



Resilience
Counseling
& Training Center
*Providing counseling, training and
consulting services around the world.*

24 Reporter Court * PO Box 1435 * North Conway, NH 03860 * (603) 730-5467



Newsletter Autumn 2020



RESILIENCE COUNSELING & TRAINING CENTER

Monica A. Nicoll, Ph.D. & William G. Nicoll, Ph.D.

Resilience: What is it? How does it develop?

The term, Resilience, is frequently used today. But, what exactly is it and how is it developed? When Dr. Jonas Salk, discoverer of the polio vaccine, was asked upon the 35th anniversary of his lifesaving discovery as to what he would focus on today if he were a young scientist, he responded, *“I’d still do immunization, but I’d do it psychologically rather than biologically”*. This is what Resilience is really all about.

Resilience involves the development of the psychological strengths that facilitate success and social-emotional wellbeing while at the same time immunizing against the destructive effects of adversity and stress in life. Resilience incorporates such qualities as: character, grit, optimism, social-emotional intelligence, self-confidence, empathy, problem solving, aspirations, and both personal and social responsibility. A person’s degree of mental health or social-emotional wellbeing can be thought of as one’s Resilience Quotient (**‘RQ’**). Studies now indicate that it is one’s **RQ** (not IQ, GPA, Self-Esteem, Test Scores, etc.) which best predicts academic, career, family, and personal success.

One’s **RQ** functions as a psychosocial vaccine against the stressful effects of change, transitions, loss, failure, trauma and other adverse life experiences. High **RQ** Individuals are less susceptible to mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, unfulfilled potential, and relationship problems. Resilient individuals are also better able to “bounce back” from adversity; they recover, adjust, adapt and then continue forward navigating through life in a positive, fulfilling direction.

Most importantly, one’s degree of personal resilience is not fixed or innate. Our **RQ** can be continually nurtured, taught, enhanced and strengthened or, conversely, it can also be systematically diminished. So, how then do we go about nurturing and developing resilience in children? The research evidence now indicates there to be four primary *‘building blocks’* for developing the **RQ** of children/adolescents:

1) *Availability of positive, supportive and nurturing social ecosystems (family, school & community).*

All living organisms require a supportive, nutrient-rich ecosystem for healthy growth. When plants, fish, or wildlife fail to thrive we find the solution in increasing the needed nutrients or eliminating the toxins in their ecosystem. The same holds true for humans! Best outcomes occur when all three primary childhood ecosystems are positive and highly supportive: the family, classroom/school, and the community.

2) *Developing essential social-emotional competencies.*

Research evidence indicates social-emotional competence to be highly associated with both social and academic development. One’s Resilience Quotient (**RQ**) appears to predict future life success up to 70% better than one’s Intelligence Quotient (**IQ**).

3) *Growth Mindset fostering communication patterns in adult/child relationships.*

People understand their personal abilities and success potential from either a ‘Fixed Mindset’ or a ‘Growth Mindset’ perspective. The Fixed Mindset perspective assumes one possesses a fixed, innate and finite degree of ability, talent, or intelligence which, in turn, determines or limits one’s potential for success. The ‘Growth Mindset’ perspective, on the other hand, assumes one is always capable of improvement and growth through effort and hard work. Such an optimistic perspective has even been identified as a better predictor of college success than entrance exam scores (SAT, ACT, etc.).

4) *Experiences that foster a Positive Self-Identity.*

Developing a child’s **RQ** requires providing ample opportunities to experience the five components of a positive self-identity:

a) **Connection** with peers and adults, b) **Personal Autonomy** via control/responsibility for one’s own life choices, c) **Respectful-Egalitarian** relationships, d) opportunities to make **Meaningful Contributions** to others and, e) developing **Competence in an area of Personal Interest**.

[NOTE: Problematic behaviors increase when opportunities for these five needs are blocked or unavailable.]

