



# Resilience

## What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability of individuals to not succumb to adverse experiences and is the typical response to adversity (Southwick Bonanno, Masten et. al, 2014; American Psychological Association, n.d). While early conceptualizations considered it an innate quality of an individual, researchers now understand it to also be a behavioral skill set that may be learned (Wright, Masten & Narayan, 2013; Konnikova, 2016). Recognizing that individuals demonstrate a range of reactions to traumatic events, tragedy and stress, researchers have tried to understand why some people succeed in the face of hardship and risks where others experience ongoing distress or illness. Researchers have sought to understand what helps resilient individuals overcome adversity in the hope that the trait may be fostered in others.

## Why the Concept of Resilience Is Important for Human Services Agencies

Human services agencies frequently work with children, families, adults and elders who have experienced extreme hardships. Understanding how to help more of them succeed despite negative experiences is a goal common to human services providers across a range of topics and populations. Trauma-informed approaches to service are intended, in part, to help agencies address the residual impacts of the negative events their clients have experienced and avoid re-traumatizing them through uninformed actions in the service context. Resilience involves skills that can be learned and qualities that can be nurtured (Ginsburg, 2014). These include building social connections, setting and achieving goals, communication, problem solving, flexibility, empathy, and impulse control. Resilient people have a good sense of themselves and their abilities and have the life skills to feel competent as individuals (Ginsburg, 2014). They often have strong connections to other people in their families, communities, or schools, as well as a solid understanding of right and wrong and a sense of integrity (Ginsburg, 2014). Agencies can benefit by developing the ability to teach these skills and recognizing opportunities to foster a positive outlook for the future that will enable those they work with to thrive.





## Relevant Interventions and Approaches

While there is relatively little research on specific programs or interventions that build resilience, professional groups tend to offer recommendations about programming that promotes protective factors. These include social connections, emotional competency, and a sense of self-efficacy and control. Skills in decision making and


planning as well as self-control are linked to healthy responses to stressful circumstances. Positive youth development programs are built on similar concepts and also may be helpful in promoting resilience.

A recent review of resilience research noted that promising approaches to building resilience “include a focus on strategically timed, culturally relevant, comprehensive programs across multiple settings, programs that are of sufficient length and depth to address the magnitude of the problem, and strive to maximize positive resources and the benefit-to-cost ratio of implementation. Additionally, because the effects of interventions might be delayed, unexpected, or indirect, it is important to consider more complex models of change and monitor outcome appropriately, over time, in multiple domains and possibly at multiple-system levels. Such comprehensive prevention approaches acknowledge the multiplicity of risks and the cumulative trauma that many children [and adults] face and emphasize the importance of promoting competence and building protection across multiple domains in order to achieve a positive outcome.” (Wright, Masten and Narayan, 2013).

## Resources for Further Learning

- [American Psychological Association, \*The Road to Resilience\*](#)  This brochure describes resilience is intended to help individuals develop their ability to overcome adversity by enhancing their own resilience.
- [American Psychological Association, \*Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers\*](#)  This guide describes how resilience is displayed at each stage of children’s development and offers suggestions for how parents and teachers can help children develop the coping skills to overcome adversity and become resilient individuals.
- [Fostering Resilience tips for professionals seeking to enhance clients’ resilience](#)  This guide, published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, describes the author’s philosophy toward building resilience and offers suggestions for how professionals who work with children can nurture resilience in their clients.
- [Positive Youth Development: More information and resources](#) 

## References

- American Psychological Association, *The Road to Resilience* (n.d.). <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> 
- Ginsburg, Kevin R. (2014). *Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings (3rd edition)*. American Academy of Pediatrics.
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- Southwick, SM, Bonanno, GA, Masten, AS, et. al (2014). Resilience definitions, theory and challenges: Interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5:25338.
- Wright, MO, Masten, AS and Narayan, AJ (2013). Resilience Process in Development: Four Waves of Research on Positive Adaptation in the Context of Adversity in S. Goldstein and R.B. Brooks (eds.) *Handbook of Resilience in Children*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media.

[Return to Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services](#)

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