

# Five ways to build your child's resilience

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The pandemic has been an emotionally difficult time for many of us and with the gradual lifting of lockdown measures, we will be moving into uncharted territory. The only thing we know for sure over the coming months is that life will be characterised by uncertainty. This affects us as parents and is likely to be especially difficult for children; who thrive on routine, predictability and boundaries, but we can help them not only cope, but prosper during these turbulent times.

Many children have also become used to the security blanket of always having mum or dad at home with them so can be understandably anxious about the changes ahead. The key to managing all of this is in helping them develop their resilience. Here are five ways to do this:

## 1. Help them manage uncertainty



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Parents can help their children feel safe and secure during these uncertain times by helping them recognise that life is actually less certain than they think – but this is okay. In fact, it can be exciting not knowing exactly what will happen – surprises can sometimes be nice!

Remind them of times when unexpected events in their lives turned out to be great. Keep a journal with them of all uncertain things in their lives and note how they turn out. They won't all turn out to be good, but that's okay too (see the second tip). For example, maybe that time when their grandparents turned up unexpectedly, maybe they saw a friend during a walk in the park, or they found a treasured toy on sale in a charity shop. All these are examples of uncertainty and can help your child to start seeing an uncertain future as less threatening.

## 2. How to cope with set-backs



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Not all unexpected events are good of course, and building resilience is about helping children cope with disappointment and things going wrong. Encourage your kids to talk about feelings and emotions so that they can recognise and label the feelings of disappointment and frustration that are normal reactions to set-backs. Help them to name these feelings when they notice them.

Show them that set-backs are an important part of life and lead by example – talk openly about things that have gone wrong in your life and demonstrate how to bounce back.

Note their set-backs (such as a cancelled birthday party due to COVID) in a special book and look at what they can learn from them; would they do things differently in future? Or have they learned a new skill-set? Learning from set-backs is the key to raising resilient children and looking back over the list over a period of time can help them to grow from these events.

### 3. Embrace mistakes



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Resilient children are less afraid of making mistakes and more prepared to take risks – because they can cope with having got it wrong. Explain how we don't always know the answers or the right way to behave, but we can make the best choices we can – and accept if we get it wrong. This means showing them that mistakes are great ways to learn and are part of what makes us human.

In the post-lockdown world, things may change rapidly as society learns from mistakes made. Point this out and use changes and new rules as opportunities to learn that getting things wrong is sometimes unavoidable.

You could even encourage them to make mistakes. Whether that be with homework, or craft projects or creating a new dish for supper – encourage them to take risks. Show them that making mistakes helps us learn – how will they know that sprinkling in a chosen spice creates an unpleasant taste if they don't try, or that adding red to the paint won't give them the hue they were after unless they experience it for themselves?

Again lead by example and don't let them see you beating yourself up for making a mistake - remove 'I should have...' from your vocabulary and change to 'I could have...'

## 4. Empower your kids



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Resilient children are able to make age-appropriate decisions about the things that affect them. All parents want to protect their kids – it’s part of the job description, but when we try too hard to protect them from life’s bumps we can do more harm than good to their developing resilience.

When parents make choices for their child and are over-involved in their lives, children learn that they cannot trust themselves and grow up believing that others always know better. Part of being resilient is learning to become independent and to trust in our own abilities – whilst asking for help where appropriate.

If they turn out to not be happy with their choice help them accept responsibility for that so that they learn that they are largely accountable for their own happiness and achievements. You can do this by praising them for shrugging off bad choices or by helping them to live with them, for example you could say ‘maybe you wish you had chosen the other meal but yours is great because it has roast potatoes – and next time you will know to make a different choice.’

## 5. Challenge their beliefs



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Finally, resilient children develop helpful rather than unhelpful ways of thinking. Examples of unhelpful thinking styles include catastrophising (assuming the very worst will happen), black and white thinking (seeing things only as either good or bad), ignoring the positives (dismissing when good things happen and only focusing on when bad things happen), fortune-telling (assuming they know what is going to happen) and over-generalisation (assuming that because something happened once, it will always be that way).

In terms of COVID-19 this could mean a child assuming that they or their loved ones will get ill (fortune-telling), perhaps seriously (catastrophising), that life at school will be terrible with social distancing (black and white thinking), that they won't be able to see their friends (ignoring the positives of the friendships they have maintained during lockdown), or that lockdown will be back every few months (over-generalisation).

Challenge these beliefs by explaining the flaws in their thinking styles and that we all make such thinking mistakes sometimes and helping them see alternative perspectives that may be equally valid.



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These are challenging times but we can use these unusual circumstances to help our children develop the skills they will need to help them navigate the rough seas - not just now, but throughout their lives. Helping children become resilient means giving them the tools they need to cope with uncertainty and bounce back when life gets tough.