



The Guide to Resilient Children



MAYA 16

Raising resilient children

Raising resilient children is not a destination, it's a journey. It is a journey of learning how to best equip your child to meet life's inevitable challenges. Research supports that when children are resilient, they are braver, more curious, more adaptable, and better positioned to extend their reach into the world.¹ In the ever-changing landscape of our world, it is crucial for children to develop their personal capacity for resiliency.



¹ <https://www.heysigmund.com/building-resilience-children/>

What is resiliency?

Resiliency by definition is the capacity to rally. It is the ability to bounce back and recover from a set-back or difficult experience. It is how we dust ourselves off and get back up when we fall. Thankfully, there is significant evidence to support the idea that resiliency can be taught, fostered, and cultivated. The difference between someone who gives up versus someone who gets up when life hits, has more to do with their upbringing than biology. This understanding is extremely important for parents and supporters as it shows that we have the potential to positively impact our child's capacity to persist despite difficult experiences.



Why does resiliency matter?

Resiliency matters because it helps promote social and emotional wellbeing. Children who are resilient are able to successfully navigate their emotions. They can trust themselves and believe that they can likely figure out what they need to. Resilient children also know when to ask for help. Benard's (2004)² research concluded that children who are resilient excel in four key areas of development:

- Social competence (can interact with others)
- Problem solving (just-in-time ability to think and act)
- Self-efficacy (personal confidence in their capacity to deal with difficult challenges)
- Sense of purpose, hope and meaning (optimistic about the future)

Rethinking resiliency

Life will inevitably provide situations for children to experience challenges and difficulty. The goal as parents is not to eliminate these challenges for our children, but to prepare our children to deal with difficulties effectively. The truth is, parents will not always be there to protect our children from any and all danger or harm, but we can teach them the skills of how to think and act so that they can protect themselves. My scholarly understanding combined with my experience as a mother leads me to believe that our goal should be to ensure our children learn how to cope and thrive in the midst of difficulties so they can bravely grow into their future.





The five pillars of resiliency

As a resiliency scholar, I have worked with people all around the world and from all walks of life. What I have learned is that there are common qualities and patterns that people tap into for growing resiliency. When developing our resilience, there are some key factors that help us to bounce back from and grow stronger through difficulty. I have come to call them the Five Pillars of Resiliency.

They are:

**Belonging,
Perspective,
Acceptance,
Hope, and
Humour.**

1.

Belonging

We need a home team. Research from Harvard University³ concluded that the single most common factor for children who are resilient is that they have at least one stable and committed person in their life. This could be a parent, caregiver, or another adult. We need someone in our corner who will teach us and protect us. This key relationship allows a child to receive feedback for adaptive skill-building and fosters a sense of safety and security.



2.

Perspective

Maintaining a balanced perspective is essential to resilience. Our outlook has a profound impact on our ability to move through challenges. Children especially can learn how to see their world with a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset. A fixed mindset says, “I am not good at making friends,” while a growth mindset says, “I may not be good at making friends yet, but I can get better”. The operative word is YET; it sends a cue to the brain that we might not be able to do this thing well right now, but with effort and intention, we can improve.

3.

Acceptance

A resilient child has learned to decipher their controllables. They have a sense of what is within their control and what is not. Many of us can get stuck on things that are outside of our control. A sign someone might be stuck is that they are always asking “why” questions. These “why” questions carry the perspective that the world is happening ‘to’ us and assumes that we don’t have much power or agency to change our situation. Examples are: Why did they pick him over me? Why are they taller? Why am I not good at math? Instead of asking these “why” questions, we can switch our perspective and ask more action-oriented questions. These questions ask “how” and “what”. As parents, we can encourage our children to accept the reality of their difficult situation by posing these kinds of questions: What are you going to do about it? How are you going to ask for help? Who should you talk to? With this encouragement, a child can start to build momentum and take positive steps forward instead focusing on things that are beyond their control.



4.

Hope

‘All will be well’ is the mantra of resilient people. It is human nature to look for threats in any given situation, even for children. However, when we allow fear, regret, or anticipatory anxiety to prevail, we deplete our capacity to perform at an optimal level. Children need to believe that things can improve. When we are hope-filled, and we believe in our ability to excel, we have greater power to achieve our goals and to bounce back from setbacks or disappointments.

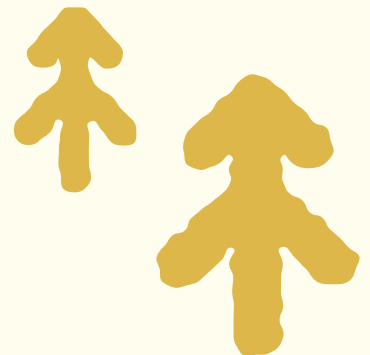
5.

