

# Strategies for Helping Your Child to Develop Resilience

*(Some Strategies for Being a Slightly Better Parent)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Children who successfully learn the skills and attitudes for coping with life's ups and downs are more likely to have higher levels of wellbeing and achieve well at school. They are also more likely to go on to have more successful and stable lives as young adults.

## Resilience

Being resilient means coping with setbacks, disappointments and challenges in one's life and 'bouncing back' to a state of emotional wellbeing. Children who can think and behave in a resilient manner are less likely, when older, to engage in harmful alternatives to coping, such as substance abuse, self-harm, or anti-social behaviour. They have a lower likelihood of becoming depressed and a higher likelihood of having more satisfying lives and greater emotional wellbeing. Resilient families can model, assist with or directly teach the following skills and characteristics of resilience to their children:

- Optimistic thinking skills (*i.e. focusing on hope, gratitude & the positive aspects of a situation*)
- Helpful thinking skills (*i.e. the kind of thinking skills that reflect how the world really is and that can help to calm them down and de-stress*)
- Using humour in a positive way
- The skills needed to achieve personal goals (*e.g. goal setting, effort and practice, persistence, problem solving and being resourceful*)
- Frustration tolerance (*i.e. being able to tolerate not getting what they want straight away*)
- Effective social skills (*e.g. negotiating, having an interesting conversation, cooperating, managing disagreements*)
- Evidence-based self knowledge about their ability strengths and their character strengths
- Pro-social values (*e.g. respect, friendliness, kindness, acceptance of differences in others*)
- Emotional literacy skills (*e.g. understanding and managing feelings, developing empathy towards others*)
- Skills for facing fear and acting courageously in the face of challenges and difficulties

The characteristics and skills which lead children to be able to 'bounce back' after adversity and disappointment are similar in some ways to those that are typical of children with healthy self-esteem as opposed to just 'feel good' self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem reflects a positive (but also realistic) appraisal by a child of his/her positive social behaviours, the extent to which they try to live according to a set of pro-social values, the quality of their positive relationships, the challenges they have mastered, the obstacles they have overcome and the goals they have achieved

On the other hand 'unhealthy' or 'feel good' self-esteem is a perception that some children might have of themselves which is often inflated or based more on what they 'have' or 'think they will be able to do' than on their own values, actions and achievements. It can develop as a result of being told over and over by their parents that everything they do is wonderful and they can achieve anything at all that they set their minds to. No-one is great at everything they try

to do and children can only make realistic choices about which goals to focus on when they have some potential or pre-requisite skills to build on.

Developing healthy self-esteem and resilience is not about protecting children from negative feelings and outcomes and convincing them that anything and everything they do is praiseworthy just so they will 'feel good'. This kind of approach is meaningless and ultimately discouraging. It can lead many children to have an exaggerated view of themselves that diminishes quickly when life's inevitable disappointments occur. If young people are convinced that they are special and 'entitled' and should always 'feel good' then they often feel resentful or helpless when they experience disappointments in life. Trying to shield young people from feelings of sadness, frustration, and anxiety when they lose, fail or make mistakes can deprive them of the opportunity to learn from such experiences and can diminish their motivation to persist in difficult tasks until they succeed. Feeling angry, sad or anxious can be a useful catalyst for change in academic, personal and social behaviour. It is sometimes necessary to fail, feel bad and to try again repeatedly until success occurs or to re-think the goals they aspire to. It is success in the face of these difficulties that can genuinely make your children feel good about themselves.

## **SOME PARENTING STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING RESILIENCE**

### ***Try to avoid the 'happiness trap'***

Don't over-focus your parenting on trying to ensure that your children to feel happy all the time. Sometimes your children won't like you very much when you act responsibly and set boundaries for their behaviour or don't agree to their requests. Sometimes they will feel angry with you or push you away and this is a normal part of their development. All parents want their children to like them but sometimes it is more important to focus on your parental goal of helping your child to develop well.

