

Pediatrician explains how to help build resilience in children

August 26 2024, by Nerissa Bauer, MD, MPH, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics



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Life can be complicated and unpredictable. And while there is no such thing as a "perfect parent," there are strategies that can help your child

become better able to deal with difficult circumstances as they arise.

Known in the pediatric community as Adverse Childhood Experiences, traumatic circumstances like death, divorce and poverty cause children stress, which over time, can become toxic, impacting a child's health now, and potentially in the future. In fact, adults who've experienced one or more adverse experiences as a child or who are exposed to ongoing chronic social inequities over time are at higher risk of depression, cancer, [heart disease](#), diabetes and other [health conditions](#) during their lifetime.

On the other hand, safe, stable and nurturing relationships can act as a powerful, protective buffer against the biological harms of toxic stress on children and are key to building resilience. When children feel connected and supported in the early years, they are more likely to become healthy, competent and educated citizens later in life.

One of the most important ways to strengthen a child's resilience is to spark moments of connection. This may be through shared book reading, for example, or participating in family routines and community traditions. Relational health is key to combating adversity and promoting skills like collaboration, connection and communication that are essential to help [children](#) develop resilience and thrive.

After troubling events, the AAP says to remember the three Rs: reassure, return to routine and regulate:

1. Reassure. Remind your child that they are safe and loved, using words and touch and by creating safe spaces in the home.
2. Return to routine. Try to maintain regular daily routines and be sure to explain any changes in the schedule ahead of time. This can promote a sense of safety and normalcy for your child and let them know what to expect.

3. Regulate. Help your child learn "self-regulation" skills to calm themselves and manage their emotions and behaviors. This may include belly breathing, stretching or taking breaks.

Turn to your pediatrician when parenthood gets challenging.

Pediatricians are trained to not only monitor your child's physical growth, but also their social-emotional health. They can help your family build a support system— whether a child is relatively healthy, has ongoing developmental or behavioral concerns, or if your family is going through hard times.

Pediatricians also want to know how parents and household members are doing and if they feel supported. At [appointments](#), your [pediatrician](#) may invite you to share stories about your [family life](#) and the daily stresses and struggles of parenting, as well as ask about your own childhood experiences and current living circumstances. So, bring your questions and concerns.

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