

INTRODUCTION

Hi and welcome to the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's ParentWise Podcast series. I'm Robyn Cummins.

Today, social work consultant Jenny Griffiths will share her insights about why it's so important to help kids with a disability to develop their ability to 'bounce back' or become more resilient in stressful situations.

You'll also learn how you can help your child to build these skills. This is the first part of a three part podcast about resilience.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Hi, I'm Jenny Griffiths.

I'm often asked by parents how they can help their child, who has a disability, to cope more effectively in stressful situations.

In other words, how they can help their kids to be more resilient?

The term resilience is strongly connected to the ability to 'bounce back' from circumstances or situations that are particularly challenging.

It's the ability to cope with the strong emotions that we all experience at stressful times during our lives.

Resilient children are more likely to experience long term happiness, emotional wellbeing and success in life.

They are also more likely to have good social skills and empathy for others, and are less likely to use unhelpful coping strategies, such as misbehaving, avoiding or denying problems or relying on others to 'fix' their problems.

SOME OF THE ISSUES FOR CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

Your child with a disability may face many challenges in their life that make the development of resilience a powerful coping mechanism.

Some of these challenges may include:

- Comprehension difficulties
- Difficulty communicating with family, friends and other people in their life
- Constant therapy or medical interventions and surgery
- Difficulty in learning and adjusting to new situations
- Bullying
- Social isolation, and
- Tiredness, pain, or sleep problems.

Dealing with these situations can be very difficult for you as a parent too.

Sometimes you may find yourself trying to protect your child from stressful situations where you may:

- Avoid potentially challenging situations for your child, such as going to painful therapy sessions or social situations where your child may be bullied.
- Fuel your child's negative behaviours and emotions by paying too much attention to them.
- Unintentionally isolate your child from new experiences and challenges that are a normal part of growth and development.
- Give no consequences for undesirable behaviours as you may feel sorry for your child or you are too worn out to follow through on appropriate consequences.
- Or, you may withdraw from taking any action because it's 'all too hard'.

While these reactions are entirely understandable, they do not help your child develop effective ways of coping and learning how to manage stressful life events.

SOME STRATEGIES

So, how can you help?

You are a powerful role model as a parent, and by sharing your own feelings, and expressing them appropriately, your child will learn to feel more comfortable in dealing with their own reactions to stressful situations.

They'll also develop coping skills critical to resilience.

This involves helping your child to:

- Recognise, talk about and understand how they and others may feel (including positive and negative feelings)
- Express their feelings appropriately. This may involve use of signs or picture exchange communication systems to facilitate communication
- Understand the link between events, thoughts, feelings and how they behave.

For example, your child may be invited to a party and automatically think that no one will talk to them. This may lead them to feel very negative about going to the party and make them very reluctant to attend or unapproachable if they do attend.

- and finally, be more optimistic; positive thinking relates to confidence and wellbeing.

By helping your child to learn more about feelings, you will help them to understand and manage their emotions, and cope with stress rather than trying to avoid it.

CLOSE

Thanks for listening. We hope you've found these strategies and ideas useful.

You can download or listen to more episodes in the ParentWise Podcast series at the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's website - www.cpfoundation.com.au