

**Building Resilience: Giving Kids Roots & Wings**, Ken Ginsburg,  
Nov. 7, 2013

Rethink what kind of parent you want to be to make your child thrive. How do we define success?

**Character**  
**Resilience**  
**Discipline**  
**Self Confidence**  
**Productive**  
**Healthy**

When we think about raising our children, we really should be thinking about what we need to do to produce a successful **35-year-old**. If you think of parenting as ending at the age of 18, you'll over-emphasize making your kids happy, i.e., give them a cookie when they're 3, give them a bike when they're 7, give them a new car when they're 16 (which you shouldn't!) We need to ask ourselves what does happiness look like in adulthood – it looks like **contentment**. If you're thinking about what college bumper sticker you'll have on your car when your child is 18, you'll be shortchanging that 35-year-old. Will your 35-year-old feel like he matters, will he be engaged in *tikkun olam* (Hebrew for "repairing the world), will he have **grit??** I believe grit will be the trait most associated with success in the next 10 years. Will you teach your child that life is a sprint, or a marathon, where he or she will be allowed to stumble and get back up and still succeed? That child will need to be creative, have collaborative skills, be able to take criticism, and to be resilient. If we get stuck in thinking that play (for younger kids) or downtime (for older kids) is time wasted, and we program our kids every moment, we undermine their ability to develop creativity, collaboration, and resilience.

What does getting into a top college really mean? It will get a person his or her first job. But what will get them that second job? That will require a recommendation saying that this person is creative, a quick study, a team player, etc. That second employer isn't going to care what the ACT score or GPA was. Things are changing so quickly in our world that the ability to learn on the job is probably the most important quality a person can have.

**Resilience** is really a mindset; it's how we respond to the stressors in our lives. When we are stressed, we have to stop to think whether the stress is a "real tiger" or a "paper tiger." If a kid is taking a physics test and is feeling stressed about it, he or she will mentally and physically be running and that makes it harder to think clearly.

Being resilient does not mean being invulnerable. Kids need to experience feeling a range of emotions, including sadness and even depression, to grow into healthy, compassionate, resilient adults. *All the research says that kids need at*

*least one parent who loves them unconditionally and holds them to the highest expectations in order to develop resilience.* By unconditional, I mean, the child knows the parent is not going anywhere and will love them just for being who they are.

As parents, when our children reach their teen years, we tend to start having “high-yield” conversations with them – where it’s all about what they’re **producing**, i.e., good grades, becoming president of the school chess club, doing a two-week stint in Costa Rica building houses, etc. But we stop knowing who our children are when we become solely interested in how they will look on paper. We need to break this cycle.

### **The American Academy of Pediatrics 7 Crucial C's of Resilience (developed by Dr. Ginsburg)**

All children have abilities and strengths that can help them cope with everyday life. As parents, you can develop your children's resilience by paying attention to those strengths and building on them. But what are the ingredients of resilience? There are 7 essential components, all interrelated, called the 7 Crucial Cs.

**Competence** - the ability to handle situations effectively.

**Confidence** - the solid belief in one's own abilities.

**Connection** - close ties to family, friends, school, and community give children a sense of security and values that prevent them from seeking destructive alternatives to love and attention.

**Character** - a fundamental sense of right and wrong that helps children make wise choices, contribute to the world, and become stable adults.

**Contribution** - when children realize that the world is a better place because they are in it, they will take actions and make choices that improve the world. They will also develop a sense of purpose to carry them through future challenges.

**Coping** - children who learn to cope effectively with stress are better prepared to overcome life's challenges.

**Control** - when children realize that they can control their decisions and actions, they're more likely to know that they have what it takes to bounce back.

As parents we may think the goal is to have children who are independent, but what we really want are children who are **interdependent**. We must honor their independence, but in a way that allows them to come back to us. To do this, it's necessary to remove the “control buttons” gradually.

We know from research that PLAY is the only thing that really works to develop children's confidence, and really all the crucial C qualities, yet we've taken play away from our kids. All species of animals play to learn. As parents, we should strive to help our children “prune” their activities and interests, letting go of those activities they don't enjoy and succeed at, and embracing the ones they feel passionate about. This is how they'll discover their careers and their hobbies. Not by being good at *everything*, but by discovering the thing they are good at

that they LOVE to do.

During childhood, parents prepare a warm, cozy nest for their kids. But as puberty kicks in, the biological clock toward when they must leave the nest kicks in and the nest becomes increasingly prickly. The secret is not to keep them so tied in that they'll never want to return once they leave, but to make it so the nest will be the place they'll want to return to for visits. Parents need to remind themselves that adolescence is a developmental stage, not a permanent state.

