

Resilience & Our Children

Dr. Debbie Akerman

Objectives

- New threats to children
- Understanding resilience
- Explore how to foster resilience in children

A New Threat

- National update in approach toward social media
- TikTok CEO Shou Chew testified before Congress on national security data concerns in March 2023 (CNN).
- TikTok was the most downloaded app in the US in 2021-2022

What *Is* the Threat?

- We know that social media algorithms have been shown to promote dangerous content:
- Self-harm
- Encouraging, re-enforcing, and helping to trigger eating disorders
- Predatory content

Why Measures Haven't Worked

- The New York Times reported in 2021 on a phenomenon in eating disorder content on TikTok: although searching #anorexia pulls up the phone number for the National Eating Disorders Association, related hashtags have over 70 million views.

Cyberbullying

- Not only traditional, direct bullying –
- Cyberbullies can access an account and post content that gets a child in trouble
- Or bullies can even create fake accounts in someone else's name
- Harassers need to be reported as soon as offensive behavior is apparent
- Client RJ
- An NJ private school admitted this year that it “hadn't done enough” to prevent the suicide of a seventeen-year-old student, which followed months of in-person and cyberbullying (New York Post)

Social Media & Suicide

- A 2021 study at Brigham Young University (Coyne et al, Journal of Youth and Adolescence) revealed several links: “teenage girls who spent two to three hours daily on social media at age 13 were at a higher risk for suicide as young adults”
- Studies have tied social media use to higher risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation

Teen Suicide

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescents (CDC)
- Suicide rates increased around 36% between 2000-2021
- Responsible for 48,183 deaths in 2021, or about one death every 11 minutes
- 42% of deaths in 20-24 year olds are caused by unintentional injury
- Poisonings related to certain drugs, including narcotics and hallucinogens

Copycat Suicide

- Is suicide occurring when one emulates another person's suicide or attempt – clusters of suicide occur.
- Occurs when role models can encourage suicide
- What happens when the media glorify suicide?
- Celebrities who commit suicide can also become glorified figures ripe for imitation

Teens will be teens: Peer Pressure

- Erik Erikson (1902-1994)
- Best known for theories on psychosocial development
- Coined the term “identity crisis”
- Erikson’s own experience helped shape his ideas

Body Image



- “Human Ken doll” Justin Jedlica
- He’s had over 70 medical procedures to look like an anime character
- This is an extreme, but pressures exist on the micro level, too, in terms of beauty standards and overall living standards.



Christina Ashten Gourkani, who died this year of complications during plastic surgery

What Can We Do?

- Communication
- Mastery and the importance of outlets
- Mastery is not pressure.
- Parents' attitudes are important: radical acceptance, or wholly embracing that which you cannot change, is a tool used in dialectical behavior therapy to move forward meaningfully.
- paradoxical parenting approach.
- What hill do you want to die on?
- Employ the five rule

How to Help/Prevent

- Build resilience.
- How do we build resilience in our children?
- In order to build resilience we need to first understand trauma

What is trauma?

Trauma is a normal response to an abnormal event.

According to the American Psychological Association, “Trauma is an **emotional response to a terrible event** like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.”

There are many different kinds of trauma

Daniel Goleman

The Social Work Perspective: PIE and the ENVIRONMENTAL Press

- Social work theory is built on the concept of PIE
- Person in the Environment
- Environmental Press:
- The person presses on the environment and the environment presses on the individual from birth on

Why do we need resilience?

- It's estimated that up to 90% of people will experience at least one serious traumatic event in their lifetime (Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges Steven M. Southwick, Dennis S. Charney, 2018)
- No two people respond to traumatic events the same way.
- Stress, demoralization, cynicism, depression, PTSD, addiction
- There is also the possibility of bouncing back.
- Elizabeth Lukas

Resilience Factors

- Resilient people confront fears, are realistic, seek support, have good role models.
- They rely on morality, spirituality, religion.
- They are attentive to their physical, mental, and emotional health.
- They accept responsibility for their emotional well-being.
- Ten resilience factors: **realistic optimism, facing fear, moral compass, religion and spirituality, social support, resilient role models, physical fitness, brain fitness, cognitive and emotional flexibility, meaning and purpose.**

How Resilient is Society?

- ...not very. (Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges Steven M. Southwick, Dennis S. Charney, 2018)
- In the United States, 80% of adults don't get enough exercise, more than 1/3 are obese.
- Children aren't either being set up for resilience: they spend over 7 hours per day at sedentary activities.
- 1/3 of adults have been dependent on alcohol at some point
- Screen time is out of control for children and teens, many report “no rules” around technology and over 7 hours per day
- 70% of children lack vitamin D from being outdoors
- Military leadership, in fact, is concerned about lack of resilience as a *national security threat* – reports by military commanders have titles like *Too Fat to Fight...*

Spirituality in Children

- Mr. Rogers Neighborhood
- Studies of meditation and schools
- Daniel Goleman's work with Cuddle Buddies
- The Marshmallow Test
- <https://www.nbcnews.com/video/meditation-curbs-violence-at-san-francisco-schools-378464323951>

How to Teach Optimism

- Positivity
- The Lubavitcher Rebbe inaugural address:
- *Bati L'gani* (I have come to my garden)