Don't give only positive feedback for everything your child does. Children also need constructive negative feedback about their efforts from time to time. Give negative feedback on their behaviour not their personality or character e.g: *I was a bit disappointed with the effort you put into that project* rather than *'You were pretty lazy about your project'*

Try not to solve your children's problems for them. It isn't helpful for a parent to become overly anxious or to intervene when their child doesn't complete a project, has an argument with friends, or faces other small personal challenges that are a normal part of a child's developing life. Let your child take ownership of his/her own problems and intervene only when a problem seems serious or too complex (*eg if they were being bullied*). This gives them the message that you believe that they are capable of handling the problem themselves with a little support from you. You can still help with your child's difficult or upsetting situation through providing guidance and support rather than direct action e.g.:

- You can debrief: *What would you do differently next time?"*
- You can use consequential questioning: *What do you think will happen if you don't finish it?*
- You can be empathic: *I'm sorry this has happened and that it has been so upsetting for you*
- You can be optimistic: *Things will improve and I'm sure that you can come up with some good ideas for dealing with this*

### ***Look for opportunities for your child to develop independence***

Let your child develop reasonable independence and take reasonable risks and the consequences of their actions. Avoid being unnecessarily overprotective. If you wrap your children up in cottonwool they won't be able to grow emotionally, become independent and feel confident about dealing with life and its challenges. Instead of restricting them or encouraging them to avoid an age-appropriate but challenging situation, consider teaching them how to avoid putting themselves into unnecessarily risky situations in the first place and how they might handle the situation if something did threaten them or cause them a problem. Let them take the consequences of their own decisions and actions in most situations. For example if they leave their sunhat at home, don't take it up to school for them. It won't be the 'end of the world' if they have to play in a designated shaded area for one day and they are more likely to remember to take it next time. Don't do things for your child that they are capable of doing for themselves (*eg phone calls to ask a classmate for a play-date; preparing breakfast, carrying their school-bag or hanging it up when they get to school*). Offer choices (where feasible) to provide your child with opportunities to learn to live with the consequences of their choices. This communicates to them that they are *capable* of making a choice.

**Continue to set clear and specific boundaries and communicate directly**

Although they may not like the boundaries you set or the requests you deny, they need to find ways to negotiate with you about them or just accept them. Children need boundaries to define their world and when they don't get them they feel insecure. Identify the non-negotiable standards you believe in and establish firm limits around them (e.g. *no use of drugs; no mistreatment of other people; no aggression*). Encourage your child to respect your right to parent responsibly by using direct instructions rather than hinting or asking for their cooperation e.g: 'I want you to have your shower within the next five minutes' is much more effective than 'Don't you think its time to have your shower?'. However, sometimes even the best efforts of parents will be met with resistance. Here are some suggestions about firm responses that can help to discourage unnecessary conflict over boundaries and encourage your child to respect your responsible parenting (even though it may take them a while to get there!)

Everybody else is allowed to...	<i>You're not everybody. You're somebody special to us.</i>
I wish you were like Emma's mother	<i>I'm not Emma's mother. I can only be myself, and I want you to be yourself too.</i>
You don't understand!	<i>We understand that we love you and want you to be safe.</i>
But why can't I have it. We can afford it	<i>We can afford it but we don't need it.</i>
You're treating me like a child!	<i>No, I am treating you like a person your age.</i>
You don't trust me.	<i>I know that things can be unsafe out there and that you don't yet have the experience to deal with that</i>
You won't ever listen to my side.	<i>I have listened to your side and I understand how you feel/your point of view.</i>
You never let me do anything!	<i>I love you and there are many things that are safe and healthy that I will continue to let you do.</i>

**Help your child to accept that life can be worrying, difficult, disappointing and sad at times and that this is normal**

Don't unnecessarily protect your child from experiencing some everyday frustrations or difficulties. Avoid offering 'quick fixes' or 'feel good' options when things get tough or they are feeling unhappy or sad. Let them sit with the bad feelings, knowing that you care that they are hurting, but that it is something they have to deal with, not escape from. Don't automatically intervene and try to fight all of their battles for them. Focus on talking with them about how they might solve or deal with the situation or problem. They need to experience and cope with some difficult times so they can learn how to 'bounce back'.

