



If at First You Don't Succeed, Try Resilience

EAP Article Series

It took Thomas Edison more than 50,000 experiments to perfect the alkaline battery. As Edison once said when discussing another project: “I have not failed 10,000 times. I have successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work.”

Thankfully, Edison was resilient. Otherwise, we might be living in a world without batteries.

As Edison progressed through each experiment, he gained insight into what did and did not work. His insights allowed him to solve the problems that arose, and avoid others which may have turned into potential pitfalls.

Edison's resiliency served him well. Each of us can apply this trait to our everyday lives. We all face adversity on a daily basis: problems with our kids; a flat tire; a meeting that runs too long. Sometimes the problems we face can be as traumatic as the end of a relationship or the death of a loved one. It's important to remember that you can manage your responses to difficult circumstances. One of the ways in which to regulate your reactions is to incorporate resiliency skills.

Experts believe that each of us can develop resiliency skills. Maybe you don't see yourself this way, but consider for a minute some of the challenges you've overcome. Perhaps you've weathered a divorce, a financial setback or a difficult childhood.

Ask yourself what specific qualities, skills and talents you've used to make it this far. Chances are the qualities that come to mind are similar to ones from the list below. If not, you may want to think about how adopting some of these traits can make you a more resilient person.

Self-Care – It's vital you take time for basic, fundamental care for yourself each day.

Relationships – Make positive connections with other people. Communicating with family, friends or members of your congregation can help you feel valuable, understood and help you recognize attitudes, behaviors and feelings in others and yourself.

Interdependence – Surround yourself with positive people; you don't have to go through life on your own.

Optimism – Expect that things will get better (they will). This can help you bounce back.

Spirituality – Prayer, mind and body exercise or meditation can help keep your thoughts on the here and now.

Creativity – Channel your energy into a creative pursuit; this helps you refocus.

Competence – Concentrate on the areas where you shine; this reminds you of your value.

This isn't to imply that, by learning a few key words, resiliency comes easy. Becoming a more resilient person is a continuous process, closely related to your overall growth and development.

So how do you become a more resilient person? There's no secret formula, and what works for one person may not work for another. But here are few tips that may help:

Positive – See life as dynamic and full of opportunities.

Adaptable – Be open to different solutions when you're faced with uncertainty.

Solution Oriented – Develop structure to help manage the unknown.

Proactive – Look ahead and anticipate change.

Focused – Determine where you want to go and stick to that goal.

In the end, resiliency is about learning how to use our strengths to live our lives. Or, as the distinguished researcher on human survival, Julius Segal, said, "In a remarkable number of cases, those who have suffered and prevail find that after their ordeal they begin to operate at a higher level than ever before. The terrible experiences of our lives, despite the pain they bring, may become our redemption."

Undoubtedly, everyone will face difficulties, but with some resiliency, each of us can manage and overcome these challenges.

Skills for Life

You may not be able to imagine it, but someday your children will be on their own. Hopefully, when they move out, they'll take with them the confidence, security and common sense you've taught them.

This preparedness for the world doesn't just happen by chance – very little in parenting does. It takes a concerted effort to equip your children with the resiliency skills they need to survive and succeed.

Al Siebert, Ph.D., an expert on resiliency, says parents should teach and model habits that enable resilient behavior: "Survivor qualities and a survivor spirit develop out of everyday habits," Siebert said.

It is these habits parents should teach and model, but where do you begin?

Start with Yourself – Provide a nurturing, non-threatening home environment, but don't smother your children. Let them fail, even when you want to rescue them. By allowing failure, you have given yourself the opportunity to teach your kids to handle it with grace. This also is a chance to teach them how to avoid making the same mistake twice. Remind them of past obstacles that they have successfully overcome, and how to use those experiences to solve new dilemmas. Your confidence in their abilities teaches them to believe in themselves – and not be afraid to try.

Commit Yourself – Keep an optimistic outlook. Your children will notice and follow suit. Look for the positive aspects of circumstances and point them out.

Keep a Basic Routine – Children find comfort in knowing what to expect. Incorporate healthy daily care into this routine: bathing, brushing teeth, reading books. As they get older, this will teach them to maintain their own schedule. Structure gives children a sense of self-control, which is a key factor in resilient behavior. However, be careful not to go overboard. Flexibility teaches children that change is inevitable, and accepting change is a healthy approach.

Recognize the Importance of Fun – Occasionally letting loose teaches your children not to take life too seriously. Having fun promotes creativity and strengthens family bonds. Developing a sense of humor and learning to laugh are resiliency skills that will prove useful for a lifetime.

Resources: "Resiliency in Action," Nan Henderson MSW (1999), "Now, Discover Your Strengths," Marcus Buckingham and Don Clifton (2001), "The Survivor Personality," Al Siebert, Ph.D.

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