Resilience, or resiliency, is the ability to survive, and thrive from, stressful experiences while building up protective skills to manage future hardship. Psychological resilience involves cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills. Researchers have identified many factors that facilitate resilience and healthy adaptation to negative events and threats. For example, strong interpersonal social skills foster subsequent positive and prosocial behavior and relationships. Strong interpersonal skills help buffer stress and encourage support from others. Emotional intelligence (EI) is another trait or skill that buffers stressors and builds resilience. Emotional intelligence skills include self-awareness, other-awareness, modulation of emotions, identifying emotions in others, and responding appropriately and effectively in a positive manner. Cognitive skills that build resiliency include learning how to identify and dispute negative thinking, using critical thinking strategies in order to make more effective and accurate appraisals of negative events, thinking optimistically and having a sense of control and management over hardship, and reframing thoughts or ideas into proactive ones. In the physical realm, demonstrating prosocial behavior that encourages and facilitates personal development, through giving, sharing, and helping others, builds resilience.

Although there has been some disagreement in the definitions of resilience across cultures, researchers agree that certain skills and strengths acquired in childhood help build resilience. Strong social skills and relationships in youth help buffer stress. Those who are involved in extracurricular activities like sports or music seem to have strong interpersonal skills that boost confidence and maturity. Involvement in activities also increases contact with others that facilitates solid support systems. The ability to interact and have rewarding relationships with peers and adults using effective communication and demonstrating appropriate personal boundaries builds self-esteem. The ability to problem solve is an active demonstration of resiliency. The ability to manage one's own emotions and assess the emotional response of others is paramount in developing and maintaining resilience.

Environmental factors related to resilience include higher socioeconomic level, levels where caregivers are not overly stressed and focused on financial security. Stability in schools and an educational environment where creativity and talent are nurtured and respected are additional factors in cultivating resiliency.

Other factors that foster resiliency are stable healthy families that encourage healthy developmental outcomes in children and consistent parenting that promotes autonomy, cooperation, independence, competence, and self-regulation with appropriate boundaries. Temperament is also related to resilience. Children are born with certain traits that endure over time and are modified and shaped by environment. A “good” fit between parents and children is crucial to bonding and subsequent development.

Resilience develops over time and is not considered a trait. Research on resilience has included terms like adaptive coping, emotional coping, psychological resilience, learned optimism, hardiness, thriving, and flourishing. These terms are used somewhat interchangeably.

History of the Study of Resilience
Norman Garmezy first coined the term *resiliency* when he began studying adults with schizophrenia in the 1940s. His work led him to discover factors that buffer individuals from psychopathology. In the 1970s, he focused on identifying risk factors and developing resiliency strategies. The heightened interest in resilience research has occurred as a result of more at-risk youth being identified for serious lifelong problems, and the concomitant desire to identify factors that would reduce or prevent the occurrence of these problems. A widely used assessment for identifying resilience, The Denver Developmental Screening Test, was developed by William K. Frankenburg in the 1960s. Scientists continue to discover strengths and factors leading to resilience.

When scientists Emmy Werner, Michael Rutter, and Garmezy discovered that more than 30% of those living in at-risk conditions were surviving and thriving, despite severe hardship, they committed to discovering what strengths provided such protection. Circumstances associated with an at-risk designation include, but are not limited to, poverty, despair, lower socioeconomic levels, instability in schools, poor interpersonal skills, pessimism, limited access to health care, poor critical thinking skills, poor mental and/or physical health, antisocial behavior, unstable families, no belief in God or a higher power, inconsistent parenting, and a lack of warmth and love.

**Development of Resilience**

Scientists across disciplines have begun to recognize many common factors that are associated with psychological and emotional resilience. Numerous longitudinal studies have assessed what factors contributed to resilience over time. One category of factors includes infant bonding and attachment style. Attachment styles set the stage for values, attitudes, and basic skills that are integral to the development of resilience. Attachment styles begin to develop in early childhood and are refined through adulthood. Therefore, scientists have concluded that parents are a major influence on the development of resilience, through modeling; support; teaching self-reliance and interpersonal skills; setting appropriate limits; showing love and facilitating healthy attachment and bonding; and demonstrating and teaching moral values, problem-solving skills, and self-control. An environment where emotional warmth is demonstrated is integral to the development of resilience.