When we listen to our kids, we have to learn to turn off our "parent alarm," the one that has you responding with the worst case scenario in response to what our kids tell us. It's our job to be the sounding board for them, to be the Lighthouse that allows them to go out into the stormy waters because we are there reflecting the light for them to see.

Perfectionism is a big problem in communities like Deerfield. Perfectionists don't like themselves, they fall apart when criticized they fear the B+. These kids grow up to be terrible in the workplace. The problem is that we don't measure the failures that are needed before we get to success. But childhood is truly the time when it's safe to experience failure and to learn to recover by trying again and again. We must stop raising kids to think they have to be good at everything instead of teaching them that they can get help from others in areas where they aren't necessarily strong. Successful people are good at some things – not all things.

We need to notice what we're praising. It sometimes looks like a person doesn't matter unless he or she has a lot of **things**. We make heroes out of sports stars, but not the mom who stays home to care for a parent with Alzheimer's.

How does one build a high achiever? Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset*, shows how rewarding kids for intellect instead of effort can deaden their motivation to achieve.

With adolescents, so much of good parenting involves the balancing act between giving kids roots and wings. The most important thing is not consistency, but rather flexibility in parenting, because every situation is different and should be considered separately. Parents must develop effective monitoring skills – it's not so much what you ask, but what you know; i.e., we must learn how to behave with our kids so they will disclose information. We have to be the Lighthouse on the shore; kids want to know that someone is looking out for their safety. Never forget to have your kids check-in with you when they come in at night, and be that parent who smells their breath. Give your kids a code word or phrase they can use with you to express when they are feeling unsafe and need your help. It could save their life.

### **Learning to Build a High Achiever**

-Letting young people make mistakes

- Praise effort rather than results
- Building spikes –Celebrate unevenness
- Not all Perfectionists are perfect
- Is not that I don't care...I care too much

### **Competence and Confidence**

- Learning not to undermine competence
- Talking in a way young people understand
- Recognizing the cognitive development of adolescence
- No more Lectures!
- Lessons are learned by mistakes

When it comes to parental involvement in teens' lives, the rules are that if it involves an issue of safety, parents must be involved; if the situation is on the cusp of being potentially dangerous, if parents communicate with the child that they're involved because of concern for safety, the child will listen; if it's just about the child's personal life, parents must learn to stay out.

Parents are like the edges of a jigsaw puzzle – they're the boundaries. And they're like the picture on the front of the puzzle box – the role models.

When it comes to stress and coping, it's important to learn to distinguish between what's a paper tiger and what's a real tiger. We need to know when something bad is temporary and when something good is permanent. Are we engaging in coping with a problem or stressor, or are we disengaging via substance abuse? It helps to make a problem manageable by breaking it down into smaller parts by using lists, timetables, etc.

When looking at the glass that's half empty/half full, the response we want our kids to have is either a) the glass is half full, but there's enough water in it for me, or b) the glass is half full, but I know where the faucet is.

### **Stress Management**

Exercise is key to stress management. For managing emotions, I recommend mini-vacations, like taking a walk, doing a hobby, or best of all, reading a book for pleasure. I highly recommend John Ratey's book, *Spark*, about how exercise

relates to brain function, especially for kids with ADD. Feeling stress is not the worst thing, however, feeling NUMB is worse. When we get over-stressed, we tend to build a lead box around our feelings, until eventually our feelings explode. We need to learn to think about the stress in our lives by breaking them down into manageable parts and then approach each issue one piece at a time. We can use exercise, helping others, and our hobbies as release valves for the stress in our lives.

When resilience reaches its limits in our kids, you might see:

- physical symptoms
- fatigue
- disinterest
- a drop in grades
- sad moods
- irritability
- anger
- substance abuse

Remember that depression in teens does not necessarily look like depression in adults. Seek professional help if you have concerns.

When parent tolerance reaches its limits:

- fall back in love with your child
- take a “vacation” with your child
- Catch your child in the act of being good
- Hold your child to the highest expectations
- Remember to honor your spouse or partner

*The greatest gift you can give your child is taking care of yourself.* If you are a happy, successful adult, you will model that positive example for your child. If you are so child-focused, your child will question why he or she would want to grow up into an adult whose only role is driving carpool....Our generation is hurting, and our roles are very complicated: if a man is not the primary breadwinner, he feels diminished; if he is, he may feel he's sacrificing being a good father; if a woman works, she feels she's not a good enough mother; if a woman stays home, she feels she's not modeling proper female achievement. We end up sacrificing all our free time to our kids, but then we aren't showing them what a successful adult really should be.

More in-depth information at [FosteringResilience.com](http://FosteringResilience.com)

Ginsburg Books:

Letting Go with Love and Confidence

Building Resilience in Children and Teens