plaster" or something similar. The point is, you can use these opportunities to teach your child to internally/externally search for methods that will help them when they are facing difficulty.

6. Don't provide all the answers

It's proposed by Lyons that sometimes using the phrase "I don't know" when your child asks a question is helpful in building their resilience. It helps for children to tolerate uncertainty and to think about how they themselves can find answers. An example of this is if a child worries that won't have any friends at school, instead of telling them they will definitely make friends and have a great time, Lyons suggests an approach where you might reply "I'm not sure how your day will go but how will you make friends?"

7. Avoid talking in catastrophic terms

Anxious parents often use catastrophic terms and talk about worst-case scenarios. For example instead of saying "it's important for you to learn how to cross roads", some parents say "you have to learn how to cross the road because it would be devastating to me if you got hit by a car". Putting these types of situations in your child's head can create unwarranted anxiety.

8. Allow for your children to make mistakes

The saying 'you learn best from your mistakes' couldn't be truer. Allowing for children to mess up occasionally, allows for them to learn to make better decisions next time. It also shows them that mistakes happen, and that there are consequences, but also they can all be overcome.

9. Help them to manage their emotions

According to Lyons, management of emotions is key in building resilience. She asserts that parents should “teach your child that all emotions are acceptable but we also need to teach them what actions are appropriate.” Lyons suggests for parents to be clear about what behaviour is appropriate and inappropriate when children react to their emotions.

10. Model Resilience

Children learn through imitation. Lastly, children often learn by example. As a parent, you should also model resilience, when you make a mistake or overreact, apologise and talk about how you are going to fix it and be better for next time.