Helping Children Cultivate Resilience During Stressful Times

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Objectives

Consider different types of stress and how they affect children

Think about resilience

Describe how a mindfulness-informed, social and emotional learning approach boosts resilience

Highlight specific research-based strategies for promoting resilience during this unusual time
Is stress a bad thing?
How Brains Develop

- Sequential, predictable development
- Develop from the bottom up
- Early experience affects architecture (through epigenetic processes)
- Use it or lose it process
HIGH performance vs. stress

- Low stress: Maximum performance
- High stress: Performance decreases
- Peak stress: Performance drops significantly
Positive Stress, Tolerable Stress and Toxic Stress/Traumatic Stress

**POSITIVE:** When young child is protected by supportive relationships with adults, they learn to cope with everyday challenges and stress.

**TOLERABLE:** When there are more serious difficulties - loss of a loved one, natural disaster, frightening injury - buffered by caring adult helping child to adapt - damaging effects are mitigated.

**TOXIC/TRAUMATIC:** Strong, frequent, prolonged adverse experiences such as extreme poverty, repeated abuse, without adult support.
RESILIENCE
How resilient will children be in the context of the current pandemic?
How can we promote resilience and self-regulation right now?

Have to recognize impact of current circumstances on us as adults.

Time for compassion.

NOT the time to revolutionize your parenting and routines.

Can look at incorporating some research-based strategies.
What is MINDUP™

• Social emotional learning program
• 15 lessons
• Integration into daily teaching practice
• Importance of brain breaks
MindUP Research

17 Schools

54 Classrooms

407 Kindergarten & Gr.1 Students in the MindUP Group

323 Kindergarten Students in the Comparison Group
Strategy 1: Understanding how our brains work

“Kids love learning about their brain and how it works. I even got some feedback from a parent that said their child has been discussing his amygdala with them.”
Understanding our brains: Resources

Young children:
- Cosmic kids (e.g., the Owl and the Guard Dog)
  - https://youtu.be/so8QN9an3t8
  - GoNoodle

 Teens:
- Many good articles online

Parents:
- https://www.multiplyingconnections.org/become-trauma-informed/amazing-teen-brain
Strategy 2: Breathing / Mindful Awareness
Mindfulness-based interventions

• Relatively recent field of research
• Couple of meta-analyses have looked across studies and domains
• Improvements in
  • Behaviour
  • Executive functioning
  • Working memory
  • Mental health
Mindful awareness: Incorporating into daily routines

- Breathing breaks
- Animal breathing
- Online apps (e.g., Headspace, Calm)
- www.mindfulnessforteens.com
Strategy 3: Practicing Gratitude
How complicated are gratitude interventions?

- Gratitude condition
- Hassles condition
- Control

How complicated are gratitude interventions?


- **Gratitude condition**
  
  “There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful about. Think back over the past day and write down on the lines below up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for.”

- **Hassles condition**
  
  “Hassles are irritants — things that annoy or bother you. They occur in various areas of life, including our family, friendships, school, health, and so on. Think back over the past day and, on the lines below, list up to five hassles that occurred in your life.”

- **Control**
  
  Completed measures only
Impact of gratitude intervention
Gratitude: Incorporating into daily routines

• Sharing gratitude at the meal table
• Gratitude journal
• Gratitude letter
• Identifying specific things that you are grateful for
• Nice bedtime routine
Summary

Current pandemic is not the time to try to introduce huge changes to routines

Small daily practices can help foster resilience

We can support children’s wellbeing by

• Learning how stress affects our bodies and how our brains work
• Supporting breathing practice
• Encouraging gratitude behaviours

All of these help us too!
Secure your own oxygen before assisting others. Because you can't give what you don't have.
For more information

• [https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/](https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/)

• For more information about our projects or to access the slides

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