

Resilience: how to build it in children 3-8 years

Key points

- Resilience is the ability to bounce back after challenges and tough times.
- Resilient children can recover from setbacks and get back to living life.
- Resilience develops when children experience challenges and learn to deal with them positively.
- Strong relationships are the foundation of children's resilience.

Resilience: what is it?

Resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' after challenges and tough times.

For children, challenges and tough times include experiences like starting at a new school or kindergarten, moving house, or welcoming a sibling into the family. They can also include serious experiences like being bullied, family breakdown, family illness or death. Children build resilience over time through experience. You can help your child learn skills and develop resilience by having a warm, supportive relationship with them.

Resilience: why it's good for children

Children who are resilient can recover from setbacks and get back to living their lives more quickly. And when children overcome setbacks and problems, it builds their confidence and helps them feel more capable the next time a problem comes up.

Resilient children are often good at solving problems and learning new skills. This is because they're more willing to try again even if things don't go the way they want the first time.

And when things don't go well and children feel anxious, sad, disappointed, afraid or frustrated, resilience helps them understand that these uncomfortable emotions usually don't last forever. They can experience these emotions and know they'll be OK before too long.

Resilient children are less likely to avoid problems or deal with them in unhealthy ways, like getting defensive or aggressive or intentionally hurting themselves. Resilient children are also likely to have better physical and mental health than children who struggle to be resilient.

All children experience challenges but children with anxious [temperaments](#), learning difficulties or disabilities might find certain situations particularly challenging – for example, reading aloud in class or being left with an unfamiliar carer. When children build their resilience skills, they can better manage their emotions and overcome setbacks.

Relationships and resilience

[Relationships](#) are the foundation of your child's resilience.

Your child's most important relationships are with you and their other main caregivers.

[Strong relationships with you](#) and other carers helps your child feel loved, safe and secure. This sense of safety and security gives your child the confidence to explore their world and to recover from any setbacks they experience.

Your child's relationships with grandparents, aunts and uncles, early childhood educators and teachers, and friends are also important. These [family and community connections](#) give your child a sense of belonging and the feeling that they're valued. These feelings help to build your child's confidence and resilience.

Children learn about resilience from watching how you and other important people in their lives respond to tough times and setbacks. When your child sees you try again, let anger go, or think positively in difficult situations, they learn that they can do the same.

Building resilience in children

Children learn resilience through experience. Each time your child overcomes a problem, it builds their confidence in their ability to handle the next challenge.

Here are some ways you can build your child's resilience:

- Support your child but try not to solve every minor problem or disappointment. For example, if your child doesn't get invited to a birthday party or didn't get what they want for their birthday, you could talk about how they feel instead of trying to fix the problem.
- Avoid predicting and preventing problems for your child. This might mean letting your child hand in homework that's wrong or not replacing a broken toy. Overcoming small challenges builds your child's resilience for bigger setbacks.
- Help your child to identify and manage strong emotions. For example, your child might be worried about a family member who's sick. You could say, 'I can see you're really worried about Grandpa. It's OK to be worried. But remember we're doing everything we can to help him get better'.
- Encourage your child to have another go when things don't work out the first time they try something. Praise your child for trying, no matter the result. You could say 'I'm proud of you for finishing the race' or 'Well done for giving it another go'.
- Build your child's [self-compassion](#). Self-compassion helps your child deal with disappointment, failures or mistakes by being kind to themselves. In turn, this helps them to move on from difficult experiences.
- Make it a habit to recognise and acknowledge when things are going well. For example, during family meals you could each share one positive thing from your day.
- Help your child to develop problem-solving skills in an age-appropriate way. For example, if a child at school says or does something unkind to your child, brainstorm how your child might respond next time.
- Find a positive role model who has experienced similar challenges to your child. For example, your child might find support in an older friend whose parents have separated or who has lost a family member.

Children develop resilience over time, so try to be patient and supportive while your child works out how to respond to challenges. You might want to make everything all right for your child, but sometimes your child has to go through uncomfortable feelings so they can work things out for themselves.