

## Competence

Competence is the ability or know-how to handle situations effectively. It's not a vague feeling or hunch that "I can do this." Competence is acquired through actual experience. Children can't become competent without first developing a set of skills that allows them to trust their judgments, make responsible choices, and face difficult situations. In thinking about your child's competence and how to fortify it, ask yourself:

- Do I help my child focus on his strengths and build on them?
- Do I notice what he does well or do I focus on his mistakes?
- When I need to point out a mistake, am I clear and focused or do I communicate that I believe he always messes up?
- Do I help him recognize what he has going for himself?
- Am I helping him build the educational, social, and stress-reduction skills necessary to make him competent in the real world?
- Do I communicate in a way that empowers my child to make his own decisions or do I undermine his sense of competence by giving him information in ways he can't grasp? In other words, do I lecture him or do I facilitate his thinking?
- Do I let him make safe mistakes so he has the opportunity to right himself or do I try to protect him from every trip and fall?
- As I try to protect him, does my interference mistakenly send the message, "I don't think you can handle this?"
- If I have more than one child, do I recognize the competencies of each without comparison to siblings?

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

Please feel free to copy this handout or download from [www.fosteringresilience.com](http://www.fosteringresilience.com) or the American Academy of Pediatrics Web site for parents, [www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org).