'RQ' Development: A Few Practical Strategies

1. **Creating a Positive, Supportive & Nurturing Family Ecosystem**

- **Establish family rituals and traditions.** Actively foster a sense of “us-ness” and belonging. For example, have formal dinner nights in the dining room w/ best china, a weekly family activity (movie night, game night, walks, etc.), or special holiday/birthday traditions, etc.
- **Family Storytelling/Oral History:** Create a family album or scrapbook including such items as: photos and documents of each generation, stories told by older generations regarding their younger lives or experiences, and remembrances of events and ancestors. This becomes an ever evolving record of “who we are” as a family.
- **Dates with Mom/Dad:** Regularly schedule a “date” with each of your children. This is alone time (mom & son, father & son, mother & daughter, father & daughter) to do something that is of special interest to that child (e.g. tickets to concert, sport event, play, museum, etc.). Or, just have an evening out for a coffee, ice cream or dinner together.

2. **Developing Social-Emotional Competence**

- **Participate in events or activities of other cultures** to learn and respect the similarities and differences among people (e.g. different religions, cultural festivals, music events, etc.).
- **Practice self-calming skills together.** For examples, at bedtime together practice **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** via progressively tense various muscle groups –clench muscles of toes, legs, stomach, hands, shoulder, etc. for 10-15 seconds each then relax (repeat each 3X). Or, practice **Conscious Breathing** by breathing gently for 5-10 breaths focusing on the sensations of breathing as it becomes more slow, calm, deep, and gentle.
- **Read & discuss books together,** discuss how the characters might have felt and thought.
[Examples for Teens] *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a boy soldier*, By Ishmael Beah, Sierra Leone boy’s story of being captured to be a boy soldier; *I am Najud age 10 & Divorced*, By Nujuud Ali, a Yemen girl’s struggle to resist tribal tradition of arranged child marriages; *Knots in my Yo-Yo String*, by Jerry Spinelli, a boy’s journey from childhood thru HS,
[For Elementary Age Children] *Salt in His Shoes*, by Michael Jordan, *Who was Sacaqawea*, by Judith Bloom Fraden & Dennis Brindell Franden; *Who was Albert Einstein*, by Jess Brallier.]

3. **Fostering Growth Mindsets**

- **Don’t Praise, Instead Encourage!** Rather than praising (i.e. “You are good, smart, talented”, etc.), focus instead on comments that a) Express Confidence e.g., “hang in there, I know you will work it out”); b) Identify Strengths and Contributions e.g., “thank you that helped a lot” or “I really like the way you...”; and c) Recognize Effort & Improvement e.g., “Wow, look at the progress you’ve made..” or “You’ve worked hard on that and it shows..”)
- **Write Letters of Encouragement.** From time to time, write a letter to each child focusing on what you’ve enjoyed, noticed, appreciated, or admired about them recently. Send it to them via postal mail.
- **Focus on the Positive, don’t criticize.** Become a “talent scout” always looking for what your child does well, has improved in or, admirable qualities. Inquire about their interest and efforts. For example, your daughter comes home with several good grades and one low grade. Comment on the work they did to get those good grades and what they enjoy about the class (AVOID, ‘That’s good but’...or “But next time...” discouraging type comments!!)

4. **Provide Opportunities for a Positive Self-Identity**

- **Family Acts of Kindness.** Together bake cookies, bread, or cupcakes, etc. and deliver them to people who feel isolated, lonely or in need such as children in hospitals, elderly in nursing homes/assisted living, group home for disabled adults, sick or elderly neighbor, or a homeless shelter.
- **Random Personal Acts of Kindness.** At dinner time, parents and children might share stories of times today or this week when each “stopped to help” someone in distress or need.
- **Family Meetings.** Invite children to contribute to problem solving discussions as to how to resolve or improve an issue in the family or to plan an event, trip, vacation, etc. Be sure all are heard and listened to respectfully, then, mutually decide on a solution to try.

Suggested Further Resources on Resilience:

- **Resilience and the Internationally Mobile Family: Navigating changes and transitions**, by William G. Nicoll & Peggy Pelonis, (2019), Archway Publishing.
- **How Children Succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character**, by Paul Tough (2012), Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt.
- **Mindset: The new psychology of success**, by Carol Dweck (2006). Ballantine Books.
- **Social-Emotional Learning Activities for Parents & Teachers** by William Nicoll & Monica Nicoll (2020), A free downloadable packet available at: www.resiliencecounselingcenter.com/publications.html

For further information on promoting Resilience in the home, school or community contact:
Resilience Counseling & Training Center, North Conway, New Hampshire USA

Email: resiliencectc@aol.com or **Website:** www.resiliencecounselingcenter.com