**Help your child to build self knowledge and a sense of competence**

Psychologist and author Dr. Martin Seligman believes that raising young people is vastly more than just trying to 'fix what's wrong with them'. It is about identifying and nurturing their strongest qualities and helping them to best use those strengths. Give your child specific evidence-based positive feedback that enables them to slowly get some idea of their particular strengths eg:

- *I was very impressed by the way you kept on trying to make that pop-up birthday card for your grandma, even though it took a long time before it worked properly. You don't give up easily. You keep going till you get it right*
- *'You really showed what a caring person you can be when you helped your sister to fix her bike. Thank you'.*
- *'You showed how brave you are when you and your friends spoke up to support Sam when he was being bullied and I was proud of you'*

Encourage your child to do likewise i.e. find some evidence for their conclusions about what they are good at (*i.e. their ability strengths*) and about the best parts of their 'character'. Seligman argues that successful people know what their signature strengths are (*i.e. the top three character strengths and the top three ability strengths that identify them*). They then find opportunities to further develop these strengths and find a 'place' to use them well. They work on their limitations as much as they can but often find a way around them or seek pathways that allow them focus more on what they are good at and not so much on their limitations.

### **Encourage your child to develop hobbies or sporting involvements**

Psychologist Dr Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has developed the concept of 'psychological flow'. This is a positive outcome that occurs when you are immersed in an activity that offers you a challenge, requires some skill and fully absorbs your attention in a positive way. Athletes refer to this as 'being in the zone'. Time passes quickly, pain and worries are temporarily forgotten and there is a sense of satisfaction at the end of the process. Hobbies or sporting involvements can provide many young people with the opportunity to achieve psychological flow. When they feel worried or distressed, it can be helpful to have this 'positive space' to temporarily retreat to so that they can re-energise and feel more able to cope with what is distressing them. This has been termed 'adaptive distancing'.

### **Encourage your child to look for opportunities to be kind and generous and/or be of service to others or the community**

Many studies have also found that people who are kind and generous towards other people, who volunteer to help others in need, or who contribute to the wellbeing of the community, tend to enjoy a high sense of wellbeing and become more resilient. It is not entirely clear why this happens but theorists have argued that helping others:-

- gives us a sense of meaning and purpose and a 'positive identity'
- fully engages us and takes our mind off some of our own concerns
- helps us to keep some of their own problems in perspective

Young people can contribute service to others in many ways such as:-

- Coaching
- Working with people in need
- Spending time with a lonely relative or friend
- Raising money for worthy causes
- Working for the development of the community

Children are more likely to show a sense of compassion and participate in community service if their parents model doing so.

### **Model and encourage optimistic thinking, positive tracking and the expression of gratitude towards others**

Show your child how to 'track' and comment on the good things more than the bad things in their day-to-day life. Remind them that bad times are mostly short-lived and only temporary. When they cannot predict an outcome or know what is true, encourage them to take the positive hopeful view rather than the pessimistic one. Model and encourage expressing gratitude to those who love, help and support them. If you have younger children try asking them (just before they go to sleep) to describe 2 good things about their day.

### **Model, teach and reinforce pro-social values**

Stress pro-social values whenever you find an opportunity. These are values that foster positive, harmonious and compassionate relationships between people. They underpin personal and social responsibility. The most significant pro-social values are: *honesty, fairness, support and concern for others, cooperation, acceptance of differences, respect and friendliness*. A belief in these values helps them to identify more meaning to life. Acting on these pro-social values increases their sense of being a decent, successful and honourable person and helps develop positive healthy self-esteem. These values act as a 'moral map' that helps young people to make good decisions. Encourage your children not to mistreat others and to show respect to everyone and try to understand people rather than judge them. Communicate a strong message about the importance of respecting teachers.

### **Teach and model good social skills**

Help your children to learn social skills and deal well with conflict. Teach and model the skill of 'respectful disagreeing'. This skill involves finding points of agreement before stating disagreement (eg '*You're right, the movie you want to see did get a good review but, on the other hand, the other one is a comedy and I think we need a good laugh*'). This can be described as a 'good news/bad news' tactic.

If siblings are fighting, get them to listen to each other's feelings and point of view and then insist on negotiation in which both parties gain some of what they want. Try not to act as referee where it isn't necessary. Stress that putdowns are unacceptable. Encourage them to recognise that there are always multiple perspectives on any situation and they should try and see all of them. There are many good ways to resolve a disagreement. Some effective strategies include:

- Listening to and trying to understand the other person's viewpoint
- Acknowledging the points they make that are valid
- Being assertive. This means using a firm but not aggressive 'I statement' such as '*I want you to leave the things on my shelf alone*' [to a younger brother] and then repeating it.
- Negotiating (ie finding a way in which everyone can get *some* of what they want)
- Agreeing to disagree

Don't get too caught up in debates about 'fairness. Try using this sentence: '*Over time we try to be as fair as we can but fair doesn't always mean 'the same*'.

