

Resilience factors within the individual child

INFANCY

- Werner (1990) "Resilient infants tend to have predictable temperamental characteristics which elicit positive responses from other people"
- Are active, affectionate, cuddly, good-natured, responsive, easy to deal with and have a capacity for self-expression
- Have experienced a secure attachment and learned to trust in its availability
- Have a supportive family member
- Have a pronounced sense of autonomy and social orientation
- Are described as alert, cheerful, responsive, self-confident and independent
- Are advanced in communication, mobility and self-help skills
- Are more advanced in social play than vulnerable toddlers
- Have developed a coping pattern that combines autonomy with an ability to ask for support when needed
- These characteristics are also predictive of resilience in later years.

PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

- Have well-developed communication and problem solving skills which the child is able to put to good use
- Are sociable but also independent

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

- Are well liked by peers and adults
- Are reflective rather than impulsive in thinking style
- Feel they can influence their environments positively
- Are able to use flexible coping strategies, including humour
- Are adept at recruiting surrogate parents, even if not blood relatives
- Resilient *boys* are emotionally expressive, socially perceptive and nurturant
- Resilient *girls* are autonomous and independent
- Resilient *children* display flexible coping strategies which promote mastery over adversity rather than reactions in a rigidly sex-stereotyped manner
- Overall, *girls* are generally more resilient to stress and trauma than boys.

ADOLESCENCE

- Are more responsible and achievement oriented
- Prefer structure in their lives and have internalised a positive set of values
- Have a more positive self-concept
- Are more appreciative, gentle, nurturing and socially perceptive than their more vulnerable peers
- Are characterised by pronounced social maturity and a stronger sense of responsibility
- Have belief in their own capacity to control their fate
- By pre-school stage were healthily autonomous with an ability to enlist support
- Have repeated successful experiences of overcoming stressful situations (often with support of others)
- Have a sense of self-efficacy and confidence
- Can select what they need from their environment and make good use of it
- Change or restructure a situation
- Are optimistic and hopeful.

WITHIN THE FAMILY

- An opportunity to establish a close bond with at least one person who has provided stable care and adequate and appropriate attention (secure base) in the first year of life
- Affectionate ties with alternative care givers, e.g. grandparents, who may support parents and provide the child with alternative nurturing
- Involvement in sibling care giving, either as the giver or the recipient, which can be a major preventative factor for vulnerable children. (The availability of some supplementary support from an adult is crucial determinant of whether older siblings will help or hinder younger ones).

WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD

- Resilient girls are reared in households combining:
 - An absence of over-protection
 - An emphasis on risk-taking
 - Reliable emotional support
- Resilient boys are reared in households combining:
 - Greater structure
 - Rules
 - Parental supervision
 - The availability of a male as healthy role model
 - Encouragement for emotional expression

FAITH

- A belief in a broader value system can help the child to persist in problem solving or in surviving a set of challenging life circumstances. A sense of 'coherence' in their experiences gives the child a feeling of rootedness; the conviction that life has meaning and an optimistic focus.

FRIENDS

- The capacity to make and sustain friendships is protective, a source of comfort and support.

SCHOOL

- Even if not gifted, resilient children can put their abilities to good use. School is often an effective refuge for children under stress or those who have experienced abuse. Teachers can shape both academic attainment and positive self-concept and esteem.

FOR GIRLS

- The nurturing and fostering of responsibility builds strength and resilience.

FOR BOYS

- Structure and control helps them to develop an 'internal locus of control' which fosters social and intellectual development.

SUMMARY

- Rutter (1985) identifies three key factors associated with resilience:
 - A sense of self-esteem and confidence
 - A belief in own self-efficacy and ability to deal with change and adaptation
 - A repertoire of social problem-solving approaches

RESILIENCE FACTORS IN THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

- The nature and strength of the attachment relationships available to an individual child are clearly identified as being of key significance in promoting resilience. Factors include (Reder & Lucey, 1995):
 - Parents' feelings towards the child – the greater the warmth and pleasure in the relationship the more the child is protected against adversity.
 - Parents demonstrated concern or interest in the well-being of the child, this builds the self-esteem and confidence of the child and links with the positive interaction cycle (Parent initiates positive interactions with the child which leads to positive responses from the child which leads parents interacting positively with the child, etc., etc.. This increases self-worth and self-esteem).
 - Parents capacity to empathise with the child's perspective on experiences, in other words to connect imaginatively with the child's age-appropriate way of experiencing events.
 - The parents' ability to view the child as a person in his/her own right.
 - Their ability to respect the child's needs and give them primacy over their own wishes/needs.
 - The parents' ability to anticipate the child's needs, e.g. for protection/comfort in distress for example, support in strange situations.

Vulnerability

DEFINITION OF VULNERABILITY

- Vulnerability can be defined as those innate characteristics of the child, or those imposed by their family circle and wider community which might threaten or challenge healthy development.

