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# RAISING RESILIENT CHILDREN

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## The Text

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13,  
NKJV

“And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made  
perfect in weakness.'” 2 Corinthians 12:9a

## Statement of Purpose

To explore key factors in fostering resilience in children. Target audience is parents of young children, adolescents, and children of any age, also anyone who wants to strengthen resilience in their own lives.

## Introduction

Resilience has become the motto of the COVID-19 pandemic. While this word has long been associated with families, it has become ever-present during this pandemic era. In fact, due to the pandemic, every child in the world has now experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). It is during these traumatic and uncertain times that we crave the safety and security of strong family bonds. The truth is as we begin the parenting journey, it should begin with an understanding that we have the responsibility to prepare our children not just for sunny days but for the storms that will inevitably arise in life.

So, what is resilience? Resilience can be defined as having the emotional and social capacity to adjust and bounce back after exposure to traumatic events or exposure to considerable risk. Walsh (2015) defines it as more than just surviving



or getting through a distressing ordeal, but rather the capacity to endure and recover from serious life challenges. It must go beyond survival, because some people survive an ordeal, but remain interpersonally, psychologically, and spiritually impaired. They continue through life after adverse or traumatic experiences with debilitating post-traumatic stress, depression or anxiety, and an inability to thrive.

The good news is that God promises that we can learn to be resilient. In John 16:33: “These things I have spoken to you, that you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” As believers and followers of Christ, we will have struggles in life, but we’re constantly reminded that God is in control. Resilience isn’t the absence of fear or challenges but the ability to persevere based on the truth that God is our ultimate source of strength.

This seminar will explore key factors in fostering resilience in children and provide some tips for parents in raising resilient children. Although this seminar takes a preventative approach, it can still benefit families going through a traumatic experience, such as the current pandemic.

## Misunderstanding Resilience

The concept of resilience originated in the field of physical sciences and referred to the capacity of an object to return to its original form after being stretched—such as an elastic band. Subsequently, the word started being used to describe individuals, families, and other items. The problem with this definition is that it often infers that it’s easy to bounce right back after facing difficult challenges. There may be an expectation that you can just move on with life after going through trials, especially in faith communities. The truth is that it is unrealistic to believe that one can just recover after experiencing serious trials.

### Discussion Question:

*Ask the audience to share ways in which resilience may be misunderstood.*

*(Example: sometimes after a loved one dies, people may say “shouldn’t they have finished grieving by now”).*



Resilience is not just speeding through a crisis and appearing untouched by a difficult or painful experience. It involves learning how to struggle well, experiencing suffering, courage, and hope simultaneously. This concept is summed up in 1 Corinthians 4: 8-9, ESV, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Resilience acknowledges the impact of the trial while believing that there is a possibility of emotional well-being despite the challenges. Resilience can be seen as an outcome—emotional well-being despite the odds. Resilience is also a process—adaptability amid adversity.

## Relationships Nurture Resilience

Many studies focused on resilience in children have pointed to the importance of strong family bonds. There are protective factors such as warmth, affection, healthy communication, reasonable structure and boundaries, emotional support, and authoritative parenting, which has a good balance of warmth and flexibility (not authoritarian – harsh and inflexible) that contribute to children’s resilience. Moreover, studies show that when children face adversity, if they have at least one caring relationship with an important adult who believes in them, they are able to gain strength to overcome hardships.

In the book, *Adventist Home*, Ellen G. White says, “Parents, let your children see that you love them and will do all in your power to make them happy...Rule your children with tenderness and compassion remembering that ‘their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.’ If you desire the angels to do for your children the work given them of God, co-operate with them by doing your part...The spirit that prevails in the home will mold their characters; they will form habits and principles that will be a strong defense against temptation...” (AH 193.3,4).

When children feel loved and nurtured in their homes, they develop stronger characters and self-efficacy – a belief in one’s ability to succeed and accomplish tasks in life. If parents are going to foster resilience in their children, they must create a home environment that nurtures them and encourages their sense of



competence, self-esteem, and self-worth. In essence, parents need to provide a strong foundation from which resilience can be built. Parents who are unable to provide this type of environment on their own can solicit the help of *trusted* family members, church friends, grandparents, and other extended family.

### Discussion Question:

*Think about your current home environment. If you were an inspector for home environments that pass the mark for fostering resilience in children, would your home pass the inspection? In what areas do you need to make changes to create the environment needed for resilience to thrive in your child or children?*

## Principles and Guidelines for Strengthening Family Resilience

Every individual and every family will experience a traumatic, highly stressful, or disruptive event during their life span. As we mentioned earlier, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, every child in the world has now had at least one adverse childhood experience. Stressful events are usually not predictable, but we can all expect that when these inevitable distressing events occur, they will interrupt normal family functioning. Parents play a key role in helping to build, foster, and strengthen resilience in their children so they can learn how to cope with life challenges when they occur. Children are not born resilient; it is a learned way of operating that can be taught and practiced throughout life.