Humour

Laughter can be a helping hand. When experiencing disappointments, hurts, or losses, we can sometimes feel that there is no room for humour or lightheartedness. However, humour is a vital tool that can help us gain perspective even in our darkest moments. Being resilient includes having the capacity to move through difficult emotions while not taking ourselves too seriously. As parents, we can encourage this lightheartedness and ability to laugh at ourselves through role modeling and by leaving lots of room for play, fun, and joy - even (and especially) during challenging times. There is solid evidence that supports the importance of laughter in resiliency. The act of laughing releases natural tranquilizers that temporarily block our pain receptors. So, even if it is just for a moment, a break in the pain or sadness allows space for the belief that “all will be well” to take root.



Together, these five pillars create a constellation of tools and strategies grounded in security and safety that allow children to actively participate in an uncertain world. No matter what, they know they will be okay. And knowing that you are going to be okay is the heart of resiliency.





Age appropriate resiliency goals

Resiliency across a child's life span looks different. What it means to be resilient at 5 years old is different than what it means at 15 years old. Hopefully, when children are little, they will only require 'little bounce backs'. The challenges our children face often grow as they do and might require more of a 'comeback'. Learning how to

navigate manageable and age-appropriate threats is critical for the development of resiliency. A helpful framework for conceptualizing age appropriate resiliency goals comes to us through the renowned scholar, Erik Erikson and his works:

Stage	Psychological Crisis/Task	What Happens at This Stage
Preschool 3-5 Years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Preschoolers learn to initiate tasks and carry out plans, or they feel guilty about efforts to be independent.
School Age 6-11 Years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Children learn the pleasure of applying themselves to tasks, or they feel inferior.
Adolescence 12+	Identity vs. Confusion	Teenagers work at refining a sense of self by testing roles and then integrating them to form a single identity, or they become confused about who they are.

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A child wearing a red and white striped hat and a teal jacket is holding a large, vertical piece of weathered wood. The top of the wood is covered in vibrant green moss. The child's face is partially obscured by the wood. The background is a soft-focus natural setting.

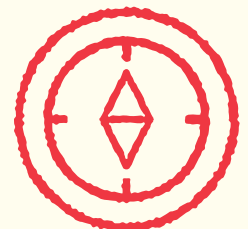
So as parents, what should we be looking for in our children and how can we help them?

3–5 years: initiative vs. guilt

The goal of this age group is to build on the trust and autonomy from their toddlerhood by exploring their Initiative. This means that children start to explore their world in more depth but are not necessarily expected to experience completion or mastery. Exploring their initiative can look like children emptying every toy shelf and starting every book, but not finishing any of these tasks. This can be frustrating for parents who want their child to 'finish what they start', but that is not the purpose of this stage of development. If this natural initiative is too often thwarted, children can begin to develop guilt. We definitely want to minimize this emotional state as it corrodes our children's willingness to take risks, and thus their resiliency. This stage is all about trying! We want to encourage our children to just start. We want them to be curious and to feel free to explore.

What can parents and supporters do?

- Provide unconditional love and safety within the home.
- Teach self-soothing. When children fall down, teach them how to hold their own knee, apply pressure, and rock. Model this behaviour on your own knee. Practice parroting speech (E.g., 'This hurts right now but I am going to be okay. I need to breathe slowly. I am okay.')
- Model behaviour that communicates optimism and confidence. Avoid catastrophic or all-or-nothing language (E.g., 'This is the worst thing ever; This is impossible; or Grade 1 is the most important year of your life!')
- Praise effort and exploration, not mastery or completion. Acknowledge effort, not the end product.
- Help children learn how to acknowledge and label their feelings.
- Help children learn to accept responsibility for their own behavior and understand that their actions have consequences.
- Establish that errors and failures are part of learning as is feedback and guidance toward improvement.
- Incorporate resilient vocabulary (I.e., 'I know you can do hard things'. 'You will figure this one out' — encourages autonomy and reinforces their personal belief and capacity for problem solving). And use language that assures (I.e., 'I am here' — comforts and prompts support and safety if needed).



6–11 years: industry vs. inferiority

The goal for this age group is to think about Industry. This is when children aim to learn how to finish what they start! At this developmental stage, we want to start mastering some fundamental skills. The opposite end of Industry is Inferiority. According to Erikson's work, this developmental stage is when the child starts to develop their own beliefs about their capacity and efficacy, which is essentially their confidence in themselves that they can perform. As parents, we want to encourage children to see that they can do things they previously could not do.

