Families Connect
with
Dr. Robert Brooks

Nurturing Resilience in Ourselves and our Children and Teens During Challenging Times

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A preliminary comment: As we all know these have been and continue to be challenging times and if we are to help our children and adolescents to be more hopeful and resilient, it’s important that we have realistic expectations for ourselves and practice self-compassion
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A very brief definition of resilience: the capacity to **cope effectively** with adversity

A focus on resilience, while always of importance, has taken on even greater significance in light of all that has transpired since March, 2020—anxiety, depression, and mental health issues at all ages are on the rise

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What is a basic foundation for kids to become resilient? The significance of what the late psychologist Julius Segal called a “charismatic adult,” an adult from whom children “gather strength”
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I am often asked:

Do we as adults need “charismatic adults” in our lives?

Can we help our children (others) be resilient if we don’t feel very resilient ourselves?

What can I say and do to be a charismatic adult in the lives of my children (others)?
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To appreciate the importance of empathy in understanding and responding to our children (others): Psychologist Daniel Goleman views empathy as a basic component of both emotional and social intelligence.

The following questions can serve to help us to become more empathic with our children (others):
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What words do I hope my children (others) use to describe me?

What do I *intentionally* say and do on a regular basis so they are likely to use the words to describe me that I hope they would use?

What words do I think they would use and are they similar to the words I hope they would use?
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Would I want anyone to say or do to me what I have just said or done with my children (others)?

Am I validating and not minimizing or dismissing any of my children’s (other’s) questions or concerns?
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A word of caution: It is much more challenging to be empathic with our children (others) when we are upset, disappointed, or angry with them.
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To reinforce a sense of “personal control” that involves strengthening problem-solving and decision-making skills in ourselves and our children, which helps them to feel a sense of ownership when dealing with what is occurring in their lives, including any challenges and setbacks they may experience.
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To identify, reinforce, and honor our children’s **passions and “islands of competence”**: this does not imply running away from or avoiding any problems they may have but rather not losing sight of the beauty and strengths of our children and loving them unconditionally.

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To engage in two forms of gratitude:

To consider the things for which we and our family are grateful

To express gratitude towards those who have been a source of strength for us and our families
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To provide opportunities for our children and our families to engage in “contributory” or “charitable” activities, which helps to reinforce a basic component of resilience, namely, a sense of purpose or meaning—such activities also promote compassion and caring for others.
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To create indelible memories that our children will take with them for the rest of their lives: it’s important to appreciate that some of these memories may be rooted in seemingly small gestures or micro-moments on our part.