



## The Resilience Cascade: The best way to promote resilience in children is to foster resilient teachers

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# The Resilience Cascade:

## The best way to promote resilience in children is to foster resilient teachers

**R**esilience has become a popular and important topic in classrooms around the world. What researcher Ann Masten dubs “ordinary magic” has the power to help all of us thrive and adapt to the ongoing challenges and unexpected hardships life throws our way.

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Much of the existing research about resilience is focused on promoting this important life skill in young children. At the same time, more and more educators and researchers are emphasizing resilience as a tool to help teachers handle stress and avoid burnout. Educators who develop and nurture their own resilience are better equipped to foster resilience in children.

The Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC) often discusses the importance of the “resilience cascade”

to highlight the point that promoting resilience in children requires us to pay close attention to our own social and emotional well-being. We use the analogy of a “pitcher” (the teacher) needing to continually pour into “cups” (the students), and emphasizing how important it is for educators to be healthy so they can better support their students. When a pitcher is full—when teachers are healthy—the cups can be filled with what they need (e.g., patience, kindness). When the pitcher is empty—when educators are unhealthy—cups do not get filled, meaning children do not receive what they need to be socially and emotionally healthy.

Research suggests resilience is necessary to teach, and particularly to teach well. A study published in the *British Educational Research Journal*<sup>1</sup> found that resilience is not just a matter of bouncing back from a difficult or traumatic experience, it also means maintaining balance and a sense of commitment to teaching.

So how can educators strengthen their own resilience?

No one is born with resilience—it is something that is learned and cultivated over time. Many techniques that work for children also can work for adults. And it is never too early (or too late) to develop social and emotional competence.

- Start by spending a few minutes each day reflecting on the areas of your life for which you are grateful. Being grateful is a powerful resilience tool, because focusing on the positive aspects of your life can lift you up when you are faced with challenges. And it doesn’t take much time! Tell a family member or friend how much you appreciate them. Thank





a colleague for going the extra mile. Tell your child or significant other how much you appreciate him/her completing a specific chore or task.

- Set limits for yourself. Recognize there is only so much you can accomplish in a given day, and accept that you sometimes will need to make small sacrifices when it comes to work, family life, and personal friendships. Setting realistic expectations for yourself can help release or reduce stress and the guilt of feeling like you always need to be "on."
- Finally, don't forget to laugh. One of the best ways children can become more resilient is by having fun, being goofy,

and letting their guards down. The same advice applies to adults (and teachers). Research shows laughter is a hidden language that strengthens personal connections. Laugh at your mistakes, even in front of your children or students.

While these techniques may be simple, the results are powerful.

Educators also can be instrumental in promoting resilience in the other adults in a child's life. As parents and caregivers seek insights into their children's behavior, teachers can talk about how to use and apply resilience techniques successfully. In this way, teachers can help grow the number of "pitchers" in a child's life and expand the resilience cascade beyond the classroom.





*Susan Damico, M.A., serves as the director of the Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC), which is celebrating its 20th anniversary of the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Program, a strength-based assessment and planning system designed to promote resilience in children, ages 4 weeks to 6 years old. DCRC's mission is to promote social and emotional development, foster resilience, and build skills for school and life success in children birth through school age, as well as to promote the resilience of the adults who care for them.*

Educational institutions play a critical role, as well. If educators and students are the pitchers and cups, respectively, then school leaders, facilities, and policies are the wells from which teachers draw their resilience. That same study published in the *British Educational Research Journal* found that long hours, poor staff congeniality, a lack of leadership support, and other professional considerations, combined with personal factors, erode teachers' resilience over time. Educators should look to their employers for opportunities to deepen their resilience wells through various support and resources.

We know that, from a very early age, resilience can be taught—and must be nurtured. Taking the time to grow resilience is essential to empowering our teachers to realize long, successful careers and foster a new generation of resilient children.

*Note:*

<sup>1</sup> Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2013). Challenges to teacher resilience: Conditions count. *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), 22-44.

## From UNICEF



“Education and Resilience: Nine priority paths for making schools safer and societies more cohesive”

This UNICEF publication explored the link between education and a community's ability to cope with disasters or conflict, identifying the following priorities for action:



1. Analyze the risk of conflict and disasters
2. Include conflict and disaster risk reduction in the education sector's planning and budgeting
3. Incorporate the Comprehensive School Safety Framework into education sector planning
4. Carry out comprehensive reform of curriculum and textbooks that is geared toward social cohesion and school safety
5. Improve all children's equitable and safe access to education
6. Monitor and evaluate progress of initiatives for reducing conflict and disaster risks
7. Strengthen coordination and networks
8. Strengthen education governance and local participation.

Read the Report: [www.unicef.org/UNICEF\\_Education-and-Resilience.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/UNICEF_Education-and-Resilience.pdf)



## Boosting Resilience Through Creativity

By Elena Aguilar

This online post explores creativity as a resource for coping with stress. “Creativity unlocks inner resources for dealing with stress, solving problems, and enjoying life. When we are creative, we are resourceful, and we problem solve in new and original ways.”

Read at [www.edutopia.org/article/boosting-resilience-through-creativity](http://www.edutopia.org/article/boosting-resilience-through-creativity)



## 7 Tips to Teach Kids/Students to be Resilient

By Dianne Maroney

We can take steps to bolster our own and students’ resilience. This article discusses how self-care, socialization, giving back, sleeping and eating properly, talking about feelings, positivity, and imagining new possibilities can boost emotional resilience.

Read at <http://bit.ly/resilience-maroney>



## Video: Building Resilience in Children

By Innovation Edge  
([www.innovationedge.org.za](http://www.innovationedge.org.za))

The future begins each time a child is born. The early life experiences of children shape and determine the architecture of their developing brains. Laying the foundations for lifelong health, learning, self-control, and relationship building allows children to thrive.

Watch at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sj2YbHxt5Vc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sj2YbHxt5Vc)

