

Raising Resilient Children and Adolescents:

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As I age, I look at the practice of pediatrics and the changes that are occurring and the thing I am most struck by is the declining emotional well-being of our children. I often treat children and adolescents with overwhelming depression and anxiety that makes them unable to cope with their minimal day to day expectations. I want to know, what can I do or what can I teach that changes the trajectory of our children's mental health. Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg's book "Building Resilience in Children and Teens" identifies the 7 Cs: competence, confidence, connection, control, character, contribution and coping.

The simple fact is every child (and adult) faces challenges: striking out, failing a test, losing a big game or forgetting to turn in an assignment. Some children face larger difficulties an absent parent, poverty, abuse or neglect. Guiding your child to develop the skills to overcome these challenges is critical.

Over the next month or two, I will be explaining the 7 C's in more detail. This month we look at Competence and Confidence.

Competence is the feeling of being able to handle a situation effectively. Allow your child to try new age appropriate things. Let your child make mistakes (when safe) and learn from them. Give specific praise for trying new things, "it was fun watching you finger paint." Get down on your child's level and let her teach you something: how to build a castle, your colors or your ABCs. Let your child help you cook dinner or fold clothes. Ask them "what do you think you should do?" about a situation rather than telling them what to do.

Confidence is a child's belief in his own abilities. Recognize and build on your child's strengths. If your child is very artistic provide opportunities to be artistic. If your child is more athletic than academic, notice his athletic accomplishments. Make children aware that all people have strengths and weaknesses. Share your strengths and weaknesses with your child if appropriate. "Math was hard for me too, I had to work a little harder on math than my baseball swing, too." When correcting or disciplining a child, focus more on his ability to do the desired or expected behavior than the bad behavior.

Happy New Year and next month more on connection, control, character, contribution and coping.