

Practical Resilience

The Power of Caring Adults to Recognize and Build
Strengths in Young People

Dr. Chris Renjilian, MD, MBE

May 17, 2018

Objectives

- Resilience 101
- A (Practical) Guiding Principle
- Building a Vocabulary for Strengths
- Strengths to Celebrate: Effective Praise
- Adversity and Trauma Informed Practice 101
- Addressing Risk: A Strengths-Based Approach
- Communicating with Youth to Promote Mastery
- Coping Strategies
- Practical Resilience in the World

Resilience 101

- Resilience is a capacity. In the face of adversity, it is the capacity that enables us to survive, recover, and thrive
- Resilience as an applied practice is informed by two movements: Positive Youth Development and Trauma Informed Practice
- Resilience is not a static trait, but a system. An individual is at the center, surrounded by family, community, society.

Resilience 101

- As health care providers for youth, we play a vital role: Through our connections to youth, we recognize and build strengths in youth to prepare them for life's inevitable obstacles and to help them recover from those they have already faced. A strengths-based approach benefits all youth.
- Our limitation: We may be better at identifying risk than we are at identifying strength.
- Our task: Identify practical strategies to broaden our focus, and build our ability to foster resilience.

Guiding Principle

A guiding principle is a powerful tool to help us shift from our own habits and to build teams that operate with a strengths-based approach.

Guiding Principle

Recognize love as a vital sign

“Love is seeing someone as they deserve to be seen, as they really are, not through the lens of the behaviors that they have sometimes needed to display.”

- Dr. Ken Ginsburg

Guiding Principle

- Putting Love into Practice
 - A single question
 - Engaging youth to help us see how we should see them
 - Working with colleagues and trainees

A Vocabulary for Strengths

- We enhance our ability to recognize and build strengths when we build a vocabulary for strengths.
- The Positive Youth Development movement has focused on identifying the assets a young person needs in order to thrive. This work helps us to identify key domains of strength.
- The *7 Cs Model of Resilience* is a helpful summary that can be put into practice. It is the official model adopted by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

7 Cs Model of Resilience

- Confidence
- Competence
- Connection
- Character
- Contribution
- Coping
- Control

Building Awareness About the Strengths We Celebrate: Praise for Growth and Grit

- We can be particularly effective — or ineffective — in our work with youth depending on the strengths we select to focus on and the manner in which we celebrate them.
- Scholarship in this area:
 - Carol Dweck, PhD
 - Angela Duckworth, MSc, PhD

Mindset

- Two mindsets predominate in our culture:
 - Fixed Mindset
 - Growth Mindset
- A Growth Mindset is linked to resilience and benefits all youth.
- We convey and promote one mindset or the other when we identify strengths and give praise.
- Praise for Growth: Character, Effort, and Process

• Adapted from Dweck, C. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Ballantine Books, 2008.

Grit

- Grit: Passion and Perseverance for long-term goals
 - More important than talent in predicting resilience, success.
 - Grit predicts Effort. Effort is a multiplier:
 - Talent x Effort = Skill and Skill x Effort = Achievement
- Grit can grow
- Grit builds from Interest, Practice, Purpose, Hope

• Adapted from Duckworth, A. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. Scribner, 2016.

Praise for Growth and Grit

- Effort
- Character
- Process
- Future-orientation

Adversity

- Stress 101
- Tigers and Paper Tigers
- Profound and Pervasive Adversity: Toxic Stress

Adversity

- Recognizing adversity in our schools

“This kid cannot keep still and he won’t pay attention!”

“Things go in one ear and out the other!”

“It doesn’t take anything to set this kid off!”

“This kid has oppositional-defiant disorder/conduct disorder/bipolar disorder/attention deficit disorder.”

“That kid is a loner.”

“That kid is an open book... and they’re sharing too much!”

“This kid is really going to hurt someone.”

“This kid just keeps zoning out.”

“This kid is a pathological liar — he/she lies all the time, even when its obvious he/she will get caught.”

“This kid is looking for trouble.”

“Nothing bothers this kid.”

“This kid always has a bellyache, headache, is too tired...”

“This kid smokes/does drugs/cuts”

Trauma-Informed Practice

- We acknowledge that adversity is common.
- We cannot know what someone has been through by looking at them.
- Youth who have been exposed to adversity have likely been shaped by their experience.
- The trade-offs of adapting to adversity can present as behaviors or problems that grab our attention.
- It is most helpful to take the unspoken approach of “What happened to you?” Rather than “What is wrong with you?”
- Most behaviors that we fear serve as coping strategies to help youth manage uncomfortable stressors.
- The behaviors we see are not always about us.
- Youth are able to heal from adversity.