### **Encourage them to develop a strong and diversified social network**

Young people who have a good network of people to spend time with and talk to can cope more readily when things are difficult for them. A social network, especially one that includes one or two close friendships, can provide them with an opportunity to spend time enjoying themselves and temporarily put worries aside, experience a sense of belonging, discuss important moral issues and get a 'reality check' on how they are seeing things. Encourage them to have a diverse social network in which they interact with and learn about many people, not just people who are similar to them. Discourage the belief that only certain 'cool' or very popular classmates are worth being friends with.

At the same time help them to understand that everyone has periods of time in their life when their social life isn't as good as they would like it to be or they don't have a close friend. It isn't the end of the world if sometimes you don't have a close friend. With effort and patience the situation can be improved. Help them also to understand that being socially rebuffed at times is a common experience that most children have and they will need to be persistent in reaching out and trying to get to know others and form friendships

### **Teach them how to become confident**

Confidence has been described as 'optimism in action'. Children are more likely to act confidently under the following conditions:

- When they use *positive 'self-talk'* and draw on their previous positive and successful experiences
- When they have been taught the skills of *optimistic thinking* and are prepared to '*have a go*'. They believe that there is a good chance that things will go well for them. They also understand that if things *don't* go as well as they would like, it might be disappointing but it won't be the end of the world. They can try again
- They understand the importance of *learning and practising the necessary skills* for whatever actions they wish to take or goals they wish to pursue
- They have learnt the importance of *effort, persistence and problem-solving* and have had opportunities to practise using these skills
- They have a realistic perception of their *strengths and capabilities*
- They are *not discouraged by mistakes* and can see them as normal situations that occur a lot when you are trying to learn something new or take on something challenging

### **Emphasise the importance of self-respect**

Self-respect is an attitude towards oneself that both reflects and contributes to resilience. It is characterised by having a sense of dignity, setting high standards for your own behaviour and believing that you matter and should be treated respectfully by others. Self-respect is demonstrated by a preparedness to behave well and to protect and look after oneself and one's reputation. Children who have self-respect also treat others with respect.

### **Encourage initiative**

Provide lots of opportunities for your child to take on tasks and challenges that they initiate themselves (eg *organising or making something*). Only give help when asked. Make positive comments when they deal well with the inevitable setbacks & obstacles that are always part of taking initiative. Talk to your child about the kinds of initiative you took as a child and how it has helped you.

### **Model and teach goal setting and goal achievement**

Help your child to set realistic goals and to make plans to achieve them. Don't forget to stress the part about hard work! Celebrate with them their successful achievement of their goal and talk to them about what they did to they achieve it. Help them to develop the habit of persistence. Emphasise that success always requires not giving up when the going gets tough or boring. Frame their mistakes and failures as useful learning experiences and obstacles as problems to be solved. Talk to your child about the goals you have successfully achieved and about times when you persisted even though you were tempted to give up.

### **Develop an attitude of courage in your child**

Talk about courage as being prepared to *face* fear, not as the absence of fear. Let them know that different people are frightened of different things. Give positive feedback when your child shows courage. Encourage thoughtful risk taking but make sure they have thought through potential consequences and are prepared for possibilities. Talk to your child about your own fears and how you have dealt with them.

### **Help your child become more able to manage strong emotions**

Feeling strong emotions is a normal part of life. Emotions can motivate us to find solutions and try to deal with situations. When children experience strong feelings such as anger, disappointment, rejection and sadness they are practising this process of handling their feelings and using them to try to make a situation better. If you help them to understand and manage their feelings rather than trying to 'fix' things for them, they will grow stronger.

Here are five steps to follow:

- Take notice when your child is feeling sad, worried, angry or upset
- See this as an opportunity for closeness and teaching
- Name their feeling and let them know you understand
- Help them to find a solution to the problem that is making them feel this way, but within reasonable limits
- Take an optimistic approach to the chances of their solving the problem successfully or coping with their feelings well.

Below is an example of these steps in action.

**Parent:** How was school today?

**Child:** Horrible. Jodie was sick and she won't be back till Friday and I had nobody to hang around with. All the other girls ignored me.

