Fostering Resilience in Kids

Resiliency is defined as the the ability to spring back from and successfully adapt to adversity. An increasing body of research is showing that most people – especially kids, can bounce back from risks, stress, crisis, trauma, and experience life success.

When kids are asked who and what has contributed to their resilience, they most often name individual people in their lives first . . . then they go on to mention activities, opportunities, classes or – occasionally – programs.

The key to fostering resilience in the school setting is for educators to decrease the number of risk factors students encounter and in turn, increase the number of protective factors or positive environmental, behavioral, and emotional circumstances that buffer kids from the challenges in their lives and encourage them to succeed.

Reducing Risk Factors

Those conditions, attitudes, and behaviors that occur around and within communities, families, schools, teens (kids), and their friends that increase the likelihood that individuals will have difficulty with school, the law, alcohol and other drugs, violence and abuse.

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Increasing Protective Factors

Those conditions that buffer kids from the negative consequences of exposure to risks by either reducing the impact of risks or changing the way a person responds to the risk by promoting positive behavior, health, well-being, and personal success.

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Resilience

The capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply the stress that is inherent in today's world.

Four Steps to Help Educators Foster Resilience

Step 1

Always communicate the "resiliency attitude"
Fostering resilience begins with an attitude, expressed verbally and non-verbally, that communicates, "I see what is right with you, no matter what you have done in the past, no matter what problems you currently face. Your strengths are more powerful than your 'risks.' And whatever risks, problems, and adversity you are facing you are on the road to bouncing back – they are not the end of the road!"

Four Steps to Help Educators (cont.)

Step

2

Focus on strengths with same or even greater meticulousness than used in characterizing weaknesses

Characteristics

Characteristics of Resilient Kids

Social Competence – Responsiveness; flexibility; empathy; caring; communication skills; sense of humor; other prosocial behaviors.
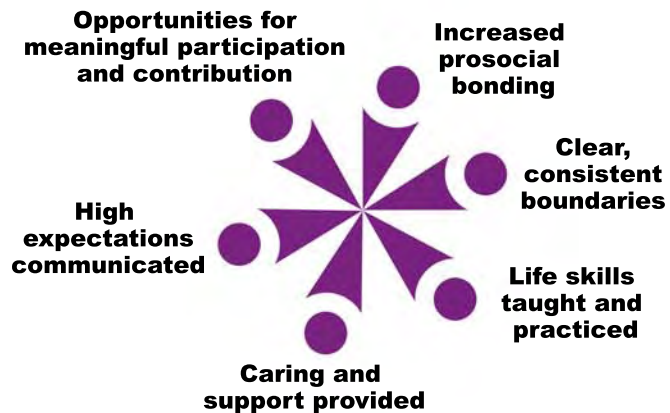
Problem Solving – Ability to think abstractly, reflectively, and flexibly; ability to attempt alternative solutions for both cognitive and social problems.

Autonomy – Strong sense of independence; internal locus of control; sense of personal power, self esteem, and self-efficacy; self-discipline; impulse control; ability to separate self from environment.

Sense of Purpose – Healthy expectancies; goal-directed; success/achievement orientation; persistence; hopefulness; hardiness; sense of anticipation and compelling future.

Step

3

Build "resiliency web" around each kid in the classroom by providing:

Opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution

Increased prosocial bonding

Clear, consistent boundaries

High expectations communicated

Life skills taught and practiced

Caring and support provided

Step

4

Maintain a "never give up!" Attitude
It is clear that fostering resilience doesn't happen as a result of shuffling kids through a program. Something all caring adults can convey is an attitude of optimism and encouragement, a focus on strengths, and a commitment to weaving standards from the resiliency web into kids' lives. Persistence, in these approaches will help kids overcome obstacles and not just "survive" but "thrive".

Tips to Foster Resilience in the Classroom

- Be caring and supportive
- Provide clear and consistent expectations
- Foster positive attitudes
- Nurture positive behaviors and emotions
- Develop feelings of competence

- Promote positive social connections
- Encourage helping others
- Teach problem-solving and peace-building skills
- Ensure healthy habits
- Recognize and assist with stress reduction

For more information: http://www.k12.wa.us/OperationMilitaryKids/