What can parents and supporters do?

- Provide unconditional love and safety within the home.
- Use reminders to help children manage and navigate feelings and experiences.
- Explain and promote behaviours that align with values, rules and expectations.
- Acknowledge follow-through and sticking with harder tasks.
- Balance children's autonomy with your available help.
- Normalize setbacks, challenges, and failures as part of the learning process.
- Encourage children to accept responsibility for their actions and understand consequences.
- Encourage open discussion and negotiation for increasing responsibilities (age appropriate).
- Encourage flexible thinking and self-reflection.
- Teach children about the importance of self-care and self-compassion.



12+ adolescence: identity vs. confusion

During pre-adolescence and adolescence there is a significant shift in development, moving to an outside the family system focus. The task is for the teenager to determine a sense of self. Questions like 'Who Am I?'; "How do I fit into society?"; "What will I do?"; and "What will my future be like?" are asked. The goal is for the teenager to safely explore their identity by taking risks and trying new ways of being. Through these practices of self-discovery, the teenager can emerge into adulthood with a solid sense of who they are while having the ability to make decisions and problem solve based on their values, ideals, principles, and beliefs.

What can parents and supporters do?

- Understand that young people are trying to figure out the world all over again.
- Listen with the intention of really hearing them not correcting or solving.
- Still make time for one another and include them in family life.
- Engage in their world as a supporter not a rescuer.
- Show respect for them as people.
- Encourage their sense of exploration, play and fun.
- Model health and wellness practices.
- Stay hopeful that their future will be bright and that your teenager is well equipped to problem solve issues both big and small.





Resiliency in the outdoors

Resiliency is not a single skill. Rather, it is a constellation of traits, skills, thoughts, and behaviours that we acquire through our lived experience. We have to get living to be able to develop the learning we need in order to strive and thrive. Outdoor play is a fundamental need for children. For one thing, outdoor play increases a child's physicality. Children are more likely to use their bodies to jump, climb, explore, and move with a sense of freedom, which has numerous benefits to our overall wellbeing. Outdoor play also increases cognitive functioning such as the use of imagination, which fosters creativity and problem solving. Research has repeatedly

shown that being active outdoors is tremendously beneficial for children (and parents, too!) It promotes mindfulness, increased

self-efficacy and reduced feelings of stress.⁴ Outdoor play also supports building stronger relationships with one's self, others, and the earth. Research demonstrates that outdoor play helps children to develop respect, appreciation, and a sense of duty to care for the planet, a crucial aspect to resiliency. Early exposure to outdoor play fosters a deep sense of wonder, awe and connectedness that can last a lifetime.

Scouting empowers youth through countless leadership opportunities that help them develop resiliency and discover their capability.

- Through Scouts Canada's Plan-Do-Review* method, youth develop into critical thinkers, extend their personal progression, and become active participants in an inclusive team dynamic.
- Young people gain leadership skills by leading their peers on meaningful adventures, facing challenges and overcoming them with solutions—all within in a safe and supported environment.
- Stimulated through teamwork, goal-setting and exploration, girls and boys in Scouts develop self-confidence, values and problem-solving skills that prepare them for success in the world.

Despite all these benefits of being outside, one of Canada's largest studies on childhood health and wellbeing suggests that only 37%

⁴ Nutz & Muller (2016).

*Plan-Do-Review: Youth take the lead in shaping their program. Taking charge, youth set goals together, organize ways to achieve these goals and collectively reflect on their experience after the goal is met.

of children play outside daily and only 7% of children under 10 are allowed to play outside on their own.⁵

Risk is another crucial element of outdoor play. Risk-taking is when the child engages in any activity without a clear outcome and holds the potential for experiencing an adverse effect.

It is an important skill that children need to develop in age appropriate ways. It is paramount to differentiate

risk-taking from danger — a threatening event or encounter that requires a grown-up to protect the child. As a parent, I use the idea of being a supporter versus a rescuer. For example, if a child is experiencing anxiety at school and we pick them up every time they feel anxious, we are rescuing. When we teach our children the

skills required to navigate anxiety, then we are supporting.

The world has changed in important ways since most of us, as adults

now, were kids: population density and urban sprawl looked different, we had less restrictions on where we could explore, and our sense of community trust was higher.