Seeing Strength Where Others Only See Risk

- Case 1
- Case 2
- Case 3

Seeing Strength Where Others Only See Risk

- Case 1
- Case 2
- Case 3

Addressing Risk

Traditional (Risk-Based) Formula

Step 1: Identify Risk

Step 2: Response: “Don’t do that!”

Addressing Risk

Strength-Based Formula

Step 1: “I love you, I love you, I love you”

(Translation: *I see you for who you are and the magnificent adult you will become. I genuinely feel it and show it in my words and actions*)

Step 2: ***Pause. Deep breath.***

Step 3: “I’m worried about you because I see how X might get in the way.”

Step 4: “Can we talk about that?”

Communicating for Mastery

Aim: Communicate in a manner that brings the young person a sense of control, honors and builds competence and inspires confidence to take the next step.

Communicating for Mastery

Traditional Communication with Youth:

- Lecture format
- Cadence is the same as algebra

Why Traditional Communication Can Be Ineffective:

- Normal cognitive development: not all youth are ready for algebra
- Stress! (No one can do algebra when running from a tiger)

Communicating for Mastery

Traditional Communication with youth:

- Lecture format
- Cadence is the same as algebra

Why Traditional Communication can be ineffective:

- Normal cognitive development: not all youth are ready for algebra
- Stress! (No one can do algebra when running from a tiger)
- Traditional Communication undermines confidence and thwarts attempts to build competence, creating a loss of control.

Communicating for Mastery

Principles of Strength-Based Communication

- Simple equations
- Young person does the math, we guide

Helpful Tools:

- Decision Tree
- Decision Ladder
- Role play (virtual walk-through)

Communicating for Mastery

Youth Cognitive Development

- Myth 1: “Teens think they are invincible.”
- Myth 2: “Teens lack executive function. This is why they take risks.”
- The Full(er) Story: Many teens have capacities that are similar to adults. Key differences in cognitive development include the **balance** between social-emotional networks and logical-reasoning networks.
- “Hot” and “Cold” Cognition
- Factors that tilt the teen brain towards “hot” cognition: stress, peer audience

Communicating for Mastery

Helping Youth Regain Control

(Or, How to Help Youth Shift from “Hot” to “Cold” Cognition)

- Create a space that is safe and away from an audience
- Be “Radically Calm”
- Create opportunities for the young person to release the heat.
- Help turn the thermostat even lower.
- Offer support to articulate feelings. (Tip: avoid saying “I understand” or minimizing feelings.)

Communicating for Mastery

Helping Youth Regain Control

(Or, How to Help Youth Shift from “Hot” to “Cold” Cognition)

- Reflect what you have heard
- Name Strengths: Reflect on what the young person has done well
- Request permission to guide

Coping

One of the greatest things we can do is to empower our youth with a wide repertoire of positive coping strategies to help them manage adversity.

In primary prevention, we create opportunities for youth to develop positive coping strategies and teach them skills they can use when most challenged.

In secondary prevention, we work with with people already engaged in worrisome behaviors and invite them to consider replacing those behaviors with others that will also reduce stress.

Coping

- Name the stressor
- Defining the stressor:
- Distinguish Paper Tigers from Real Tigers
- Know when bad things are temporary
- Know when good things are permanent

Coping

- Engagement v. Disengagement
- Emotion-focused v. Problem-Focused

Coping

Tackling the Problem

- Making the problem more manageable
- Active Avoidance
- Let some things go

Taking Care of My Body

- Exercise
- Relaxation
- Nutrition
- Sleep

Managing Emotions

- Instant Vacations
- Releasing Emotions
- Contributing to the World

Practical Resilience in the World

Recognize the negative ways in which youth are portrayed in our communities and in the media.

Celebrate when you see youth making a contribution in your community.

Create opportunities for youth to make a contribution in your community (or even just your corner)

Recognize character, effort and process in every day actions.

Find new ways to celebrate and build strength in yourself.
Youth are paying attention to our actions and how we model resilience.

Further Reading

Ginsburg K & Kinsman S, eds. *Reaching Teens: Strength-Based Communication Strategies to Build Resilience and Support Healthy Adolescent Development*. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2014.

Duckworth, A. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. Scribner, 2016.

Dweck, C. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Ballantine Books, 2008.