



# Pediatric Associates

of Lewiston

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## Building Resilience in Children

Children face challenges and stress every day at home, at school, and in the community. Some children handle those challenges with ease, while others struggle to bounce back from the stress of their daily routine, social adversity, failure, or trauma. The ability to cope with, or recover from, these challenges is not an innate response; it is a skill that children must develop as they go through life. Their curiosity and bravery help them take healthy risks and they learn to trust their instincts as they learn to solve problems independently. But there are incidents in their lives that may be more than they can handle on their own. For example, a serious illness, being bullied, being neglected and/or abused, having school difficulties, losing a loved one, divorce, moving to a different neighborhood - these are all overwhelming challenges for children, and adults sometimes don't recognize the severity of that challenge until the child is exhibiting emotional and/or behavioral problems.

Children need to develop resilience to navigate through these life challenges. When they have these skills, they develop the self-confidence to face their problems and learn from them. If they can bounce back from these adversities on their own, they come to see themselves as strong and competent, which is what we want for our children.

Below are some strategies that experts agree help children build resilience to help them navigate the obstacles they encounter as they grow. It's not possible to avoid stress, but being resilient is one of the best ways to cope with it.

### **Strategies:**

***Build a strong emotional connection with your child.*** Spending individual time with your child provides a safe place, within a loving relationship, for them to develop coping skills. Individual time is important and means parents must put down their cell phones and other technologies and focus solely on the child. When children know they have the full attention and support of a parent, family member, or a teacher, they are empowered to ask for guidance and help to work through difficult situations. This positive connection between a parent and child or a teacher and child provides the context for adults to model coping and problem-solving skills for children.

***Encourage healthy risk-taking.*** Children sometimes need support to try new things such as a new sport, a school play, initiating a conversation with a peer.

***Don't be a Fixer.*** Ask questions instead. It is better to just pose questions to the child about how they might solve their problem rather than give them the answer or directive of how to do it. Help them think through the problem so they can come up with their own solution.

***Teach your child skills for solving problems.*** Do some brainstorming with your child about possible solutions to their problem. Have your child list their possible options and then review the pros and cons of each option so they can

make the best choice. You're not trying to make them into rugged, self-reliant individual; rather you teach them a process for problem-solving and let them know that they can get help to go through that process.

***Label Feelings/Emotions.*** When children are stressed or overwhelmed by a situation, it's hard for them to identify their feelings. Help your child identify their feelings about the stress so they can make sense of what they are experiencing. Let them know their feelings are valid, no matter what they are, and reassure them that the feelings will pass, as all feelings are temporary.

***Be a role model in demonstrating good coping skills.*** Teach them how to relax and calm themselves when they are stressed or frustrated by being calm and relaxed yourself. Deep breathing exercises can help them relax and enable them to remain calm as they go through the process of solving their problem.

***Don't be afraid of making mistakes.*** Mistakes can be the impetus for building resilience. If you and/or your child avoid mistakes, you tend to become highly anxious. In dealing with your child, rather than focusing on the end result (or success) promote a growth and learning mindset - give your child the message that mistakes help us learn and help make us more competent.

***Promote optimism.*** Every experience has a bright side and bringing it out helps us accept and learn from even the most painful of experiences. Resiliency is developed with optimism. Help your child by promoting an optimistic view of a difficult situation. If your child tends to be pessimistic, it's important to acknowledge the feelings that lead to pessimistic thinking and teach your child to reframe their feelings.