



# Resilient Children

At Home  
&  
At School

DR. LAUREL L. JOHNSON  
CLINICAL CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGIST



# Resilient Children





# What is Resiliency?

- Not one specific thing
- A combination of skills and positive attributes that people gain from their life experiences and relationships
- Helps them
  - Solve problems
  - Cope with challenges
  - Bounce back from disappointments







# Resiliency in Children

## **1. Relationships and reaching out**

- A sense of belonging, having people who can be there for us and knowing how to reach out to them

## **2. Emotional skills**

- The ability to deal with emotions so they don't overwhelm us

## **3. Competence**

- Skills and thinking abilities that enable us to solve problems and influence what happens in our lives

## **4. Optimism**

- A positive and hopeful attitude



# Relationships and Reaching Out Skills

- The single most important factor in child resiliency is :

## RELATIONSHIPS

- A sense of belonging
- Having people who can be there for us and knowing how to reach out to them





# Emotional Skills

- The ability to deal with emotions so that they don't overwhelm us.



- We can't control our emotions completely, but if we are frequently overwhelmed by emotions, we have to put all of our energy into trying to cope with them.



More difficult to get over bad feelings and make good decisions in challenging situations.



# Competence

- Resilient people feel a greater sense of control over their lives because they understand their own competence
  - Their knowledge and skills enable them to set realistic goals and develop strategies to accomplish them
- Children are learning about cause and effect all the time



- All of these experiences become part of developing competence that helps children in all cultures feel that they have some control over their lives

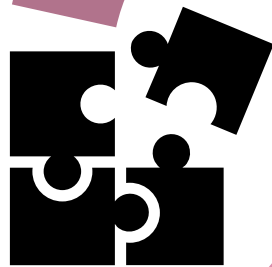


# Optimism

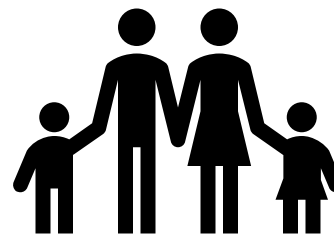
- Healthy optimism that is realistic
- Based on beliefs, knowledge, experience and a clear understanding of one's skills and capabilities



