

HOW TO ASSIST YOUR MENTEE TO BUILD RESILIENCE



Mentoring relationships are not intended to be lifelong so one of the most important things you can do for your mentee is to build their resilience and prepare them to cope with life's ups and downs using their own resources and talents.

Developing resilience requires young people to be aware of their strengths and to have a sense of their own self-worth.

Resilient individuals are also aware that they have control over their own actions and that this gives them power to make changes in their own life. For a mentor, fostering this awareness means carefully listening to their mentee and guiding them to find their own answers rather than telling them what to do or how to do it.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is the ability to cope with and bounce back in the face of life's challenges and demands. If you can keep this in mind during interactions with your mentee it will remind you to give them opportunities to talk through their own problems or concerns and find their own answers. The opposite of resilience is a sense of powerlessness, which is how young people can begin to feel if they are constantly being "rescued".

SELF-BELIEF IS POWER

TIP

If you can teach your mentee coping strategies for when they run into problems, rather than trying to fix individual situations as they arise, you will be setting them up for life.

Remind them they have the power to change the way things turn out – when they are faced with a challenge they need to concentrate on the strengths they have and to think about what actions they can take to resolve the situation or to change the outcome.

SIX STEPS TO BUILD RESILIENCE

1. Show them they have the power to change events.

Encourage your mentee to talk about various situations they have been exposed to (both positive and negative) and ask them to identify how their actions changed the outcome.

2. Help them to learn from past experiences.

Ask them to talk about situations they have been involved in where they would have liked the outcome to be different – get them to think about what they could have done differently to change the outcome, share some of your ideas or relevant experiences.

3. Enforce their self-belief by giving them opportunities to identify and explore what it is they are good at.

Help them with this discovery by acknowledging specific achievements and situations they have handled well. Prompt them with questions – "tell me about something you've done that made you feel good about yourself?"

4. Work with your mentee to set achievable goals.

Goal setting can develop self awareness and show young people they have the power to make conscious decisions to drive success in their own lives. In setting these goals let your mentee know what your expectations of them are and why you believe they can meet them. (See fact sheet 6 for more information).

5. Talk about dealing with disappointment.

Acknowledge that sometimes our own actions or unexpected obstacles will mean goals are not achieved. Remind your mentee that no one succeeds all of the time (again talk about your own experiences if appropriate) and that we can learn valuable lessons from our mistakes or failures. Talk through their options – such as reapplying themselves to achieving the goal or re-evaluating their goals and coming up with new, more manageable ones.

6. Let your mentee know that sometimes things will go wrong that are beyond their control.

Remind them it is okay to feel sad, angry or hurt when this happens and that it can help to share these feelings with someone. Even though they cannot change what has happened they are still in charge of the way they react to it.

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

Resiliency experts refer to the “resiliency attitude” as the “I can see what is right with you” approach. It is based on the belief that all young people have strengths and can act on them. Often with young people who are disadvantaged, or who experience an adverse environment, there is a temptation to focus on their “risk factors” but it can be much more powerful to concentrate on what they have going for them.

If young people have not grown-up in an environment where they are praised they may be unaware of their talents and uncomfortable with discussing them. If you make positive attention and encouragement a natural part of your mentoring relationship, mentees will get used to thinking about what they are capable of and where their strengths lie.

ACKNOWLEDGE SUCCESSES AND TALENTS

When your mentee has done something well, changed a negative behavior, identified a possible solution to a problem, picked up a new skill, made use of one of their strengths, achieved a goal you set together or even been open in sharing their thoughts and aspirations with you, don't be shy to acknowledge and celebrate these positives.

If you are not in the habit of making positive statements it can be difficult to do but the more you do it, the more natural it will become. Here are few ways you can positively acknowledge a young person's achievements:

- Great idea
- You did a great job
- Thanks for sharing your idea with me
- I was so impressed with the way you ...
- I'm really proud of you
- I knew you could do it
- I know what you mean
- I hear what you are saying
- Will you show me how to do that?



EXERCISE: UNDERSTANDING YOUR MENTEE'S RESILIENCE – A RESILIENCE CHART

This exercise will help you understand more about your mentee and their capacity to overcome the difficulties or challenges in their life. It is particularly important that you understand your mentee's strengths as your confidence in them will build their sense of self-worth and enable them to cope with setbacks.

Take a piece of paper, write your mentee's name at the top and divide it into two columns.

In the left column, list the problems you see in the young person's behaviour and in his/her environment. Narrow your list down to the most significant three or four problems.

Before moving to the right column, think about the meticulousness with which we search for and assess problems and apply that same mindset to identify all the strengths in this person and his/her environment.

In the right column list any positive characteristics of your mentee – include any strengths, talents, potential talents, personal qualities and ability to tap into support. To help you write this list think of times this person has surprised you and ask “what helps him/her do as well as he/she does?”

At the end of this exercise you will have the evidence of your mentee's resilience – something you can build on and make them aware of during your time together. This activity is a valuable first step in fostering resiliency because it allows you to:

- Look at the whole picture – the problems and strengths your young person has to work with;
- See the glass as half full instead of half empty – your confidence in your mentee is crucial;
- Recognise that everyone has strengths if you look for them – critical information when you consider the research showing that strengths are more powerful than risk factors.

TIP

RECIPE FOR RESILIENCE

Comprehensive studies have shown that a few simple factors make all the difference for fostering resilience in young people – feeling secure, feeling connected and feeling valued. In a mentoring relationship you can create these feelings by consistently turning up for your mentee, listening to what they have to say, respecting their opinions and fostering their positive connections with friends, family and community.