

Promoting Resilience in Middle Schoolers

Resilience is the outcome of a combination of protective factors that counterbalance significant stress or adversity:

When it's not possible to eliminate all stressors, enhancing protective factors is an effective approach.

Stress/Adversity

- School demands and frustrations
- Negative thoughts or feelings about self
- Physical and emotional changes
- Conflict with friends/peers
- Unstable or unsafe living environment
- Parental separation or divorce
- Ongoing family conflict or financial problems
- Chronic illness
- Moving or changing schools
- Taking on too many activities
- Having too high expectations



Protective Factors

- Facilitate supportive relationships
- Promote development of coping skills and opportunity to try them
- Build a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control
- Access sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions

**see handouts on Attachment and Connection and Strategies for Supporting Healthy Habits and Self-Care*

The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.



Self-Care for Caregivers



Adults who strengthen the below skills in themselves can better model healthy behaviors for their children, so it's crucial that caregivers are caring for themselves too!

Develop self-awareness:

- Consider how thoughts feelings and behaviors trigger or perpetuate stress
- Identify things that “set you off,” so you can develop a plan for coping when they happen; recognize physical changes that signal you’re becoming stressed, frustrated, etc. and employ coping strategies/plan at the first signal of stress
- Engage in positive self-talk and access gratitude, accept that “perfect” is not an attainable goal and have self-compassion
- Avoid catastrophizing or forecasting the future; existing in the present moment reduces stress

Enhance coping and problem-solving skills:

- Practice different strategies for reducing stress or coping with various emotions; if it doesn't work the first time, try again or try something else. Don't give up!
- Don't put off making decisions, as this piles on stress; use problem-solving strategies (e.g. cost/benefit analysis) to move to action. Action reduces stress and enhances sense of self-efficacy
- Access supportive relationships (friends, family, community resources, and seek professional support when needed)

Don't forget the basics! Nutrition, Rest and Movement

- Taking care of the physical improves your ability cope with stress, and is foundational for effective emotional regulation