KEY FACTORS

- Factors that might render a child vulnerable to abuse and neglect and/or to not weathering ordinary adversities and veering off a healthy developmental path can be separated into:
 - Some intrinsic characteristics in the child which might render them more vulnerable
 - Those vulnerabilities exposed by parents' views or expectations of the child

BABIES AND INFANTS

- Intrinsic characteristics of the child:
 - The child who is born too soon – in particular the child who is premature
 - The child who is born with developmental difficulties, in particular various sorts of disabilities
 - The child who is arrhythmic, i.e. the child who cannot be helped to settle into any predictable rhythm or routine
 - The child who cries and cannot be comforted
 - The child who cannot sleep or disturbs the parent frequently, waking during the night in particular
 - The child with an unusual temperament – especially the child who will not accept being held
 - The child who is between 6 and 18 months is especially vulnerable to effects of separations because they have 'selected' or identified their primary carers and therefore experience their loss in a pervasive sense.
- Those vulnerabilities imposed by parents' views or expectations of the child:
 - The child who is born of the 'wrong' sex, i.e. where the sex of the child disappoints parental expectations and hopes
 - The child who resembles a hated partner or spouse

PRE-SCHOOL STAGE

- Intrinsic characteristics of the child:
 - The child is likely to take on some sense of responsibility and personal connection with negative life events, particularly if they are separated at this time. They are more likely to attribute blame to themselves and this will render them more vulnerable to the effects of future separations and may threaten their confidence in their 'secure base'
 - The fact that the child at this stage will be challenging authority figures through healthy autonomous behaviour, may render them at risk of physical or emotional abuse
 - The child who feels unsafe to explore and insecure in their attachment may cling or follow the carer in an irritating manner, provoking abuse
 - If the issues of autonomy and independence are not well managed at this stage, they may well re-emerge in a salient way in adolescence. However, this then provides an opportunity for re-working these issues in a healthier manner
- Those vulnerabilities imposed by parents' views or expectations of the child:
 - The child at this stage of development should be exploring his/her environment – therefore if they are either under-protected or over-protected at this stage, their development may suffer
 - The lack of healthy boundaries

SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

- Intrinsic characteristics of the child:
 - The child who is subject to developmental delay and the child who needs special help at this stage, especially to enter school, may be particularly vulnerable. Therefore the child who is sensitised to separations may not manage this milestone well
 - The child who is aggressive or who has persistent behaviour problems
 - The child who makes no demands for their emotional needs to be met, i.e. is passive and unresponsive, as they do not enlist adult support
 - The child who is slow or unable to learn, who has particular learning difficulties which are not identified
 - The child who is struggling intellectually at school, as this has particular knock-on effects in terms of their social and emotional development as well as their intellectual functioning
- Those vulnerabilities imposed by parents' views or expectations of the child:
 - The child who is isolated as part of a closed family system
 - The child who is scapegoated, in particular the child who is the focus of negative responses and initiatives from parents amongst siblings who are more clearly valued.
 - The child who is different in any way. For example, in particular the child who may be identifiably different in racial terms within a predominantly white society, particularly those children who are of mixed parentage

ADOLESCENCE

- Intrinsic characteristics of the child:
 - The young person who has learned no planning or problem-solving skills may well be vulnerable as they are unable to protect themselves or ask for adult support in a healthy manner
 - The young person with established behaviour problems which have not been addressed and/or patterns of disturbed behaviour, especially conduct disorder in boys. These children have often already encountered difficulties in nursery settings as well as in primary and secondary school as their behaviour sets them apart from their peers. They are more likely:
 - To have trouble in making and keeping friends
 - To find it hard to develop a pattern of learning
 - To gravitate towards other children or young people in trouble partly as a reflection of their view of themselves, as well as attraction to the excitement this peer group offer
 - To be more vulnerable to disruptions in schooling which is a setting invaluable for providing resilience in late adolescence and in the transition to adulthood
 - The young person with poor self-esteem or sense of self-efficacy
 - The young person who is part of an under-achieving or anti-authority group with limited choice of other peers
- Those vulnerabilities imposed by parents' views or expectations of the child:
 - The young person who is disapproved of or blamed for family problems: the scapegoat may believe there is no point in trying as they cannot affect any improvement in their circumstances
 - The young person who is pressed to take on too many family responsibilities, in particular the 'parental' child
 - The child who has no support for their developing independence
 - The child who is not nourished in terms of their questions and confusions about their sexual identity and orientation
 - The young person who has no continuity of confiding relationships at a stage of development when the 'secure base' is particularly necessary once more
 - The young person who is frequently separated from important people, their attachment figures, their peer connections, and their school links, with no support in addressing these moves and changes, and no help in making sense of the continuity and coherence of their own story

Source

Daniel, B., Wassell, S., & Gilligan, R. (1999) Child Development in Child Care and Protection Workers. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Disturbed Social Development

Look at the three children (see handout) and answer the following questions:

- Which children show signs of disturbed behaviour?
- What do you think might be the cause of the disturbed behaviour?
- Which children do you think will have problems in later life, and why?

Child One

John is four years old. He is very lively, talkative and playful. His parents say he is 'cheeky' and encourage this. Whenever adults are around he tries to gain their attention; he often interrupts adult conversations and whines if he can't get his own way. His parents usually give in to him to keep the peace.

Child Two

Jenny is seven years old. Her mother claims she is uncontrollable. At school she is first class student and doesn't demonstrate any disturbed behaviour. She fights with her ten year old sister frequently, who says she is very moody. She often has tantrums and can spend several hours in solemn silence if she doesn't get what she want. She wets the bed at least once a week.

Child Three

James is five years old. He is an only child and is very quiet. He can play alone for hours. He plays in silence, but his parents shrug their shoulders and say 'that's James for you'. His parents rarely play with him and they live on an estate where the only other children are teenagers. James has just started school and says he hates it. Getting him out of the house in the mornings is traumatic.

Bowlby Statement

"What is believed to be essential for mental health is that an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute – one person who steadily 'mothers' him) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment."

- Study this statement carefully and identify the key components.
- It may be helpful to break the quote down into its constituent phrases, and look carefully at words used.
- Where there is ambiguity consider the range of possible meanings.
- What questions do you think research might help to answer in order to clarify any confusion?