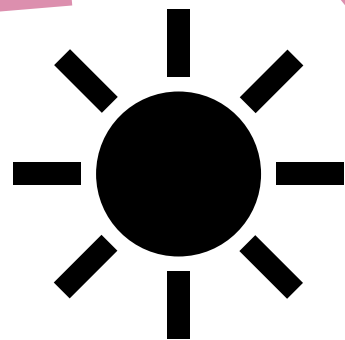




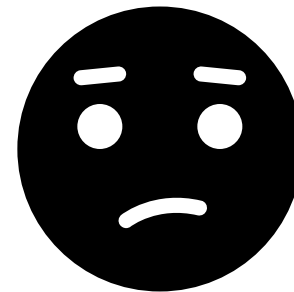
**Competence**



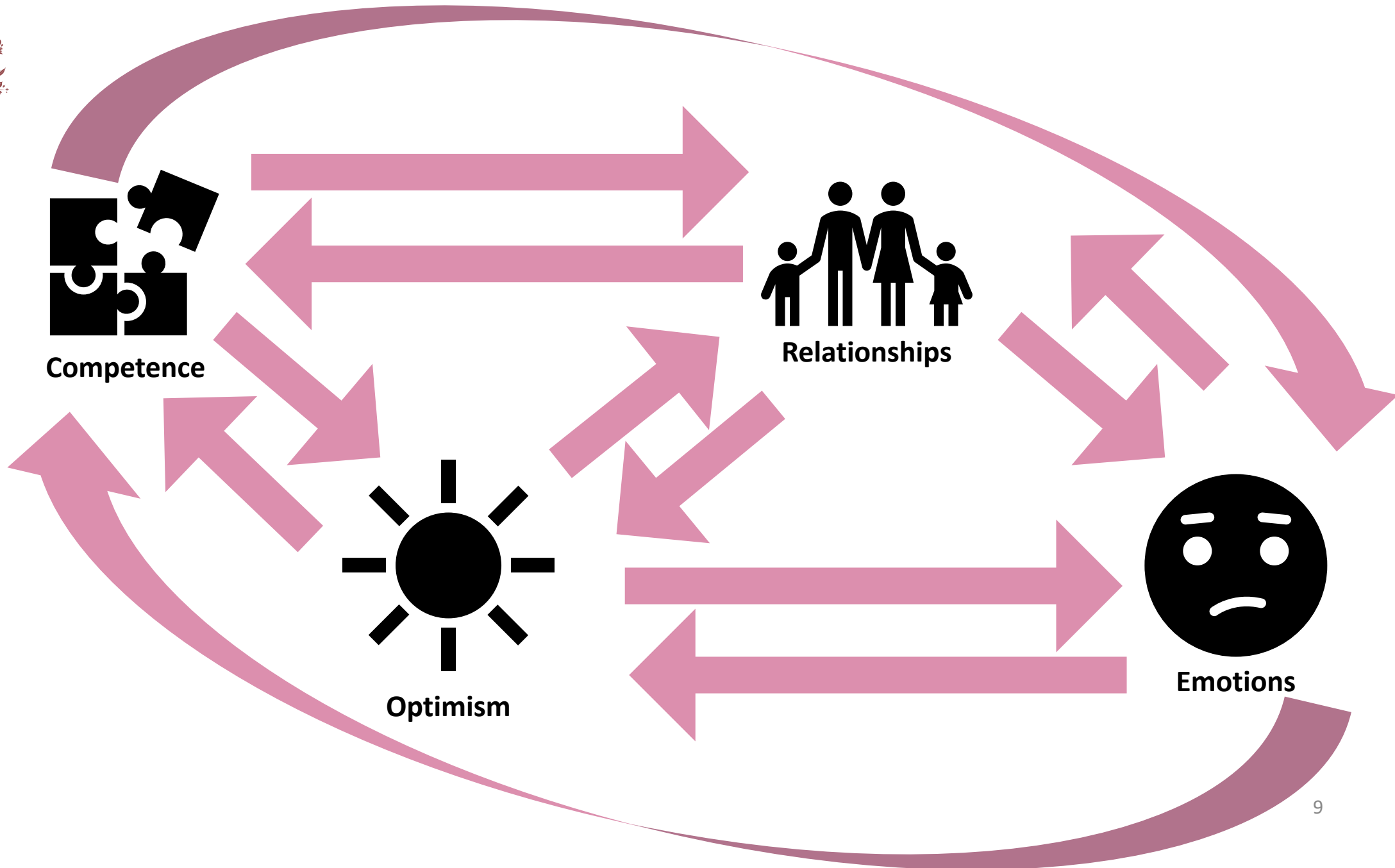
**Relationships**



**Optimism**



**Emotions**





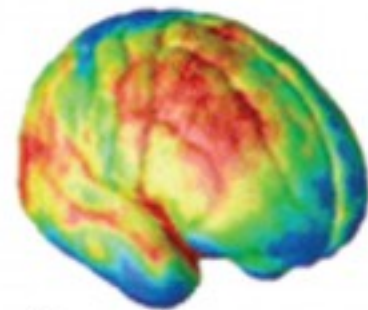
# Gender Differences

- Girls and boys may develop and display resiliency in different ways
  - Boys tend to be less interested than girls in talking about feelings
  - A boy's response to being upset is often physical, while girls generally learn to talk about feelings earlier than boys
  - Girls may develop certain kinds of judgement and competence (such as being able to sit still and pay attention) earlier than boys, while boys often learn physical skills more quickly
- The important thing is to not expect the exact same resiliency development in boys and girls

