

Psychology Update



Resiliency In Children

Please take the short quiz below:

1. Name the 5 wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last 5 Heisman trophy winners.
3. Name the last 5 winners of the Miss America contest.
4. Name 10 people who have won a Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last 6 Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

How did you do?

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one...

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name 3 friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name 5 people who have taught you something worth while.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of 5 people you enjoy spending time with.
6. Name 6 heroes whose stories have inspired you.

Easier? The lesson?

The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money or the most rewards. They are the ones who care!

With that in mind, let me start by saying that the teachers I have encountered since working in this school system have been some of the best I've worked with in my career as a school psychologist. I've observed well-managed classes that have inspired creativity and love for learning for the students. You are to be commended!

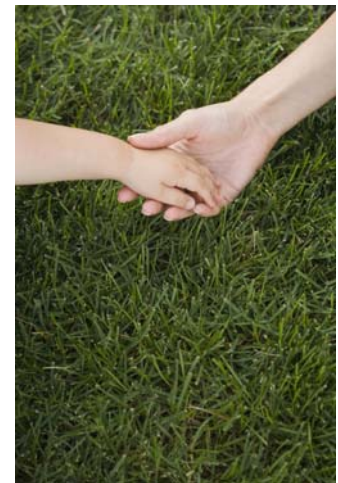
I would like to concentrate on the kids who "fall between the cracks." These are the students who are "slow learners," "low

achievers," have behavioral problems, or come from an impoverished background. These can be the *most difficult* students to work with because progress can be slow. You may think that you are not getting through - they are not *hearing* you. You would be amazed at how many DO hear, even if they don't respond! YOU may be the teacher that puts them on the right track - and down the road, they may flourish! How would you like your name to be an answer to the #1 question on the second quiz? YOU CAN BE!

**Madison County
Public Schools**

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*By believing in a child,
you help them to be-
come more resilient.*

Resiliency

I like to define resiliency as a combination of coping strategies and attitudes that allow us to bounce back and deal with difficulties in a healthy and productive way. There are many factors that affect a person's ability to be resilient, including (but not limited to):

- The ability to problem-solve
- Adaptability
- Social skills
- A belief system
- Trust
- Tolerance
- Confidence in oneself
- Taking responsibility for oneself
- Self control

No one person encompasses all of these qualities; however, the more qualities a person possess, the more resilient he or she is likely to be.

There have been cases of people who have endured life's difficulties (such as traumatic events, being labeled a "bad seed," low socioeconomic status, or child abuse) and have emerged a stronger person. How did they do it? In the literature, students who have overcome adversity to be successful in life have a combination of many factors. ONE COMMON factor they all possessed is that they had someone who believed in their abilities.

As a society, we have developed an "At-Risk Mentality." What do I mean by this? Well, we are a society that is looking for a "quick fix." We are looking for things that are wrong, and looking for ways to fix them. We look for students' weaknesses and try to remediate or intervene. Don't misunderstand - there are students who need remediation and intervention to be successful. We should not discontinue this practice, but for "at-risk" students, meaning those who are not disabled, I encourage you to try a new approach. Sometimes, students become accustomed to low expectations and failure. When teachers expect more and believe in a student's abilities, we may see improvement!

A New Way to Look At Things...

OK, so now we know about the "At-Risk Mentality." Let's change our thinking to the "Challenge Mentality" (phrase taken from Wolin and Wolin, 1993, *The Resilient Self*). The At-Risk Model claims that children are helpless and are victims of their circumstances. The Challenge Model credits youth with the power to help *themselves*. This model views adults as partners in helping the child overcome adversity and becoming a better person because of their struggles.

Have your students play an active role in setting rules for classroom life. Rule-making is a way for children to practice morality. Discussing rules invites them to weigh consequences and reflect on concepts like fairness and the reasons for the rules.

Have the students participate in meetings to solve classroom problems. Difficulties arise in every classroom over such issues as being first at something, violating another child's "space," or taking someone else's belongings. When teachers use classroom meetings to solve these problems, rather than relying on their own authority, they build initiative in children. Calling a meeting conveys the message, "In this classroom, we don't regard problems as stumbling blocks or evidence that something bad is happening. We have the power to solve our own problems." Classroom meetings give children the opportunities to practice the skills of exchanging ideas and listening to one another.

How Do I Accomplish This?

Try reframing mistakes. Rather than simply pointing out what is incorrect, have the student challenge themselves to do things differently next time. Ask: What was difficult about that task? What was good about what you did? What would you do differently next time? Motivate the student to act on his or her own behalf.

Turn your classroom into a "learning community." When classrooms are organized as communities, rather than authority-based hierarchies, a group spirit emerges. Have students discuss what behaviors they need to exhibit in order to succeed in school (i.e.; complete homework, participate in discussions, etc.). Hold the students responsible for these behaviors.

Website of the Month:

Project Resilience—This website teaches a strengths-based approach to education, treatment and prevention.

<http://projectresilience.com/index.htm>