# BUILDING RESILIENCE - COMPETENCE

**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**.

## COMPETENCE

Competence is the ability to handle situations effectively. It is the bedrock for resilience and foundational to the other 6Cs. Children acquire competence by mastering tasks and facing challenges.

Competence is cumulative and rooted in experience. Unless a child has been tested by experience then the feeling or assumption of competence is not likely to stand up in moments of real challenge. From learning to ride a bike to attending parties where there are alcohol and drugs, it takes time and real life experience to find true—and safe independence and conviction.

There are several key guidelines for fostering competence:

**Getting out of the way!** We want to help, fix, and guide our kids. But we have to remind ourselves that when we just let them figure things out for themselves, we communicate this powerful message: "I think you are competent."

**Play is one of the major jobs of childhood.** Unstructured free play (or downtime in the case of adolescents) allows children to use their creativity while developing imagination, dexterity, and physical and emotional strength while also providing time to relax and destress.

**Noticing, praising, and criticizing**. Appropriate acknowledgment, genuine specific praise, and constructive criticism are important tools for supporting children in growing their competence. This means praising the effort and not the intelligence or the end result and offering specific criticism that focuses on improving effort versus pointing out personal character flaws.

**Striving for authentic success**. Enjoying the process of work is as important as what is accomplished. Let children know that a creative spirit is one of the greatest predictors of success and that the best ideas are usually rejected at first and that everyone fails sometime, but truly successful people can learn how to do better next time.

**Thinking clearly**. We can teach children not to remain stuck with their first impulsive, negative thoughts when they become frustrated, disappointed, anxious, or sad. They can use their cognitive abilities to rethink the situation, reframe it, "decatastrophize" it, and find workable solutions. Mindfulness tools are a great way to learn this practice.

ok.
you've got this

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

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**No more lectures**. Our intentions are good, but lectures don't work—they backfire.  We need to shorten our speeches, be direct, and get kids involved by asking them to make a choice. The child hears your parameters and has a choice, which gives her some control of the situation.

**Guiding children to find the right choices**. Once we stop lecturing and have guiding conversations with children, they will find their own way to making wise, safe decisions. When a child sees a solution or finds an answer by thinking through a situation they have their own "Aha!" moment and will continue to trust their ability to think through and make the right choice going forward.

**Media literacy**. Kids aged 8 to 18 spend an average of 7.5 hours a day using computers, televisions, cell phones, video games, and other electronic devices. In addition, children are exposed to scores of advertisements and inundated by messages in the music they listen to and magazines and Web sites they read. We need to raise media-literate children who can see through the media messages, recognize what's helpful and educational and what isn't, and who feel satisfied with their own capabilities and identities.

**IDEAS/TIPS for Parents and Families:**

1. Ask for help:  Children need to feel useful and needed just like adults.  You can say something like, "I could really use your help.  Would you please bring in the groceries and I'll put them away?  Remember to say "thank you" to your children for their help.
2. Offer a limited choice:  Let them pick one of two choices, "you may _____ or you may _____." This could be used for everyday chores such as " You may set the table or clean up afterward. Which do you prefer?"  Or for bigger issues like, "You may help clean the house and then go to the party, or may choose not to help clean and not go to the party.  Up to you."
3. Work together for solutions:  "You want _____ and I want _____.  How can we work together so we both get what we want?"  This strategy requires discussion and willingness to compromise.
4. Children crave boundaries:  Children crave boundaries so they can know if they are pleasing you and because they are eager to prove they are good.  Adolescents need boundaries so they can better learn to define themselves.  Boundaries allow teens to experience and test their limits while knowing deep down that they will be protected.  (Just don't count on being thanked for setting boundaries!)
5. There are "always" and "never" rules but most rules are in place only until a child can demonstrate responsibility that shows they need less supervision.  Always rule:  always wear your seatbelt.  Never rule:  never drive while intoxicated.  Temporary rules:  "You may not drive after dark until after you have more experience driving during the day."

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.

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