**Parent:** You must have felt quite lonely.

**Child:** I don't want to go back to school till Jodie comes back

**Parent:** Well I can understand why you feel that way because it isn't nice to feel all by yourself and left out. But you can't stay home from school just because Jodie's away. Can you think of ways to help yourself feel a bit less lonely tomorrow?

**Child:** (A bit later) Perhaps I could go to the library at lunchtime tomorrow or ask Sarah if I can play with her. She's always kind to people

**Parent:** Sounds like a good idea. Things will seem better in the morning.

### **Encourage Self Discipline**

Comment positively on behaviour that shows self-control, willpower, and self-discipline eg attending netball practice when they don't feel like it or doing homework when there is something they would rather watch on TV.

### **Teach and model 'helpful thinking' whenever the opportunity arises**

Teach your child to use 'helpful' thinking eg:-

- To look for supportive evidence instead of jumping to conclusions
- To avoid over-generalising from a single situation or event (*e.g. I once fell over playing soccer so I'm not going to play soccer again*)
- To not exaggerate or assume that the worst possible outcome will happen. This is called 'catastrophising'
- To get more information, test things out or get a 'reality check' by talking to others.

Discourage them from becoming obsessive about a worry or something that has upset them i.e thinking about it all the time. It's helpful to think about a worry in order to find possible solutions but not to obsess about it emotionally and in a non-productive way. Teach them to stay busy and use the strategy of 'thought stopping'. This involves recognising when they are over-thinking and over-worrying about something (*eg not winning a role in the school musical production*) and then turning off that 'thought channel' and switching to another, more pleasant 'thought channel' (*eg recalling in detail a recent happy enjoyable holiday experience*)

### **Continually work on building a resilient family environment**

A resilient family has many of the following characteristics:-

- They communicate with each other in a warm and open manner and don't keep secrets and resentments going. They quickly find ways to 'build a bridge' back to each other.
- They share time together and enjoy each other's company
- They show affection for each other in a range of ways and affirm and support each other
- They accept differences in family members and hence accept each other.
- They are committed to the family and show loyalty and dedication. They view the wellbeing of the family unit as a high priority
- They respond well to changes and deal with things by talking and supporting rather than blaming or attacking.
- They use humour as a sharing and coping tool

Have regular family meetings (eg weekly) to discuss issues related to the household and family and invite your children to put items on the agenda. In this way they begin to understand that members of a family or community have a responsibility to work together to negotiate solutions to problems rather than just act on self-interest.

Cope with family challenges by pulling together as a family. Every family faces challenges. Resilient parents model resilient behaviour for their children when things temporarily 'go wrong' in their family (*as they usually do at some point in every family*). They try to pull together, behave calmly, avoid blaming each other, take a positive approach and problem solve. Resilient parenting involves:-

- Effective and calm communication with each other and with your child
- Looking after your 'couple relationship' too
- Working together and supporting each other rather than dividing, becoming angry with each other and pulling against each other
- Not using coercive or harsh punishments with children nor 'words that wound or scar'
- Staying optimistic and having a positive attitude towards the challenges and setbacks of family life

## **WHAT IS BULLYING?**

Bullying is when a student (or group) with more power at the time repeatedly and intentionally uses negative words and/or actions against another student that cause distress and create a risk to their wellbeing. Bullying can be physical, verbal, emotional or social and can be carried out in person, through technology or by indirect means.

### ***The five key features of bullying behaviour are:***

- A specific student is the target of negative behaviour
- The targeted student is distressed by what is happening
- The behaviour is deliberate and intended to cause distress
- The negative behaviour is repeated
- There is an imbalance of power (*eg in terms of size, age, number of people involved, social power*)

### ***What Bullying Is NOT***

Some negative social behaviours are not examples of bullying even though they are undesirable and may in some cases warrant low level teacher intervention and management. There are three socially unpleasant situations that are often confused with bullying:

#### ***Mutual conflict***

In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are equally and genuinely upset and want a resolution to the problem. However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way.

#### ***Social rejection or non-preference***

Students in schools that focus on wellbeing as well as achievement are encouraged to include others. Learning how to handle their (often temporary) social non-preferences is also an important part of their development and children (especially younger ones) often behave in ways that suggest that they still haven't yet developed the skills of doing this respectfully and in a non-hurtful way. However such behaviour isn't bullying unless it involves ***deliberate*** and ***ongoing*** attempts to:

- cause distress to another child by making nasty comments
- encouraging others to exclude or dislike him/her
- cause damage to their social reputation

#### ***Single-episode acts of nastiness or meanness, or random acts of aggression or intimidation***

Single episodes of nastiness, name-calling or physical or verbal aggression are unpleasant behaviours that may in some cases require teacher management, but they are not the same as bullying.

