

# Dr. Brooks on "Raising Resilient Children"

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In an engaging and humorous way, Dr. Brooks discussed a number of factors that foster resiliency in children. He discussed practices parents can follow to provide children with a resilient foundation. In his book Raising Resilient Children, Brooks defines resiliency as the inner strength to feel optimistic and competent in coping with life's daily struggles.

## Being Empathic:

This is the golden rule in understanding your children and bringing about resiliency. The basic foundation for any successful relationship, empathy is your attempt to appreciate and validate your child's viewpoint. It doesn't necessarily mean you agree, rather, you put yourself in their shoes and attempt to see the world from their point of view.

While many adults rate themselves high on empathy in pleasant or neutral situations, the true test of being empathic is when you are upset, angry or frustrated. Brooks recommends you make a list of all the words you believe or hope your child would use to describe you. Then ask your child "How would you describe me"? The answers and gaps will tell you a lot.

## Being a "Charismatic adult":

Loving and believing in our children so they feel special and appreciated is one of the most powerful qualities we can give. Dr. Brooks believes a resilient child has at least one adult in their life from whom they draw strength and unconditional love. This doesn't mean there is no discipline or accountability; it means we love unconditionally even when things get tough.

Dr. Brooks recommends adults explore three individuals who were charismatic in their own childhood and identify three people you may currently consider "charismatic". He also recommends keeping a "file" for each child that holds important papers, milestones and accomplishments to make them feel special. By spending less time criticizing a child and more time focusing on the beauty of who they are, a child will feel love and acceptance.

## Accepting our Children for who they are:

A child needs to feel accepted for who they are ~ not who we want them to be. All children are born with different temperaments; it is important to be aware of and accommodate these differences so appropriate goals and expectations can be set.

"Easy" children make parents feel like a star and are naturally optimistic and hopeful. They appreciate the one minute of time they get with you. Cautious, slow to warm up children may need more time and empathy. Spirited or "difficult" children have an insatiable way of believing the world is unfair and recall the one minute you picked up the phone vs. the 59 minutes you played with them. Understanding that adolescence brings on its own issues, these different temperaments must be accommodated to foster resiliency in children. (cont....)

### Reinforcing "Islands of Competency"

Self worth, hope and resiliency come from experiencing success in areas of life others deem important. Every child possesses "islands of competency" or areas of strength – and it is up to the parent to identify and reinforce these rather than focus on weaknesses. Once children have discovered their strengths and believe in themselves, they can confront areas that are problematic for them.

### Communicating Effectively:

Empathic communication will help model effective listening and word choice. How do you respond when a child spills a glass of milk? How do I say what I want to say in a way that can be heard and not resented? Do I want what I am about to say to my child, to be said to me? Is my child a stronger person because of what I said today? Monitoring and changing repetitive, negative scripts that often play out from our own issues may be necessary.

### Turning Mistakes into Opportunities:

Resilient children view mistakes as learning opportunities (e.g. the kid who strikes out endlessly and asks the coach for help). Others believe mistakes are more proof of failure; they retreat from challenges and blame others. Parents can help children develop a healthy outlook about mistakes from an early age by responding to their own mistakes with comfort and humor. Kids are very observant and need to understand that mistakes are OK; they help you learn to do it better next time.

### Developing Compassion in Children:

Providing children with opportunities to help others will teach empathy and compassion at an early age. Children inherently want to help – parents, coaches, teachers, those less fortunate because it makes them feel important.. Involving children in charitable work – walks for hunger, food drives, soup kitchens will help foster self esteem and resiliency.

### Encouragement for Discipline:

Resilient children learn how to define problems, consider options and judge what the best solution is. If you always have the answer for your child, they can't possibly become resilient. Natural and logical consequences are what you strive for; hitting, humiliating or intimidating physically with words produces angry and resentful children. Positive feedback and encouragement on areas that are going well is the best kind of discipline you can give. Maintaining the self worth and dignity of the child is paramount.

*Dr. Brooks elaborates on all these concepts in his book entitled Raising Resilient Children which can be purchased at Westwinds Bookshop. Dr. Brooks' website can be found at [www.drrobertbrooks.com](http://www.drrobertbrooks.com)*