



# Helping children learn resilience

One of the most common wishes parents have is that their children will learn the coping skills necessary to take care of themselves amidst the many storms that will confront them in life. Adapting to and overcoming challenges means being resilient, and resilience is usually not something with which one is born—it must be learned. Teaching children how to process complex situations and emerge intact is a gift that parents can give to their children by helping them build resilience skills as they grow.

## Be an engaged, supportive parent.

As suggested above, it's often not inborn determination or strength that helps children deal with problems, upsets, pain or tragedy. Instead it's the presence of at least one supportive parent who is the foundation of the close relationship and helps the child understand and deal with problems. A parent who is present and engaged can easily sense a child's stress and start to instill the coping skills needed to get through troubling circumstances.

## Model resilience for them.

As appropriate, let your children observe how you deal with a challenging situation, and explain it to them in a way that enables them to grasp the basics. Watching you work your way through tough circumstances or sad events—without going to pieces—will be a very valuable part of their resilience learning process.

## Encourage them to ask for help when challenged.

If children believe that they must always be ruggedly independent and self-reliant in order to survive, they may not fully learn to think through complex problems. Instead, teach them that it's okay to ask for help, and it's actually smart to do so much of the time. When a little of your wisdom nudges them toward solving a problem, you'll see the value of encouraging your child to share their thoughts with you.

## Notice and praise their resilient behaviors.

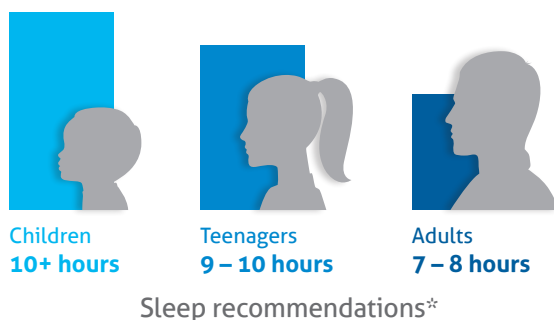
Providing some positive reinforcement when a child has succeeded (e.g., "You were so brave to get through that recital") builds confidence that they will also be able to conquer the next challenge.

## Teach them to have optimism.

When children suffer a setback, help them to see the "silver lining" in the situation. Show your understanding for the disappointment or discouragement they may express, but also help them get back to a hopeful outlook for the near future. For example, even though they may have had a spat with a friend, teach them the value of a cooling-off period, and engage in some extra fun activities with them in the interim.

## Resilience and sleep

Sleep is restorative and helps repair cells damaged by stress, fatigue and muscle strain. It also helps performance by improving concentration and memory function and supporting better stress management.



### Help them face and overcome fears.

Encourage children to face fears that may be holding them back. Let them know that you'll always be there for them when they need you. Then, even if their efforts aren't 100 percent successful, praise them for being willing to confront the unknown.

### Teach them to build on their prior experiences.

You've probably noticed that with each crisis or challenge you navigate, you develop some specific skills and strengths for dealing with the next one. (The common phrase is, "Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger.") When they're facing a new challenge, remind children of how they used certain strategies to successfully overcome a prior problem.

### Help them build problem solving skills.

Teach them the value of looking at problems from multiple angles, being flexible by experimenting with different strategies, drawing on their past experiences, breaking big problems down into manageable pieces, and looking to others for examples of successful problem resolution.

### Listen but don't jump in too soon.

Although it can be tempting to solve children's problems for them, give them an opportunity to "think out loud" and come up with solutions that are primarily their own.

### Keep them healthy.

Being able to bounce back from stress requires a healthy body and mind, particularly for children. So, it's very important to make sure they get adequate sleep, a well-balanced diet, plenty of outdoor exercise, and lots of love from you!

Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)

\* National Institutes of Health