## **PARENTS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF BULLYING AT SCHOOL**

Bullying happens in every school and parent-school partnerships are an essential component of maintaining a safe school with a positive and pro-social culture. Here are some of the positive actions that parents can take.

### ***Show parental disapproval for bullying***

Students are less likely to continue to take part in bullying when their strongly and explicitly disapprove of bullying. Let your children know how much you disapprove of bullying and why. Stress that you want them to try to include other children and as much as they can and handle any social non-preference in ways that respect the rights and feelings of others and don't cause hurt and distress. Help them to develop empathy by reminding them of 'Golden Rule' i.e. treat others as you would like to be treated in that situation



### ***Don't let other children suffer***

Some bullying can be very covert & subtle and not easily identified by teachers. Let the school know if you become aware of possible bullying situations that involve children in other families.

### ***Continually encourage your child to act in accordance with the pro-social values of respect, kindness, friendliness and acceptance of differences***

Work towards teaching your child to behave in ways that genuinely demonstrate personal and social responsibility. Children who claim to believe in these pro-social values whilst acting otherwise can develop an unhealthy and sometimes arrogant view of themselves which does not reflect reality. Encourage them to ask themselves *'am I doing or saying anything to another child that I wouldn't like someone to say or do to me?'* Encourage your child to show respect to everyone and try to understand others rather than judge them. Remind them to see the positive side of other students rather than express contempt and superiority. Emphasise trying to see things from another's point of view and stress the right of all people to be safe and free from cruel treatment. Remind them that if they wouldn't say something to another person in public they shouldn't communicate it through technology. Look for signs that your child might need some more intensive encouragement to practise these pro-social values. Some of these signs might be:

- They show contempt for another child in the way they speak about him/her
- They seem to enjoy repeating stories of another child's misfortune or embarrassment
- They quickly move in to 'excluding' another child when there is a disagreement
- They take part in being unkind to others then justify their behaviour by blaming the child who is being mistreated (eg they might say *'it's their own fault because they....'*). Dispute this kind of thinking with them

### ***Discuss ways to resist negative peer pressure***

Peer pressure can be a positive force (*eg when a peer group aims for high achievement in academic studies, sport or community service or shows kindness and support to a new student*) but it can also be a negative force. We know that the majority of students feel unhappy and worried when they witness or hear about bullying happening at school but approx. 20% of students will give in to peer pressure and join in if their friends are bullying another student. Discuss the effects of such negative peer pressure and encourage your children to have the courage to resist pressure to bully or act in mean or unkind ways towards another child

### ***Encourage your child to have the courage to be a supportive bystander***

Stress to your children that bullying is everyone's problem and encourage them to act courageously and support any other student who is being bullied. The social pressure of peer disapproval can often be more powerful than action by teachers.

### ***Discuss the best ways to manage conflict***

Conflict is not the same as bullying but sometimes situations that involve disagreement can evolve into bullying when one child tries to get revenge and 'prove' that they are in the right. The most constructive way to deal with conflict involves seeing disagreement as mutual, listening to the other person's view of things, stating your view of things and then trying to find a negotiated solution to the problem.

### ***Help your child to differentiate between those who genuinely care about them and those who don't***

Help your child to look for signs that help them to distinguish between other students who really care about their wellbeing and those who don't care and would be able to easily discard them or turn on them. Children require the confidence and skills to avoid others who don't treat them with respect. Talk to your child about the qualities associated with genuine caring friendships and assist them to build and maintain these friendships.

### ***WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?***

Most students cannot resolve a bullying situation by themselves once it has become established. They need support to change the situation.

***Talk openly about the situation with your child.***

Listen, understand and support rather than assume your child is contributing to the bullying situation by their own behaviour or their personal limitations. Accept your child's feelings. Let them know you understand how hurt they feel, that these feelings are normal in the circumstances and that most people would feel the way they are feeling. Make sure your child knows the situation is not their fault.

***Don't tell them to ignore what's happening.***

Usually bullying doesn't just 'go away'. It may intensify. Don't encourage them to retaliate as they will have to take the consequences if they do. Retaliation also escalates the situation.

