

Family Resilience

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What is family resilience?

The ability of a family over time to adjust to stressful situations—sometimes described as “bouncing back” or “bouncing forward” – since circumstances and family adjustments may mean ending up in a place somewhat different from where you started.

Situations calling for resilience can include any events that create major challenges for families. They include situations that affect one member but then have ripple effects through the family, such as a major illness. They include circumstances that affect the whole family such as natural disasters, acts of terrorism, community violence; hate crimes and incidents of bias, or other situations that challenge family resources and functioning

What can contribute to family resilience?

- Belief systems that
 - View crises as shared family challenges to face together
 - Accept that distress by some or all family members is understandable
 - Include hope that is realistic. Examples are understanding when it is necessary to switch from rebuilding to relocating out of a flood-prone area, or from focus on medical cures to saying “good goodbyes”
 - Draw positive meaning from difficult times (such as., “we are a coping family”)
 - Avoid focus on shame, blame and guilt
 - Make use of one’s spiritual belief systems
- Functioning that preserves rituals, routines and roles to the extent possible, but with flexibility to meet the situation
 - Routines: For example, try to maintain routines for children to the extent possible, but realize that there may need to be adjustments
 - Rituals: For example, traditional food might not be available, but the family can still gather and enjoy important parts of a holiday
 - Family roles: For example, a child might need to take on more responsibilities—ones that fit the child’s developmental level and with appropriate adult guidance/supervision.
- Sharing information—in a way that is developmentally appropriate for the children
 - Limit young children’s exposure to adult conversations and media that might be distressing to them—but answer questions and address children’s concerns
 - Choose the time and place that works for you and your child
 - Ask what your child knows and what your child wants to know. Follow your child’s lead.
 - Give answers in a developmentally appropriate way
- Making good use of resources from within the family and outside (e.g. from community)
- Adults’ modeling of self-care, coping and problem-solving skills

*Based on Vogel, J. M. & the Family Systems Collaborative Group. (2017). Family Resilience and Traumatic Stress: A Guide for Mental Health Providers. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

https://www.nccstss.org/sites/default/files/resources/resilience_and_child_traumatic_stress.pdf