

Emotional Resilience and ADHD

This is extracted from the Presentation given by Associate Professor John Wong Chee Meng, Head and Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Dept of Psychological Medicine, National University Hospital, at the ACE Award 2012 event on 15 Sep 2012.

Resilience and the "Resilient Mindset"

- **Strengths** in helping overcome adversity
- **Capacity** to deal successfully with the obstacles in life while maintaining a straight and true path towards our goals.
- **Resilient Mindset** increases the probability when children facing a host of adversity in their lives, can persevere and experience future life successfully and with satisfaction
- View the world in an **optimistic and hopeful way**; feel special and appreciated in the eyes of significant others;
- Learn to set **realistic goals and expectations** for themselves
- Believe they have the **ability to solve problems** and make decisions.
- **View mistakes, hardships, and obstacles as challenges** to confront, rather than as stressors to avoid.
- Rely on growth fostering coping strategies, awareness of own weaknesses and vulnerabilities, also **recognize own strengths and talents**.
- **Empathic** and possess the skills to develop satisfying **interpersonal skills**. Seek out assistance and nurturance in a comfortable manner.
- Define the aspects of their lives they have control over and to **focus their energy** and attention on these rather than on factors over which they have little, if any influence.

There is clear evidence that parents, teachers exert a significant, positive impact in helping their children develop a resilient mindset that impact both their children's current functioning, and ultimately their future success and happiness.

5 Strategies enabling children with ADHD become more Resilient

1. Practice Empathy
2. Teach Responsibility
3. Develop Decision Making & Problem Solving skills
4. Giving Encouragement & Positive Feedback
5. Dealing with mistakes

1. Teach Empathy, by Practicing Empathy

If our children are to communicate effectively and develop satisfying interpersonal relationships, it is essential that we help them to develop empathy. .

Empathy ~ the ability to put oneself inside the shoes of another person and to see the world through that person's eyes.

Emotional Intelligence ~ Dr. Daniel Goleman

- an essential interpersonal skill, operating in all relationships, it is far more difficult to achieve than most of us realize.
- especially true when we are upset, angry, or disappointed with another person.

When we are Empathic

- We not only ask ourselves what we hope to accomplish when we say or do things, but as importantly, we consider the following question, "Are we saying or doing things in a way that our child will be most responsive to hearing us?"
- We listen closely to what they have to say;
- We validate their statements; and when we say and do things in a way in which they will be most responsive to learning from us.
- We avoid preaching, lecturing or offering comments that our children may take to be judgmental and accusatory.

2. Teach Responsibility by Encouraging Contributions

- To develop a feeling of accomplishment and pride, we must provide them with opportunities for assuming responsibilities, roles that strengthen their belief that they are making a contribution to their home, school, or community.
- Help them to feel that they are making a positive difference.
- Reinforce their motivation and self-esteem as they witness concrete examples of their achievements.

3. Teach Decision-Making and Problem-Solving Skills ~ Reinforce Self-Discipline

- Sense of mastery, the belief that one possesses some control over one's life.
- To acquire this attitude of ownership, children require experiences from which they can learn and apply decision-making and problem-solving skills. We can encourage them to articulate problem areas; to think of possible solutions; to consider what solution might work best; and to attempt that solution and to assess the results.
- Involve children in discussions of how best to solve particular problems, e.g issues with friends; when and in what order to do their homework; ways to solve problems with a sibling; or asking them to do research on a particular project.

- Use of problem solving skills is an important process of discipline with the goal of promoting self-discipline. Children with ADHD have limited use of self-discipline or self-control.
- To obtain the input of children in the development of rules and consequences that affect their lives at home and at school (children are often more likely to remember and follow rules and develop self-control when they are involved, within reason, in participating in the creation of these rules and consequences).
- Empower children by reinforcing a sense of ownership, commitment, accountability, and self-discipline.

4. Offer Encouragement and Positive Feedback

- Resilience is nurtured when we convey realistic appreciation to children and help them to feel they are very special and important to us.
- Role models and motivating adults in their lives, from whom children gather strength and inspirations. Spending special time alone with our children, writing them a brief note of love or appreciation or hugging them are examples of this strategy.

5. Help Children Deal with Mistakes

We, all make mistakes.... !

- The fear of making mistakes and looking foolish is one of the major hindrances to developing high self-esteem and resilience.
- Children with ADHD can be vulnerable to feelings of defeat and are likely to retreat from tasks that may lead to failure. We must help our children realize that mistakes are an important ingredient in the process of learning.
- Responding to children's mistakes by showing them the correct way to solve a problem
- Avoid saying such demeaning comments such as, "*Do you have any brains?*" or "*You never do anything right!*"
- At the very beginning of the school year before teachers have taught any lessons or given any work, they can introduce the topic of mistakes in the learning process.
- In the discussion teachers can share memories of their own anxieties about making mistakes when they were students and involve the class in a discussion about the best ways to ensure students do not worry about making a mistake.
- Placing the issue about the fear of making mistakes out in the open typically serves to lessen its potency, thereby increasing opportunities for learning.