***Work with the school to deal sensitively with the situation***

Remember that you may be acting on incomplete information or misinterpreting what is happening as bullying. Go carefully. Avoid the temptation to contact the children involved or their parents as this will usually make things worse for your child.

- As a starting point, suggest that he/she talks to a teacher they trust and feel some closeness with. Discussion with a teacher can help them to clarify whether what is happening is bullying or not and gives them a chance to identify some initial responses that could be helpful in stopping the bullying eg making firm eye contact and making a statement such as '*you are bullying me and I want you to stop doing it. I wont put up with it*'. Remind them that asking for support is not the same as dobbing. Dobbing means trying to get someone into trouble but talking to a teacher and asking for support involves asking for help when you're in trouble.
- If you think the bullying might be continuing, contact your child's teacher to check out what might be happening and discuss the most appropriate and sensitive way in which to handle the problem so that further damage to your child's social situation is minimised. Don't assume that punishment is the best action for the school to take. Research consistently shows that most students don't want those who are mistreating them to be punished except as a last resort.

***Help your child to develop 'socially protective behaviours'***

It can be helpful to work with your child to develop some socially protective behaviours but these won't put a stop to any bullying that has already started. Nonetheless such skills may help them to feel more confident. Socially protective behaviours include:

- Moving away from peers who are teasing or provoking
- Speaking up assertively (*using a calm strong voice and firm eye contact*) and telling the other person(s) and communicating that you want them to stop it and leave you alone.
- Acting in a neutral and unemotional manner if 'picked on' rather than becoming angry and emotional

However it is important to stress that the way to deal with a bullying situation isn't training the child to be NOT bullied. This is as unfair as assuming that the way to deal with being physically attacked in the street is to learn how NOT to be attacked by developing skills in martial arts. Children have the right to be safe from bullying just as everyone has the right to be free from physical attacks.

**The BOUNCE BACK! Acronym** (Copyright: *Bounce Back!* McGrath and Noble, 2003; 2011)  
You can use the acronym below to remind yourself and your children about ways to be resilient

*When things go wrong for you, or you get 'knocked down' by what happens in your life, you can decide to BOUNCE BACK! and be yourself again by remembering these basic guidelines.*

**B**ad times don't last. Things always get better. Stay optimistic

**O**ther people can help if you talk to them. Get a reality check.

**U**nhelpful thinking makes you feel more upset. Think again.

**N**obody is perfect-not you and not others.

**C**oncentrate on the positives (no matter how small) and use laughter

**E**verybody experiences sadness, changes, hurt, failure, rejection, and setbacks sometimes.  
They're a normal part of life. Try not to personalise them.

**B**lame fairly –how much of what happened was because of you, because of others and because of bad luck or circumstances?

**A**ccept the things you can't change (but try to change what you can first)

**C**atastrophising makes things worse. Don't believe the worst possible picture.

**K**eep things in perspective. It's only part of your life.

## **FOLLOW UP READING**

**McGrath, H, 2009, (8<sup>th</sup> Reprint), *Difficult Personalities*, Penguin, Melbourne**  
(*This is a book with a predominantly adult focus that helps to explain behaviours such as anxiety*)

**McGrath, H. and Francey, S. 1991, *Friendly Kids, Friendly Classrooms*, Melbourne: Longman Cheshire**  
(*Social skills focus- Probably available from your school's library but your local library can also order it for you on inter-library loan*).

**McGrath, H. and Noble, T. 2005, *Eight Ways at Once*, Pearson Education.**  
(*This book is based around Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Model and is written for teachers. However it also contains a self-report checklist to help students identify their intellectual strengths and some information for parents. It is probably available from your school's library but your local library can also order it for you on inter-library loan*).

**McGrath, H. and Noble, T. (2003, 2011:2<sup>nd</sup> edition) *BOUNCE BACK! A Wellbeing & Resilience Program*, Pearson Education, Sydney.** (*Probably available from your school's library but your local library can also order it for you on inter-library loan*).

**Noble, T. & McGrath, H. 2005, *Helping children and families 'bounce back'*, Australian Family Physician, 9, 34**  
(<http://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/search/GFDSearch.asp?itemNum=4709>)

## **Raising Children Network**

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

(*A site with lots of interesting material for parents*)