It feels safer to keep children indoors, but studies have found that in order to grow up healthy and resil-

ient, children need the freedom to “occasionally scrape a knee or twist an ankle.”⁶

The goal is not for them to get hurt, but to allow our children to experience the thrill and excitement of testing their limits and abilities. Giving children the opportunity to see what they can

Scouts are able to develop well-rounded skills by taking appropriate risks through safe, supervised experiences like:

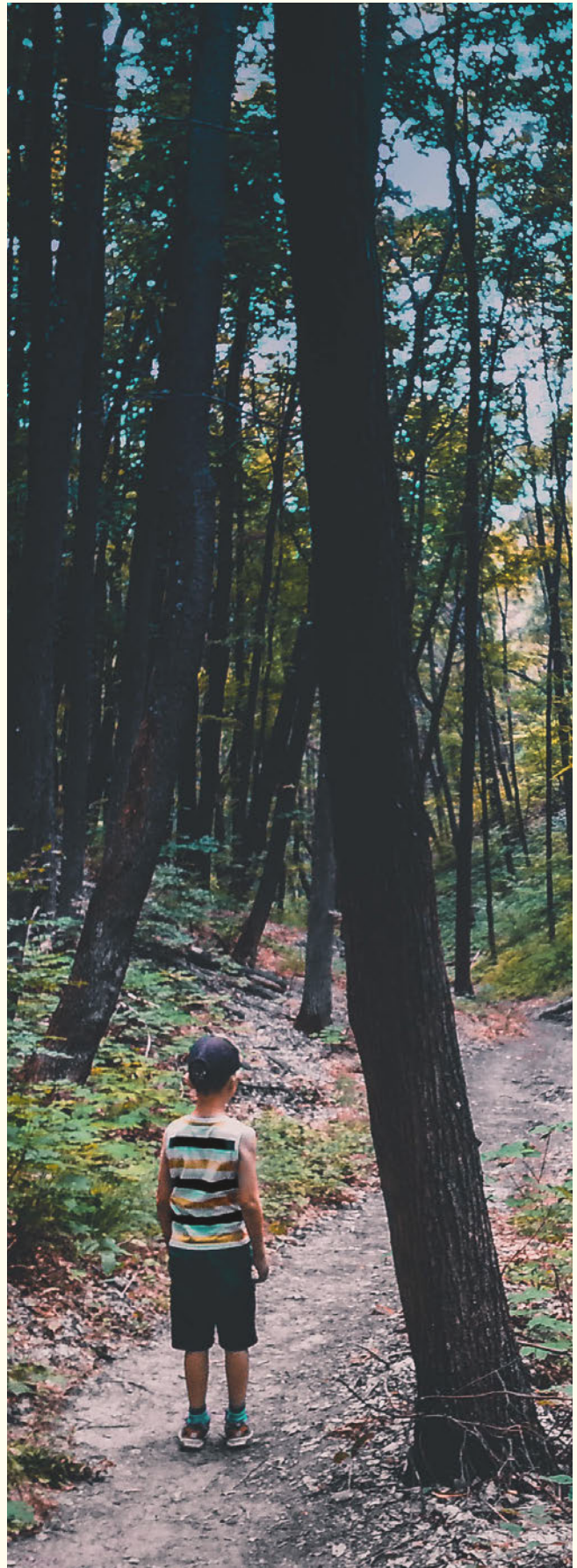
- Navigating a hike route and leading their peers on the trail.
- Embarking on a wilderness camp to develop enhanced first aid skills.
- Building a quinzhee for an overnight camp in wintertime.
- Lighting a campfire and cooking a meal amidst challenging weather elements.
- Taking vertical skills to new heights on the high ropes.

⁵ ParticipACTION, (2015).

⁶ Trembley et al., (2015).

do, to experiment and take risks develops their ability to perceive danger. It also increases self-regulation and provides potent stress relief. Interestingly, the benefits of risky outdoor free play are astounding. According to a recent Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, more adventure-based and 'risky' opportunities for outdoor play amongst our children can lead to better developed motor skills, social behaviour, independence, and conflict resolution skills.⁷

We can strive to teach children the difference between risk and danger. And we can protect our children from danger while allowing them to take risks.



Resiliency in the home

A resilient household is a crucial component for developing our children's resiliency. Researchers routinely discover that, "protective factors promoting resilience originate from within the child, family and community and are essential for coping with risk factors on all different levels, as well as for building physical and mental health, emotional well-being, social relationships and academic achievement."⁸

A resilient home is characterized by grown-ups who:

- Set high expectations.
- Provide routines.
- Instill core family and personal values.
- Ground the family system with trust and support.

It is important to remember that observing these characteristics of a resilient home does not mean removing or preventing any and every bad thing from happening to our children. One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is the belief that they are capable, competent, and that we trust them to figure out solutions to their problems.



