



# Resilience Summary

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## Why Resilience?

Your child's openness to engage in manageable challenges and recover from difficult experiences are essential to developing lifelong resilience. You can begin by exposing your child to challenges that are just the right size for them, offer just enough support for them to know they can trust you, and help them recognize and feel a sense of success and empowerment when they master the experience.

**Tip** These steps are best done when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

**Tip** Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parent relationship will support these steps.

## Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Help your child notice and name their own cues so they can develop self-awareness and learn to trust their own feelings. This includes describing and naming the pride they may feel when they have gotten through a challenging situation. Pointing out the resilience that they demonstrate will help them notice it and know it is there when the next challenge arises.
- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *"What do you notice? How do you feel? How do you think the other child feels? What are you wondering?"*
  - For example, if your child is with others who are all facing a challenging situation - such as the first day in a new child care room - help your child notice their own thoughts and reactions and those of the other children. You might even name what expressions and body language you notice: *"That little girl just ran over to the block area with a big smile on her face. Her running and her smile make me think she is excited to check out the blocks in this new room. Do you think that she is excited?"*

- You can also point out how your child seems to feel at the end of the day and how that seems different than what you noticed at the beginning of the day. *“It seems like you are happy that you met some new friends and had fun playing. This is different from how you looked this morning when you were pretty uncertain about entering the room. I think you were able to get over your uncertainty and have fun today. Is that true?”*
- When reading books, look at the images of people and ask your child what they notice about the people that shows them being resilient. Ask, *“How do you think that character is feeling? Did they get through that big challenge?”*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe all of the emotions that occur when trying to be resilient or how others are feeling, consider asking questions, naming what you notice, and leaving plenty of quiet space after your questions so they have an opportunity to share their ideas too.
  - *“How did you feel when you first saw the new classroom? I noticed some children were very excited about the toys.”*
  - *“I noticed other children took more time to look around and get comfortable. Was there anything that made you feel nervous.”*
  - *“I am feeling happy to see you. How do you feel right now?”*
  - *“How do you think you will feel when we come back tomorrow?”*
  - *“Is there anything we can do to remember how resilient you were today?”*

**Tip** Grow your own resilience by creating a plan for calming down. Research shows that children cry less when their caregiver is less stressed. Secure your child’s safety, then close your eyes, and breathe deeply. Crying creates stress in adults so be sure and take breaks when you need them.

## Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Use your tone of voice and facial expression to help your child celebrate when they have gotten through a change such as a new child care arrangement, sleeping in a new place, trying a new food, and so on.
- Read and “pretend play” together.
  - During reading time, select a book of faces to help your child learn to identify the different feelings of other children. Point out what you notice and how you can tell what each child is feeling. Do the children’s feelings change based on experiences they are having in the book? Be sure to point out moments when children successfully overcome difficulties.
  - After reading a story together, act out what feelings look like together. *“First she looked sad (make a sad face) and then she got help and looked happier (make a happy face).”*
- Share your thoughts and feelings: *“I did not expect we would get home so late. I don’t know how we are going to be able to clean up before our friends arrive. This mess is making me feel very worried. Maybe I will start to feel better after we get the toys picked up. Can you help too? I am sure we can handle this if we work together.”*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *“It made me feel so much better to tell you how I was feeling and to ask for help.”*

- Grow optimism. For example, when your child uses definitive language like, “I will never be able to do this,” you can respond,
  - *“Some things can feel really hard but then it is possible to get through them after all.”*
  - *“Do you remember last time when this seemed hard? You took a deep breath, and were able to do it.”*
  - *“I wonder if we can do something that will help us get through this challenge.”*

**Trap** Don't tell your child what they feel; ask instead. Three-to-four-year-olds are striving for independence and may create a power struggle if you are too direct about their thoughts and feelings. You might say, *“You look angry. Is that right?”*

### Step 3. Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Learn about your child's development. Each new age presents different challenges.
- Provide opportunities for your child to do things that are more challenging than what they have done before. If they have already mastered a game, is there another game that is slightly more challenging that you can play?
- Provide books, dolls, and other materials at home that give children a chance to see people who face challenges and do not necessarily get through them the first time around. Do you tell stories of someone who was not able to succeed at first, but kept trying? Describe how that person is building resilience to get through hard times.
- Use your child's dolls or stuffed animals to act out moments of resilience-building. This is a good way to practice facing really big challenges that the child might be experiencing or about to experience, such as a move, a new baby in the family, or a major medical situation.

### Step 4. Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements like: *“I noticed that you were nervous about going to the new center, but you got through it and had a good time afterall. I love seeing that.”*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your child is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your child's ability to face the new. In a gentle, non-public way, you can say, *“Remember how last time it seemed like it would be hard, but you tried it and it turned out to be fun? I thought you might like this challenge too.”*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges. You can offer reflections like:
  - *“You seem worried about playing with the new kids in your class.”* Offering comfort when facing new situations can help your child gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away.
  - You can also offer comfort items to help your child face new challenges. *“Would your bear help you feel better?”* Bring a comfort item with you as you face new challenges.

**Trap** Don't move on quickly if your child shows interest in a new person. Children often need more time to adjust to new individuals. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to warm up to the new person. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain relationship skills over time.

## Step 5. Recognize Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. *“I notice you have gotten more comfortable coming to grandma’s house and staying in the guest room all by yourself!”*
- Recognize small steps along the way: *“You told me you were scared, and we came up with some ideas. I like seeing that!”*
- Notice when your child tries something new or recovers smoothly from a challenging situation. These conversations might start happening naturally during your bedtime routine or when snuggling up to read stories together.
- Build celebrations into your everyday routine. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Resilience Summary. Ages 3-4*. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.