

The Resilience-based Philosophy: Reflections on Our Program

The Essential 2 questions:

1. Within our walls, do we believe in every young person unconditionally and hold them to high expectations?
2. Do we sincerely believe that every child can succeed?

Competence

- Do we see what a young people have done right? Or do we focus on their mistakes?
- Do we help our youth recognize what they have going for themselves?
- Do we help them focus on those strengths and build on them?
- Are we helping to build the authentic skills that make them competent in the real world?

Educational Skills • Work Skills • Social Skills • Interview Skills
Anger Management Skills • Stress-reduction Skills

- Do we communicate in a way that empowers them to make their own decisions, or do we undermine their sense of competence by lecturing them, thereby giving them information in a style they cannot grasp? Rather than talking down to them, do we instead deliver information in a manner they understand?
- Do we let them make safe mistakes so they have the opportunity to right themselves, or do we protect them from every bump and bruise?
- Do we praise in a way that notices effort more than it rewards the product?

Confidence

- Do we see the best in our youth so that they can see the best in themselves?
- Do we clearly express that we expect the best in them?
- Do we help them recognize what they have done right? (Confidence comes from knowing that one has competence.)
- Do we help them understand that they have authentic survival skills?
- Do we treat them as incapable children or young adults learning to navigate a difficult world?
- Do we catch them when they are doing the right thing?
- Do we encourage them to strive just a little bit further because we believe they can succeed?
- Do we avoid instilling shame?

Connection

- Do we recognize that adults' unconditional belief in a young people— and holding them to high expectations—is the single most important factor determining whether those young people will be able to overcome challenging circumstances?
- Do we enter young people's lives without permission, or do we give them time to understand we are worthy of their trust?
- Do we build a sense of safe community within our walls?
- Do we encourage young people to take pride in the various ethnic, religious, or cultural groups they belong to?
- Do we recognize that for many of our most troubled youth, the firm attachment to a stable family might be missing? Further, do we know that our role as stable caring adults takes on an even greater importance?
- Do we have a television and self-contained entertainment system in every room, or do we create a common space so people share time together? Does everyone exist in their own world hiding behind earphones, and texting distant friends, or is communication happening here?

Character

- Are we helping our youth to recognize themselves as caring people?
- Do we allow them to clarify their own values?
- Do we allow them to consider right versus wrong and look beyond immediate needs?
- Do we help them understand how their behavior affects others?
- Do we help them develop a sense of spirituality that fits into their (not our) belief system?
- Do we value them so clearly that we model for them how important it is to care for others?
- Do we value each other so clearly that we demonstrate the importance of community?
- Do we value each young person, and promote the understanding that when all reach their potential, every child benefits?
- Do we notice the character traits of grit--integrity and tenacity?

Contribution

- Do we make clear that we believe our youth can make the world a better place?
- As we create programs that serve youth, do we include them in the planning process, appreciating that they are the experts on themselves and their own needs?
- Do we create opportunities for each youth to contribute to the community?
- Do we share how important a value it is to serve others?

- Do we help our young people recognize that precisely because they have come through difficult times, they are positioned to guide others in how to improve their lives?
- Do we search in each person's life for another individual for whom they might serve as a role model? Do we use this to encourage them to be the best person they can possibly be?
- Do we help them to understand that if they have messed up in their past, their recovery serves as a model?

Coping

- Do we recognize that so many of the risk behaviors youth engage in are attempts at reducing the stress or pain in their lives?
- Do we condemn young people for their behaviors? Do we increase their sense of shame and therefore drive them toward those behaviors?
- Do we believe that telling youth to "just stop" the negative behaviors will do any good?
- Do we guide youth to develop positive, effective coping strategies?
- Do we help young people understand when their thoughts are magnifying problems? Do we help them to make realistic assessments?
- Do we model positive coping strategies on a daily basis?
- Do we encourage caring for our bodies through exercise, good nutrition, and adequate sleep?
- Can children safely play and exercise outdoors or in recreational centers in our community?
- Do we encourage creative expression? Does our community offer resources and programs in which children and teens are able to learn and practice creative expression?
- Do we encourage written and verbal expression in a way that allows each youth to reveal thoughts in a comfortable manner, whether through talking, journaling, poetry or rap?
- Do we create an environment in which talking, listening, and sharing is safe and productive?
- Do we model relaxation techniques?
- As we struggle to compose ourselves so we can make the fairest, wisest decisions, do we model how we take control rather than respond impulsively?

Control

- Do we help young people understand that life is not purely random?
- Do we help them to understand that they are not responsible for many of the bad circumstances that may have plagued them?
- Do we help them think about the future, but make it less overwhelming by helping them learn to take one step at a time?
- Do we help them recognize their mini-successes so they can experience the knowledge that they can succeed?

- Do we help youth understand that while no one can control all his circumstances, each person can shift the odds by choosing positive or protective behaviors?
- Do we understand that youth who have been hurt emotionally or physically may think they have no control and therefore have no reason to take positive action?
- Do we understand that discipline is about teaching *not* punishing or controlling. Do we use discipline as a means to help someone understand that their actions produce consequences (in other words, life is not random)?
- As we work to build trauma-informed practices, do we understand that traumatized children lost control over portions of their lives, and, therefore, our giving them back a sense of control is key to their healing?

Take Home Handout:**The 7 Cs: The Essential Building Blocks of Resilience**

Bottom Line #1: Young people live up or down to expectations we set for them. They need adults who believe in them unconditionally and hold them to the high expectations of being compassionate, generous, and creative.

Confidence: Young people need confidence to be able to navigate the world, think outside the box, and recover from challenges.

Competence: When we notice what young people are doing right and give them opportunities to develop important skills, they feel competent. We undermine competence when we don't allow young people to recover themselves after a fall.

Connection: Connections with other people, schools, and communities offer young people the security that allows them to stand on their own and develop creative solutions.

Character: Young people need a clear sense of right and wrong and a commitment to integrity.

Contribution: Young people who contribute to the well-being of others will receive gratitude rather than condemnation. They will learn that contributing feels good, and may therefore more easily turn to others, and do so without shame.

Coping: Young people who possess a variety of healthy coping strategies will be less likely to turn to dangerous quick-fixes when stressed.

Control: Young people who understand privileges and respect are earned through demonstrated responsibility will learn to make wise choices and feel a sense of control.

Bottom Line #2: What we do to model healthy resilience strategies for our children is more important than anything we say about them.

From Ginsburg KR, Jablow MM. Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings. 2nd ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2011

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