⁸ <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/guides-and-publications/growing-up-resilient> (See also Oades-Sese et al., (2014) for example).

Resiliency finisher statements

As parents, we play a significant role in helping our children form their personal resiliency world view. Our worldview is shaped by the stories we tell ourselves, parts are made up of the thoughts we think about ourselves (our self-belief) in order to make sense of our experiences. Here is a great activity you can do with your child to support them in anchoring their self-belief in a steadfast conviction—that they have what it takes to be resilient. The following prompts are used to complete ‘finisher resiliency statements’ that reinforce a positive self-belief.⁹

I have...

(E.g. I have people around me who love me no matter what; I have the ability to learn this new skill; I have people I trust who support me). These are “who is in my corner” statements. A child needs external supports/resources to develop safety and security, which lay the foundation for resilience.

I am...

(E.g. I am a person people can like and love; I am strong; I am capable; I am hard-working). These are strength-based statements that affirm a child’s positive traits, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs.

I can...

(E.g. I can do hard things; I can talk to others about things that frighten/bother me; I can ask for help). These are self-efficacy statements that reinforce a child’s ability to navigate challenges, learn, and succeed.

I will...

(E.g. I will figure this out; I will stick with it; I will learn from this; I will keep trying). These are forward-focused action statements that instill hope, positivity, and willingness.

Courage over comfort

One of my favourite scholars, Dr. Brené Brown, writes that, “we need to choose courage over comfort”.¹⁰ The next time you are tempted to do something for your child that they could do for themselves or when you are tempted to prevent them from experiencing a setback, take a pause and hold space for courage – your own courage as well as your child’s courage. In this pause, see if you can cultivate the courage to allow your child to try something new or to feel something uncomfortable. I invite you to take a step back and to let your child navigate their world independently. Remember, it is when we are outside of our comfort zone that we learn what we are truly capable of achieving. Choosing courage over comfort is what allows resiliency to take root in our children, giving them wings so that they can soar.



¹⁰ <https://brenebrown.com/blog/2018/03/13/courage-comfort-umbling-shame-accountability-failure-work/>



**Special thanks to
Rich McPherson, OCT, M.Ed.,
Aleyah-Erin Lennon, OCT, MA
and Lauryn Bons for their
contributions to this guide.**



RESILIENCY | DR.RHD

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About Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe

Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe is a multi-award-winning psychology and education instructor who specializes in resiliency, navigating stress and change, leadership, and personal wellness in the workplace and schools. Robyne's writing and research interests focus on resiliency and wellness, in her own backyard and around the world. Robyne is committed to finding real and sustainable solutions for creating positive relationships for individuals, teachers, families, and organizations. Her refreshing approach looks at resiliency from multiple vantage points with the aim of being fully accessible to everyone. Robyne lives in Central Ontario with her husband and three amazing children, and two dogs, who remind her each day that she still has a lot to learn about mostly everything! On most days, Robyne runs on her love of family, historical fiction, coffee, and puppies—oh, and a clean kitchen in the morning.

Resiliency Guide – A Letter from the CEO

Earlier this year, communities across Canada and the world were disrupted by unprecedented change: for some, the global pandemic brought instability, anxiety and isolation (to name a few), while for others COVID-19 became a call for community, solidarity and compassion. While we all took slightly different paths during the initial 'shelter at home' advisory, I am extremely proud of the resilience demonstrated by our Scouting community.



Thanks to the extraordinary commitment and passion of our volunteers and employees, Scouts Canada was able to quickly modify our program and standards to continue providing a safe, quality Scouting program; youth were able to stay active and engaged virtually throughout the spring and summer of 2020.

As a Movement, Scouting has witnessed great change since its beginnings over a hundred years ago. Our Canadian Scouting community has demonstrated an ability to adapt and thrive during difficult times, embracing moments of challenge and crisis as opportunities to try new things and achieve even greater success. We will always look back on 2020 as a year that marked our lives, and we will also remember it as a time that reminded us of who we are as Scouts: kind, trustworthy, helpful and resilient.

Resiliency is not something we are born with, but something we are taught. That's why Scouts Canada has partnered with expert Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe to develop "The Guide to Resilient Children". This free resource offers Canadian families the tools and knowledge to help kids better navigate risk, stress and challenges – not just during a pandemic but also in everyday life.

Scouts develop confidence and resiliency by taking on responsibility for selecting, planning and leading the adventures they want to pursue. Along the way, they learn a lot about themselves, their capabilities and working with others while tackling new challenges and experiencing new adventures.

Now more than ever, we are committed to developing young leaders who are better prepared for success in the world.

Andrew Price, CEO and Executive Commissioner