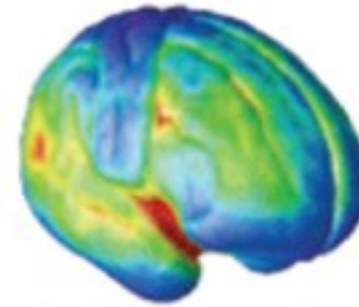
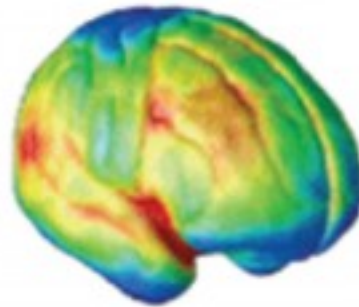


# The Developing Brain

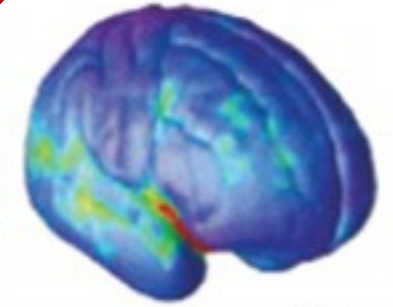
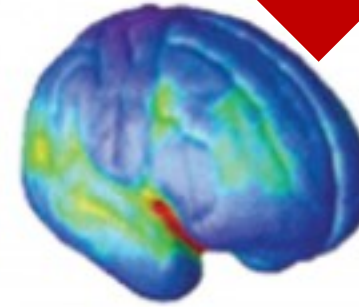
- Very rapid brain development in first 3-5 years of life
- All the structure and building blocks are present by age of 9



Age 5



Adolescence



Age 20

- Reasoning
- Planning
- Judgment
- Organization
- Self-regulation



Prefrontal Cortex not fully developed until early adulthood.



## 6-8 Years Old

### NEED HELP WITH:

Relationships	Getting along with others • Understanding other people's behaviour and feelings • Taking steps towards independence while still feeling dependent at times
Emotional Skills	Managing strong feelings • Finding the right words to express their feelings
Competence	Learning how to behave away from home • Controlling impulses • Paying attention and sitting still for longer periods of time
Optimism	Feeling reassured by secure, loving relationships with parents and caregivers





## 9-10 Years Old

### NEED HELP WITH:

Relationships	Dealing with their expanding and more demanding social world <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Treating other adults with respect, while still being assertive</li></ul>
Emotional Skills	Bad feelings, which can sometimes be harder to get over at this age <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understanding other people's emotions</li><li>• Talking about feelings and emotional experiences</li></ul>
Competence	Being realistic <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Following through with things they have to do (like chores and homework)</li><li>• Dealing with disappointment as they learn they aren't "awesome" at everything they try</li></ul>
Optimism	Seeing the hopeful side of negative situations <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finding alternatives to some of their negative thoughts</li></ul>



# 11-12 Years Old

## NEED HELP WITH:

Relationships	Learning to challenge authority respectfully • Staying connected to parents, because they spend less time with parents at this age
Emotional Skills	Dealing with strong feelings that can be heightened by puberty and a growing desire to be independent • Dealing with the ups and downs of preteen social life
Competence	Realistic planning • Perseverance • Learning how to be responsibly independent
Optimism	Developing more positive ways of thinking • Learning how to see the positive or hopeful sides of situations they see as negative



# Different Temperaments

Activity Level

Distraction

Intensity

Regularity

Approach/  
Withdrawal

Sensitivity

Adaptability

Persistence

Mood



# How Parents Build Resiliency in Children

- Parents cannot give their children resiliency, but parenting does have a major impact on resiliency in five different areas:
  - The parent-child relationship
  - Parent-child communication
  - Positive discipline
  - Optimistic thinking
  - Dealing with stress







# Parent-Child Relationship



- Be aware of little opportunities to connect
- Schedule special time with individual children where the two of you do something you enjoy together
- Remember to enjoy your kids at all ages and stages. As children grow, we expect more of them and we become more critical
  - There's a danger of focusing only on their faults, or behaviours we'd like to see improve
  - It's important to notice children's good qualities, to find humour in the odd and funny things they do, and to show interest in the things that interest them



