

BUILDING RESILIENCE - CHARACTER

We are all born with resilience inside of us, that ability to recover from adversity. We all have the mental, emotional, and physical capacity to bend and flex and then come back to our original form. When raising children, our work is to recognize, nurture, and encourage the qualities that strengthen resilience—just like exercising our muscles to grow physically stronger. Using Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg’s model for raising resilient children and teens, there are 7 Crucial C’s (7Cs), or characteristics that we can foster in our children—and in ourselves as role models. These seven integral and interrelated components are: **competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control.**

CHARACTER

As parents, we need to be intentional about instilling a basic sense of right and wrong—character. In order to truly thrive, children need to understand values such as responsibility to the broader community as well as the value of each and every life. Every family has its own recipe for what constitutes good character and each family will prioritize those traits differently. The importance is in being active about developing character in our children. They will receive many subtle messages about character from their friends, the media, their school, their clergy, and their coaches among others, so it’s critical that direction about character development comes from parents.

Here are several examples for fostering character:

Promote responsibility. A key trait of resilient people is taking responsibility for their behaviors, including failures, and then taking action to improve them. This important character trait will make a huge difference in how a young person performs later in his work and personal life.

Notice acts of kindness—your child’s and others’. We often notice and praise children when they accomplish a task or achieve a good grade. We also need to catch them when they are kind, generous, and thoughtful to others if we want to build character. Additionally, pointing out the positive things our friends and neighbors do will also promote the value of that kind of behavior.

Treat each other and even strangers well. Children pay close attention to how adults treat each other. When problems are discussed and resolved honestly and openly without hostility, children learn it’s safe to voice opinions and that conflict is healthy and can be worked through respectfully.

Reinforce the importance of including all children. Children can begin at an early age to drop into set groups which can become exclusive over time. Help your child realize the importance of other children’s feelings while still maintaining his best friendships. This means reinforcing acts of kindness when your child befriends a less popular child or making an effort to enable your child to play with others who have different abilities. When children choose their own friends rather than based on what others say or think they are cultivating a great asset that will serve them well as they get older.

Don’t spoil your children. Spoiling children creates adults who expect everything instantly and who feel they are entitled to anything they desire. Giving your child lots of love does not spoil her, but be mindful



Adapted from *Building Resilience in Children & Teens* by Kenneth Ginsburg, MD

BUILDING RESILIENCE - CHARACTER

of giving them lots of material objects and granting all their wishes. Patience is an important trait to learn as well as learning that sometimes there isn't enough money to buy them what they want. Better yet, help them think of ways to earn their own resources.

Be there when they receive unfiltered messages via media. Especially in this day and age of easy access to media on our devices and screens, it can be very easy to develop the idea that what they see on television is normal and acceptable. While it's impossible to prevent their exposure to some of it, you can, especially when they are younger, restrict how much they see and hear, and be there when they do to talk about it. Ask them questions that will help them understand and make a conscious choice about the values being presented.

Work toward a better world and teach philanthropy. There are many ways, big and small to make the world a better place. Volunteering and making cash donations are one. Talking about what it takes to have a healthy community and the roles we can play to make that happen are another.

Honor plurality and avoid prejudice. We want to teach our children to be open to rich discussions. This is how we grow and learn. Avoid the tendency to divide into *us* and *them*. Prejudice is not always intentionally malicious and is often unconscious but can have troublesome consequences including justification for discrimination. Prejudice prevents us from getting to know each other better.

Care about nature. What child doesn't love to climb a tree or splash in a puddle? Children relate easily to the idea of our interdependence with nature and the need to take care of it.

Be human. Every human has a full range of emotions and traits, including selfishness, impatience, and anger. We do children an injustice by pretending to be perfect. Let them know that we adults also struggle to be good people. When we talk about that struggle, we model how to do the same.

IDEAS/TIPS for Parents and Families:

1. Notice how you talk about news and the world around you. We often talk about appalling behaviors and edit out normal behavior and forget to recognize the decent deeds people do. Make a conscious effort, to take note out loud and appreciate the positive things your friends and neighbors do. Let's redefine our heroes and give less air time to our scandals.
2. Small acts make the difference too. Pick up trash instead of walking by it. Give your seat to an elderly person or open the door for them. Make time to call and connect with relatives and friends. Let your child see you do these things and/or have them join you.
3. Don't simply tell children that prejudiced messages are untrue; show them by exposing them to positive images of diverse groups. Multicultural books, media, and events can help children understand the history and culture of other people.

The **Ok. You've Got This** project is a collaborative, county-wide public education campaign to increase resilience among Addison County youth. For more information and resources visit okyouvegotthis.org.



Adapted from **Building Resilience in Children & Teens** by Kenneth Ginsburg, MD