

The Research on Resiliency



LearningAlly

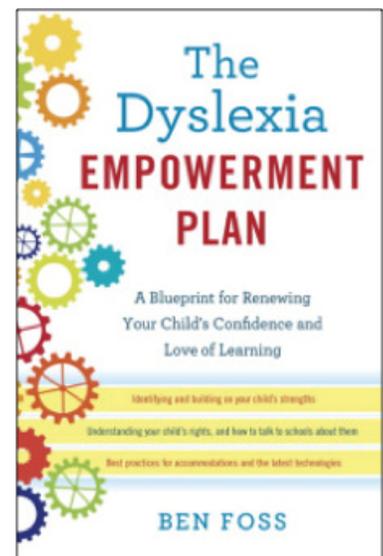


Dr. Robert Brooks, a Harvard Medical School child psychologist, and his colleague Sam Goldstein, at the University of Utah, have spent their careers studying resilience in children, including those with SLDs and/or ADHD. They emphasize that fostering a child's strengths is a great way to begin the process of creating the ability to bounce back from adversity. The key elements that lead to resilient children are: 1) unconditional love from an adult and 2) giving a child responsibilities he can handle. You can use the Strength Star to gain a better picture of your child's strengths, and you should begin emphasizing them both in the tasks your child takes on and in praising her for what a good job she does using these skills.

Brooks and Goldstein agree that one of the most important things you can do for your child to build resilience is to unconditionally accept him for both his strengths and his weaknesses. This means not attacking her when she makes mistakes and encouraging her to pursue activities in her areas of strength, as opposed to activities solely in your areas of interest. Every child needs to have access to an adult who will coach her and accept her as she is. Besides or in addition to a parent, children can turn to a sports coach, a minister, or a Scouting leader. Look for mentors in an area (based on your assessment of your child's strengths) that will help her flourish. If she is particularly musically gifted, it may be the person who teaches her how to play an instrument; if she has a love for kinesthetic learning, it could be a dance team choreographer.

It is also extremely important to develop a pattern of problem solving with your child. Brooks and Goldstein emphasize that it's important for children to have a sense of worth that comes from meaningful

From the Book, *THE DYSLEXIA EMPOWERMENT PLAN* by Ben Foss.
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contributions to the world. A sense of his or her own competence and usefulness will help foster resiliency in your child over the long term. This involves giving him responsibilities in the household that are commensurate with his level of skill. This might range from putting the dishes away each night to helping you paint a room in the house. This could also be a volunteer activity where your child helps deliver meals, or teaches a younger student how to play sports.

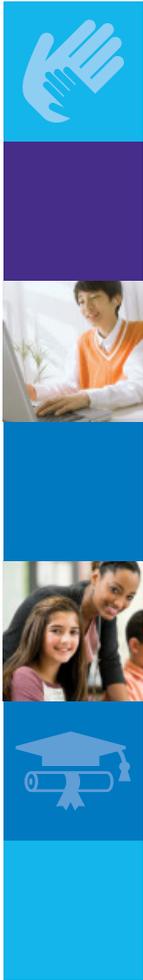
Brooks and Goldstein's work also points out the necessity of developing backup solutions when an initial plan doesn't work. Children are very capable of thinking through techniques that will help them stay on task or learn, so involve them in designing solutions and approach mistakes as an opportunity to engage in problem solving.

This mind-set can result in conversations that begin with "How can we do this better next time?" or "What accommodations would make this easier for you in the future?" rather than "You didn't try hard enough!" or "Why don't you focus more?" The general principle that resiliency and other emotional skills drive success has been demonstrated specifically in the context of dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities as well.

Resiliency and dyslexic children

A study from the late 1990s conducted at the Frostig Center in Pasadena, California shows a striking result. The Center is affiliated with a school by the same name that specializes in teaching students with learning disabilities, including those with dyslexia. Researchers undertook a twenty-year longitudinal study looking to determine the factors related to positive adult outcomes for the school's graduates. The findings showed that "life success" depended much more heavily on a number of attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics than it did on any specific element of their academic achievement, IQ, or social background.

The lead author was Marshall Raskind, who went on to become Director of Research at the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, which operated a program to disseminate information on learning and attention problems. The study demonstrated that the IQ scores or academic achievement of students while enrolled in school had between zero and



5 percent predictive power in explaining the variation in their long-term outcomes. At the same time, emotional and attitudinal success attributes (the authors named six: self-awareness, perseverance, proactivity, emotional stability, goal setting, and social support systems) explained 49 to 75 percent of the variance in the students' long-term outcomes. Put another way, academic achievement and IQ score predicted next to nothing about the future of these dyslexic students. What mattered most was their ability to bounce back, get help from others, and take action.

In this particular study, the highs and the lows were extreme. The researchers looked at measures of success: a good job, educational attainment, stable family lives. One graduate in the study was running his own software company in California at the age of thirty-five. Another, also thirty-five, was serving a life sentence in prison for murder. Either could have a high IQ, and indeed, they might both have strong verbal or narrative skills as well. But their ability to master emotional coping skills was what correlated best to their outcomes.

Overall, a hopeful attitude and a sense that you can beat the odds are the most important elements in building resiliency. As a parent, talking about dyslexia in the context of a hopeful future is a great way to begin this path.