# Good Communication

- Talking

- Have regular conversations
- Ask for their ideas and opinions

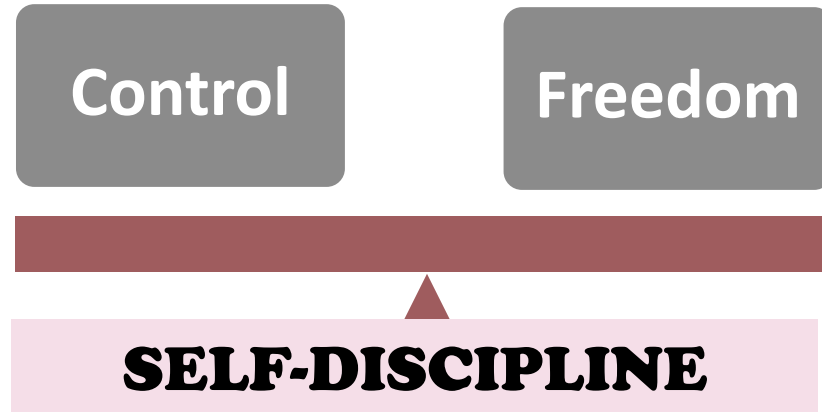
- Listening

- Give full attention
- Respect
  - Feelings
    - Teach feeling words and coach in-vivo
  - Voice
- Encourage respectful assertiveness





# Positive Discipline



- Authoritative Parenting

- Use positive discipline to help children learn and understand the impacts (both good and bad) of their behaviours, actions and choices.
- They set reasonable limits, tell and show what behaviour is expected (not just what kids shouldn't do) and use fair consequences, rather than harsh punishments.
- Authoritative parents also allow children some freedom, with guidance, and are willing to negotiate and consider their children's ideas and wishes.



# Positive Discipline

- Learning to Make Independent Decisions

- There's a connection between authoritative parenting, self-discipline and resiliency.
- Being able to make responsible, independent decisions is a crucial part of the competence that builds children's resiliency.
- Children can only learn to make good decisions with lots and lots of practice. So it's important that we allow them to make choices, and even mistakes, that are appropriate for their age.

- Learning to Solve Problems Independently

- Let kids experience the discomfort of having a problem and let them work through it and develop their own-problem solving skills