### Begin With the End in Mind

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” This text reminds us that even though we may be going through trials, God knows what His purpose is towards us, and that is to restore us to peace and prosperity (wellness, wholeness). It is a reminder that while we are going through unexpected adversity, He has an expected end for a hopeful future (*Jeremiah*, 1909).



Parents must have a clear vision of what their family is about and how they are going to operate. When there is a clear vision of what type of family you want to have, it affects every decision you make and how you handle circumstances in the family. God has already stated the vision; we just need to capture it and run with it. This vision will directly impact how a family handles good times and challenging times.

### Discussion Question:

*Think about your family. List the members of your family (include extended family members who live in your household or frequently visit, such as grandparents, etc.). Write or draw what your home environment looks like now—happy, cheerful, sad, angry, adversarial, forgiving, etc. Then write or draw what you would like your home to look like (vision). What habits or attitudes would you like to change or remove from your home? What would you like to add to see your vision become a reality in your home?*

## Be Intentional in Family Bonding

We can't stress enough how important it is for your child to feel connected and bonded to their parents, to others and to God. Attachment studies have shown us that children who are emotionally connected in healthy ways are more secure. The more secure a child is, the more resourceful they are in dealing with the many demands of life. The securely attached or connected child believes he or she has sufficient inner resources, faith in God and others to handle life. When a child is insecurely attached, they don't feel they have the resources or support and is left to fend for themselves.

God created us to be in relationships, and research supports the biblical concept that relationships are crucial to life. From the time an infant is born, their brain is wired for basic functions such as thinking, feeling, relating to others, judging, and perceiving through the mother-child and father-child bonds. There is much evidence to suggest that an infant's very survival depends on this early bonding experience. Major studies that have shown that infants who were left without hugs and warmth/affection died for lack of connection. We should hasten to say that



even a mother or father figure that provides the needed soothing nurture could help the infant to thrive.

When a child is securely attached, they experience what is called homeostasis. This means a child can physiologically and emotionally regulate their response, especially when they encounter turmoil in their environment. Parents can assist their children find stability at all ages by providing a home that is safe, predictable, and filled with much love and bonding. Just as God quiets his children with His love, we are called to do the same with our children.

### Discussion Question:

*Read Zephaniah 3:17 and list all the ways God attaches to us, his children. In what tangible ways can you be more intentional about rejoicing over your children to build closer bonds and nurture a secure attachment?*

*“The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” Zephaniah 3:17*

## Model Resiliency

My grandmother (Elaine) often shared stories of her young life and many of the hardships she encountered when she was a young girl. She was the oldest of 10 children, forced to drop out of school at age 13 after her father died to help her mother take care of her younger siblings. However, she always spoke about how God brought her through her trials. She often quoted scripture such as Philippians 4:13 and 1 Corinthians 12:9 and encouraged us to memorize God’s promises to help us get through the challenging times in life. She lived her life believing that God would always make a way, even out of what might seem impossible. She modeled resilience.

Resilience doesn’t mean you pretend or ignore the hardships or challenges in life. It means you remain positive and hopeful during difficult times. Here are a few ways that parents can model resilience.



1. **Foster a positive attitude.** Again, this is not fake positivity that doesn't allow for the processing of emotions, but one can look for the good despite the hardship.
2. **Learn to regulate your emotions.** *People often misunderstand emotional regulation to mean don't express emotions. But it simply means you can learn to express your emotions in a healthy and proactive way. If parents model how to "self-regulate" then kids will learn as well.*
3. **Remain hopeful.** *Be optimistic about the future. As God's people, we have this hope that one day He will return and take us home with Him. Let your children hear you praying and reciting God's promises and reassure them that your trust is in God and that He can carry you through the storms.*

### Discussion Questions:

*Read the following texts: Philippians 4:13 and 1 Corinthians 12:9. Discuss what these texts mean to you and how they can help you become more resilient.*

*Memorize these texts this week if you haven't already done so or select other texts that can help you build resilience in yourself and your children.*

## Conclusion

As Christians, we can turn to God for help with developing a greater capacity to respond to trauma and stress. Parents can help foster resilience in their children and remind them of the relief that comes with knowing that God has promised them hope and a future. If you are struggling to overcome hardship in life, don't hesitate to seek out Christian counseling.

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