



*Optimal Treatment  
for Anxiety  
& Mental Health*

# Building Resilience in Kids

Maura F. Roll, LPC, CSAC  
[mroll@rosscenter.com](mailto:mroll@rosscenter.com)

Made in Partnership with  
Northern Kentucky Health Department



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# Resilience

- Set of skills that enables individuals to respond and cope effectively to life's challenges.
- Children who demonstrate resiliency believe in their own capabilities, adjust to difficult situations and bounce back after negative experiences.
- Resilience is a skill that can be learned.

# Adolescence

- A time of change and challenges.
- Hormonal changes impact emotionality.
- Change, even positive change can be challenging to adjust to.
- Brain Development – explosive brain development
  - *The areas of the brain for logic and strategy are developing while emotion centers are active*
- Sensitivity and Reactivity

# Foundations to Building Resiliency

1. Validation

2. Self Talk /  
Cognitive  
Reframing

3. Mindfulness

4. Distress  
Tolerance Skills

# Validation

- Shows acceptance and understanding, even if we don't agree.
- Validation communicates to another person that their feelings, thoughts and actions **MAKE SENSE** and are understandable to you in a particular situation.
- We want to convey that we understand an adolescent's emotion and/or experience.

# Validation

Invalidation communicates (intentionally or not, through words or actions) that another person's feelings, thoughts, and actions in a particular situation make no sense, are "manipulative," or "dramatic," or an "overreaction," or not worthy of your time, interest or respect.

## **IMPORTANT:**

Validation DOES NOT MEAN Agreement:

- It means that you understand where they are coming from, not that you like or agree with what they are saying/doing.

# Why Validate?

- ❖ In adult-adolescent interactions, validation is one of the most important and helpful skills to learn and practice.
- ❖ Validation promotes healthier connection, leads to more self-disclosure and calms down emotional situations.
- ❖ By developing a validating learning environment, you lessen the impact of the adolescent's biologically based emotional vulnerability and helps them access resiliency skills.

# Why Validate?

- It can deescalate conflict and intense emotions
- Validation improves relationships / asking for help

## Validation says:

- ✓ I'm listening.
- ✓ I understand.
- ✓ I am not judging.
- ✓ I care about this, you and the relationship.
- ✓ We can have a disagreement without having a big conflict.

# What to Validate?

- We can validate feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in ourselves and other people.
- Validate the valid, not the invalid
  - You can still validate the feeling without validating the behavior.

# How Can We Validate Others?

- Active Listening – Make eye contact, stay focused
- Be mindful of verbal and nonverbal reactions in order to avoid invalidation
  - rolling eyes, sighing, walking away, making light of serious things
  - “Don’t be angry.”
- Observe what the other person is feeling in the moment. Look for a word that describes the feeling.
  - “I see that you’re sad.”
- Reflect the feeling back without judgment. The goal is to communicate that you understand how they feel
  - “That makes sense that you’re frustrated”

# External vs Internal Validation

Adolescents and teens often invalidate themselves:

- “I shouldn’t feel sad about this.”
- “It’s stupid that I got this upset.”
- “This shouldn’t be so hard.”

They judge their own experience which can come from:

- modeling the responses of an invalidating environment.
- an anxious/depressed (dysregulated) lens.

# Self Validation

- It is important to learn how to validate self.
- Self-validation involves nonjudgmental observation, description, and acceptance of our own emotions.
- It acknowledges that our feelings, thoughts, and actions are accurate and make sense in a particular situation.
- Adults can help adolescents learn to self-validate.

# Self Talk

- The private conversation that we are having with ourselves
- Self Talk drives behavior – what I'm telling myself drives my capability
- Anxiety/Sadness have narratives vs. Healthy Self-Talk:
  - *I will be OK vs. It will be OK*
  - *If something bad happens I will be able to handle it.*
  - *Stay calm*
  - *I can get through this.*
  - *Get an adult*
  - *Distraction*
  - *Exercise / Breathe / Self-Soothe*

# Cognitive Reframing

- Helps me assess my self-talk
- Feelings vs Facts?
- Feelings are **NOT** facts
- Emotion Regulation – Fact Checking
  - *Do I think that happened?*
  - *Do I feel that happened?*
  - *Do I know that happened?*

Cognitive and Behavioral Flexibility helps kids deal with stress and problem solve.

Are there other alternatives to this situation? Other ways to respond? Think about it?

# What Can We Say?

- I know that it feels that way? Is that actually what she/he said?
- I know that it felt that way at lunch but are you sure that's what they were talking about?
- I'm sure that's what their intention felt like but is there any other ways to view this?

# Mindfulness

- **Full Awareness (Opened Mind):** Being aware of the present moment i.e. thoughts, feelings and physical sensations without judgement and without trying to change it.
- **Attentional Control (Focused Mind):** Staying focused on one thing at a time.

# Mindfulness

- Gives us more choices and more control over your behavior
- Reduces pain and increase pleasure
- Helps make important decisions
- Helps focus attention: in control of thinking therefore more effective and resilient
- Increases compassion for self and others

# How to Be and Model Mindfulness

- Pay attention (with intention!) to the present moment
- Observe
- Describe
- Participate
- Be nonjudgmental
- Do one thing at a time
- Do what works: *Be mindful enough to pay attention to what has been effective*

# Mindfulness

I.e.: When a kid is hyper-focused on the grade, the test next week, etc., remind them that we are here **NOW**. What is happening in the now that we have control over that might influence those future outcomes?

- Saying things like: “You are losing out on today when focused on the future or past”
- Missing current opportunities
- There is **value** in allowing kids to respond to stressors—don’t over-function.
- It is a hindrance to building resilience.

# Distress Tolerance: Why Tolerate Painful Feelings?

- ❖ Pain is part of life and can't always be avoided.
- ❖ If you can't manage pain, you may act impulsively or ineffectively.
- ❖ When we act impulsively, we may end of hurting ourselves, someone else, or not getting what we want (Rathus & Miller, 2015).

# Resilience = Tolerating Distress

- Facing and accepting distress head-on reduces suffering.
- Sometimes there is nothing we can do to change or improve a negative situation.
- Acceptance helps us cope effectively with emotion, build resilience and move on rather than get stuck/suffer.

# Resiliency and Distress Tolerance Skills

A resilient individual copes successfully when facing adverse situations.

Things to do to be successful:

- i. Activities – what feels good?
- ii. Self-Soothe with Senses – look at photos? Take a bath? Make a hot cocoa?
- iii. Improving the Moment – sometimes we get stuck, are there things like visualizing a better reality?  
Conjure memories, unplug from devices, etc.
- iv. Relaxation and Self-Regulation Skill – breathing skills, guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation.

# Resilient Individuals

- ✓ More effectively problem-solve
- ✓ Ask for help when they need it
- ✓ Believe in their capabilities

Less resilience can result in struggling under pressure, an increase in anxiety and depression and feelings of hopelessness when things go wrong.

# References

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