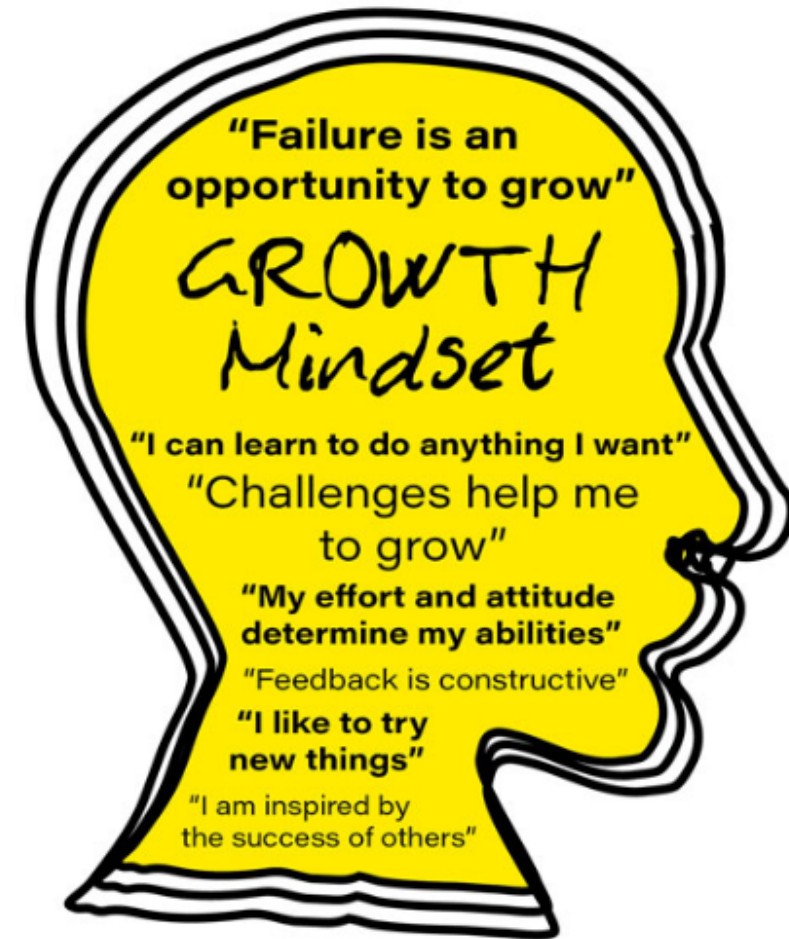
# Positive Discipline

- Kids need failure to thrive
- Cannot have resiliency without adversity

**LET KIDS FAIL!**

- Natural consequences are powerful reinforcers

When kids avoid risk, they internalize the message that they aren't strong enough to handle challenges. When kids embrace risks, they learn to push themselves.





# Teaching Optimistic Thinking

- Optimists generally see bad situations and feelings as temporary – things are tough right now, but they’ll get better – and see the hopeful side of negative situations
- Optimists don’t take failure personally and are less likely to blame or have negative thoughts about themselves when things go wrong

1. Challenge Negative Thoughts (gently)
2. Show Children a More Positive View
3. Model Optimistic Thinking





# Helping Children Deal with Stress

- A certain amount of (moderate) stress is normal and good for us!
- Stress becomes a problem when children experience very high, ongoing levels of stress, or when they don't get the support they need from adults to help them deal with it
- Stress can sometimes cause children to be irritable, cry, become angry more easily than usual, or even to complain of tummy pains or headaches
- Sources of Stress for Children
  - Big changes in their lives – moving to a new home, starting school or daycare
  - Ongoing conflict within the family
  - Schedules that are too busy
  - Problems with school work
  - Social problems – being teased, bullied, feeling different or left out by peers, friends or teammates
  - Feeling unliked or unloved by parents, family members or other caregivers



# Helping Children Deal with Stress

- Make sure both you and your child gets enough rest, a proper diet and exercise
- Listen and talk to children about how they feel and show acceptance for their feelings.
- Help children identify the problem that is causing the stress and understand how big the problem is.
- Assist your children in discovering activities or strategies that help them feel better when they are stressed.
- Ensure that children's lives are not too busy.
- Unstructured play and other enjoyable activities help children deal with their stress.
- Teach children to take slow, deep breaths in stressful moments.

**THE STRESS WON'T LAST FOREVER!**



# School Resiliency

= A set of behaviours and attributes that have a big impact on how effectively children are able to work and learn at school.

## Communication Skills

allow children to pay attention, understand information, ask questions and learn from others. Includes:

- basic English, French, or other native language skills
- speech, hearing and listening abilities
- non-verbal communication skills (reading facial expressions, body language, tone of voice)

## School Social Skills

enable children to get along with others and feel comfortable at school. Includes:

- a sense of belonging at school
- willingness and ability to interact with peers and teachers
- ability to get along with others
- age appropriate emotional skills

## Learning Skills

enable children to participate in and benefit from learning activities at school. Includes:

- academic ability (intelligences)
- motivation to work
- child's active participation in her own learning
- ability to concentrate and solve problems

## School Self-Esteem

helps children want to succeed, feel able to succeed and feel comfortable at school. Includes:

- child's inner view of his own ability
- parents' support of school learning and activities
- support and encouragement the child gets from teachers