Traits, like temperament, and environmental characteristics play a role as well, but seem to be lesser influences in the development of resilience. In addition to the factors related to the development of resilience in children, researchers are identifying resilient qualities in middle-age and older adults. Adults who experience crises fare best when they are socially integrated and able to share their feelings with friends and peers, use their strengths to cope with daily activities, and seek professional help when needed. Those who maintain resilience take action when crises occur, while seeing adversity as part of life. They feel competent to solve problems, nurture and care for themselves to stay healthy, manage their emotions, and have a realistic sense of hardship. Resilient individuals find meaning in adversity; this meaning-making tends to facilitate personal growth and a renewed sense of and gratitude for life. Adults who can look to the future and not focus on the past seem to fare best.

With the psychosocial stressors in the last decade, including the natural disasters around the world, economic downturn, and international strife, researchers have been especially interested in promoting factors that help individuals thrive and flourish, rather than just survive. Resilience is being tested and studied across all domains and cultures. Researchers have learned that resilience is developed over time by experiencing conditions of environmental protective factors and/or developing skills, cognitive awareness, and strategies that facilitate resilience. In childhood, skills and strategies for coping are

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learned, and over time, developed, enhanced, and internalized. In adulthood, resilience factors are embedded in the personality and become part of the constellation of competencies individuals use to cope with life's adversities.

**Clinical Applications of Teaching Resilience**

The field of psychology is moving toward a prevention model, including education that teaches what qualities, skills, and strategies promote and maintain resilience and subsequent well-being. Researchers have identified many factors that promote resilience, and educational institutions are beginning to institute resilience-enhancing programs to students. School settings are a natural environment for cultivating qualities related to resilience. Children spend 7 to 10 hours per day in school, and thus, have many opportunities in that setting to build strategies and skills for success. Protective factors that lead to resilience and coping can be taught from kindergarten through high school. Research demonstrates that a framework for developing resilience should include helping children avoid risk exposure, minimizing consequences from risk exposure, fostering self-reliance and esteem by teaching children how to reframe negative thinking, and providing opportunities for personal growth. Policy in schools must meet the demands of a diverse population and help children find their strengths instead of trying to manage negative behavior. The fostering of factors associated with resiliency must be part of the learning environment. Schools are vital to helping youth to be resilient.

Parents and communities have roles to play in this educational process. Parents, teachers, and caregivers can promote solid emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social skills in youth. The shift from identifying risk factors to identifying resilience factors is the focus of contemporary research. Chris B. Rush, president of the Resiliency Institute, created a model for resiliency, *The Seven Keys to Resiliency*, which helps teach and foster skills that help youth develop into healthy and productive citizens. The American Psychological Association (APA) has adopted and embraced his model, and Martin Seligman, past president of the APA, has been conducting research on resiliency factors since the 1960s. Seligman and colleagues conduct the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) to help children build strong cognitive skills for coping with adversity.

Sybil Wolin and Steve Wolin are also primary researchers in resiliency studies. The Search Institute has been at the forefront of research for more than 20 years. There are many educational programs around the world teaching resiliency skills and strategies, with more in development.

The research demonstrates that resiliency skills are best learned and internalized during youth, however, current researchers are studying how adults can learn to change their thinking and manage their emotions and behavior to develop resilience. Psychologists and other trained mental health professionals have the ability to teach adults how to recognize and capitalize on their strengths rather than just addressing their weaknesses. Since all people have the capacity for resilience, it is reasonable that clinicians can help those who feel a sense of hopelessness regarding their situations to find and develop their strengths. In her pioneering work over the last 30 years, Emmy Werner has demonstrated how Native Hawaiians have overcome adversity and thrived, despite overwhelming odds. The results of many long-term studies are positive for those who grow up in at-risk environments.

Schools, parents, and communities at large can play a big part in the development of resilience. The community must commit to working together with parents, educators, and other institutions to cultivate an attitude toward identifying and fostering strengths that lead to the development of resilience. Since resilience is developed over time, optimal conditions of environmental protective

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factors, cognitive awareness, and strategies that facilitate resilience can set the stage for optimal development. Researchers will continue to identify what factors constitute resilience. Parents, communities, and schools are starting to work together in helping children thrive, not merely survive, when adversity strikes. Although there is no one factor that determines who will develop resilience, the research clearly demonstrates that all human beings have the potential to develop their strengths.

See also
Cancer Management; Coping; Disasters, Impact on Children; Happiness/Hardiness; Hope; Optimism and Pessimism; Positive Psychology; Rehabilitation Counseling; School Counseling; Self-Esteem; Stress; Stress Management

Further Readings

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