



# Emotional Health and Well-being of our Children

One of the things we CAN do as parents is to find ways to teach and reinforce things like resilience, flexibility, optimism, gratitude, kindness, and compassion. These are not simple things but when practiced, they can become habits like anything else. The world is not always a fair and just place, and we all need to learn to deal with it and also work to change it.

# Resilience Guide

1. Make connections - *teach your child how to make friends, including the skill of empathy. Connecting with people provides social support.*
2. Help your child by having him or her help others - *children who may feel helpless can be empowered by helping others.*
3. Maintain a daily routine - *sticking to a routine can be comforting, especially younger children who crave structure in their lives.*
4. Take a break - *provide unstructured time to allow children to be creative.*
5. Teach your child self-care - *make sure your child has time to eat, exercise, rest, and have fun.*
6. Move toward your goals - *set reasonable goals and then move toward them one step at a time.*
7. Nurture a positive self-view - *past challenges build strength - help your child learn to trust himself to solve problems and make appropriate decisions. See the humor in life and be able to laugh at yourself.*
8. Keep things in perspective - *an optimistic outlook enables your child to see the good things in life and keep going even in the hardest of times.*
9. Look for opportunities for self-discovery - *tough times are often the times when children learn the most about themselves, they discover "what they are made of."*
10. Accept that change is part of living - *change can be scary. change is part of life and new goals can replace goals that have become unattainable.*

*There are no findings showing that self-esteem causes anything at all. Rather, self-esteem is the product of doing well.*

## Islands of Competence

*For children who have a learning disability, it is invaluable to have an area where they can shine.*



# Labels

- get you services, create a useful focus on interventions
- teach your child their label and what it means for them; it is an explanation and not an excuse
- the world needs all kinds of people
- school is not a good measure; your future job will be based on an area of strength

# "Fixing" Your Child

*if we act as a problem solver, we communicate that there is a problem - some children conclude that they are the problem; instead, catch them being good and cheer them on*

*make sure your child knows that they are perfect and loveable just as they are AND work on improving their skills*

*make mistakes in front of your child - through this they will know that they are not alone while you model coping skills*

*growth takes time - be patient, think about how far you have come compared to a year ago; have a growth mindset*

# Most Important Goals

*parent modeling is the most effective way to teach - so acquire the skills yourself before you set out to teach your child*

*keep an open channel of communication - set judgment aside, validate feelings*

*use specific praise - "I like how you smile", "thanks for telling me all done", "great job finishing your homework before 9:00"*

*work happens all by itself; it is important to intentionally create time for fun together - be silly!*

*You ability to be an effective parent hinges on your relationship.*

# The Penn Prevention Program

*detailed in the book: The Optimistic Child – by Martin Seligman*

selected at risk 12 year olds

> evaluated how many were depressed

> trained in optimism skills

	control	trained
before	24%	24%
right after	23%	13%
2 years after	44%	22%

>> training really helps (it is not a magic bullet)

The basis of optimism does not lie in positive phrases or images of victory. It lies in the way you think about causes in your self-talk.

pessimist	optimist
always	sometimes
global	specific
external	internal

- catch your automatic negative thoughts
- look for evidence / evaluate thoughts
- generate alternatives / more accurate explanations
- de-catastrophize

Example: Gloomy Greg vs. Hopeful Holly

# Social Skills

## problem solving

- slow down (pause, take time to think)
- consider the perspective of the other person (what did they feel, think)
- brainstorm possible responses
- choose a path
- evaluate success (choose a new path if needed)

✓ Give your child space to solve his own problems

✓ Compliment the good steps and help evaluate where things went awry; focus on the learning opportunity, be a coach or mentor

✓ Model flexible problem solving strategies – think through your own problems out loud

## Presentation style

push-over ---> assertive ---> aggressive

- describe situation
- say how you feel
- explain what you want
- say how the change will make you feel

Examples: Bully Brenda, Pushover Pete, and Say-it-Straight Samantha

# Pressure, Stress, Life in Silicon Valley

- Each child has their own level of coping
- A happy child is much more productive than a stressed out child
- If needed, reduce the school workload or number of outside activities
- There are very few doors that are permanently closed
- College can be approached many ways; none of them are worth dying over

# Recognizing Depression

1<sup>st</sup> cluster – change in your child's **thinking**: having a grim view of the self and the world, pessimistic self talk

2<sup>nd</sup> cluster – change in **mood**: sad, may cry, discouraged, hides in room, enjoyable activities are no longer enjoyable OR displays irritability/anxiety, picks fights, blames others

3<sup>rd</sup> cluster – change in **behavior**: passivity, indecisiveness, cannot get started, wants it all to end OR wants revenge

4<sup>th</sup> cluster – change in **physical self**; appetite changes, under or over eat, sleep changes, over or under sleeps, frequent headaches, stomach aches

# Addressing Depression

Best practice treatment for depression is **DBT and mindfulness**. If your child has suicidal thoughts or is cutting, ASPIRE program. You can use the techniques taught in ASPIRE to possibly head off problems.

**Validation** – show that you understand your child’s feelings or opinions. Be nonjudgmental out loud. Listen and show interest in what your child is saying. Be respectful. Smile, use humor, leave your attitude at the door.

No buts – use “**Yes, AND**” “you did a great job washing the dishes, (but) **AND** now you need to take out the trash”

**Radical Acceptance** – see reality for what it is even if you don’t like it.

It is far more effective **to reinforce positive behavior**. Reinforce even small steps in the right direction (shaping). Occasional punishment is appropriate, but make it fit the crime and be a logical consequence.

Parent through **LOVE** rather than **FEAR**.

# References

- The Optimistic Child – A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience *by* Martin Seligman
- Mindfulness for Teen Anger – a workbook to overcome anger and aggression using MBSR and DBT skills *by* Purcell and Murphy
- MBSR (sitting) and Mindful Qi Gong (with movement) classes at El Camino Hospital <http://www.mindfulnessprograms.com>
- Nonviolent Communication *by* Marshall Rosenberg
- Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control: A Love-Based Approach to Helping Children with Severe Behaviors *by* Forbes and Post
- Parenting from the Inside Out – How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive *by* Siegel and Hartzell