# Resiliency for Parents

Relationships	Parents can rely on relationships with friends and loved ones for... • emotional support • sharing the ups and downs of family life • help and advice • good times that help us enjoy being parents
Emotional Skills	We can use our experience, knowledge and understanding of emotions to... • control our anger, frustration and alarm when we need to • calm ourselves and help ourselves feel better • remind ourselves that bad feelings are temporary • avoid making bad decisions when we are upset
Competence	We can use our thinking ability and various life skills we've developed to... • understand and solve problems • find information and answers to our questions about parenting • control the parts of our lives that we can control • learn to live with and adapt to the things we can't control
Optimism	Optimistic thinking can help us... • see the rays of hope in difficult situations • find ways to help ourselves when faced with parenting challenges • make the most of our good times



# Key Tips for Parents

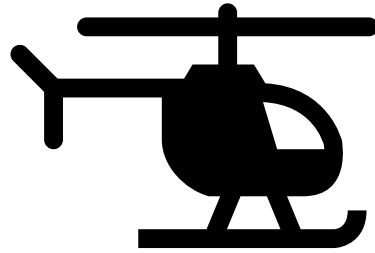
- Take care of yourself so you are at your best
- Unconditional love and support
- Model resiliency
  - When you experience adversity
  - When you are wrong, make a mistake
- Identify and label emotions and normalize them
- Reward effort, not outcome
  - But call losing "losing!" –and celebrate the winners
- Solve problems openly (model) and let kids solve their own problems
  - Ask questions instead of lecture
  - Brainstorm and weigh pros and cons



# Key Tips for Parents

- Do not be a Helicopter Parent or Lawnmower Parent

- Fear of consequences
- Protection (e.g. anxiety)
- Overcompensation
- Peer pressure



Failure and challenges teach kids new skills, and, most important, teach kids that they can handle failure and challenges.

- Let kids fail – and take the fear out of failure

**Adversity** → **Resiliency**

- Do not overindulge your children

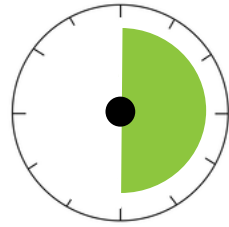
➤ Entitlement



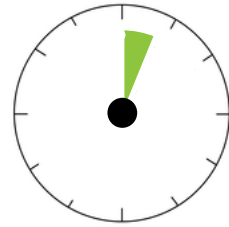
# Social Media and Mental Health



Teens



Age 8-12



Age 0-8

- Link between screen time and behaviour problems (chicken and egg)
- Teens
  - FOMO
  - Highlight reel
  - Bullying and online harassment (herd mentality)





# Effects

“Daily overuse of media and technology has a negative effect on the health of all children, preteens, and teenagers by making them more prone to **anxiety, depression**, and other psychological disorders, as well as making them more susceptible to **future health problems.**”

“The effects of cyberbullying can be profound including **depression, anxiety, isolation** and in some cases **suicide.**”

“Researchers have proposed a new phenomenon called **“Facebook depression,”** defined as depression that develops when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression.”

“Heavy social media users are almost **three times more likely to be depressed** than occasional users.”

“21% of teen social media users report feeling worse about their own life because of what they see from other friends on social media”

“Teens who are on social media for more than two hours a day.... report **poor self-rated mental health, psychological distress, suicidal ideation or unmet need for mental health support.**”





## More Effects

- Addiction – similar to substance dependencies in brain studies
- Lower attention span
- Productivity – interruption occurs every 10.5 minutes
- Sleep
  - Children need 10-11 hours of sleep per night
- For children and youth with mental health concerns, getting enough sleep can mean:
  - less aggression
  - less hyperactivity
  - less depression and anxiety
  - better concentration



# What Parents Can Do

- Pay close attention to how much time is spent on social media (and online in general)
- Help them deal with online adversity! There is lots!
- Is your child a (cyber)bully?
- Help and encourage kids develop organizational and on-task skills
- Make sure they get enough sleep!



Questions?

