



Building Resilience in Children with Special Needs



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Overview

- What is resilience?
 - Challenges for children with special needs
 - Common traps for children & carers
 - Learning more about feelings
 - Learning healthy coping skills
 - Learning effective social skills
 - Fostering healthy families
 - Helpful resources
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What is Resilience?

Emotional resilience refers to the ability to manage and cope with day to day stresses as well as major life events (Sanders & Turner, 2005)

- One of the most important tasks of parenthood is helping children learn to deal with their feelings (Sanders & Turner, 2005)
 - Developmental readiness
 - Assists with preventing more serious problems in later life
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Challenges for Children with Special Needs

- Comprehension difficulties
- Non verbal or complex communication difficulties
- Therapy & medical interventions
- Orthopaedic surgery
- Fatigue, pain, sleep problems
- Learning difficulties
- Bullying or social stressors





What is Anxiety?

- We can all feel anxious when faced with difficult situations
 - Anxious children worry a lot about something they fear or dread, and can sometimes be out of proportion
 - They try to avoid the things that they fear
 - Anxiety becomes a problem when it stops us from enjoying normal day to day experiences
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What is Depression?

- We can all feel sad or depressed when faced with difficult situations, depression is when these feelings are frequent, profound and significantly impacting on day to day life
 - Children may be downhearted and sad or agitated, overactive & aggressive
 - Children lose interest or pleasure in activities that they would usually find enjoyable
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Common Traps for Children & Parents

- Avoiding situations
 - Becoming aggressive
 - Remaining passive or withdrawing
 - Paying too much attention to emotional behaviours
 - No consequences for undesirable behaviours
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Learning More about Feelings

- Expressing feelings
 - Words, signs, AAC, PECS
 - Understanding link between
 - Events - thoughts - feelings - behaviours
 - Body clues
 - Breathing, headache, heart racing, dry mouth
 - Common thinking mistakes
 - Something bad is going to happen
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Learning Healthy Coping Skills

- Problem solving
 - Helpful thinking
 - Doing something soothing & relaxing
 - Doing something fun & distracting
 - Gentle exposure
 - Support from others
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Problem Solving

- Define problem (what is the problem & why?)
- Brainstorm solutions
- Pick a solution
- Put into action
- Review
- Revisit solutions?





Helpful Thinking

- Unhelpful vs helpful thinking
 - “No one will want to talk to me”
 - “Everyone else can do it but I can’t”
 - Understanding self talk
 - “I can do some things well”
 - Challenging unhelpful talk
 - “Are you sure this is going to happen?”
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Relaxation

- Doing something soothing & relaxing
 - Build into routine
 - Find something that works for you
 - Examples : Breathing, exercise, visualisation
 - Learning how to cool off & calm down
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Fun Activities & Distraction

- Doing something fun & distracting
 - Schedule pleasant leisure & recreation activities
 - Sport, music, drama, poetry, writing, art
 - Learn to distract yourself and take your mind off a stressor
 - Using imagination, counting, alphabet, making lists
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Gentle Exposure

- Facing stress or fear to overcome avoidance
- Having a plan to approach a stressor in small steps
- Some discomfort is inevitable, children must experience some stress or anxiety in order to cope and overcome it

For example:

- Swimming
 - Plasters
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Support from Others

- As children get older their support networks grow
- Accepting assistance
- Asking for help
- Talking to others
- Helping others





Learning Effective Social Skills

- Learning specific social skills
 - Social cooperation
 - Developing supportive relationships
 - Becoming assertive
 - Coping with teasing & bullying
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Fostering Healthy Families

- Discuss personal strengths & weaknesses
 - Stay open and honest to encourage self acceptance
 - Express positive and negative feelings
 - Praise and encourage brave, courageous behaviours
 - Encourage independence
 - Model and teach healthy coping skills
 - Use discipline for undesirable behaviours
 - Monitor overprotective behaviours
 - Allow opportunities to experience mistakes, loss, failure, disappointment
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Resources

- Children's Hospital Westmead:
 - [Factsheets on pain, surgery, anxiety, depression](#)
- Friends Program & Cool Kids Program
- Triple P Program
- Raising Children Network
- Children's books
 - [Nicholas Nigel Norris](#)

