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## **HOW RESILIENT ARE OUR KIDS?**

A sixteen year old said to me recently, "I have never been on a bus in my life and I wouldn't know how to get into the city using this form of transport, and if I did, I'd be scared." What is the world coming to I thought? Are young people not as resilient as they used to be? I got to thinking, maybe they are not, simply because we have wrapped many of them in cotton wool or in bubble-wrap, its equivalent. Large percentages of children are dropped off at school by parents which is possibly another sign of the lack of independence and resilience some of our kids are demonstrating.

Each generation is different and is a product of its times. The following indicators give some insight as to why many youngsters don't seem to be able to bounce back when faced with life's inevitable hardships:

- Large numbers of adults suffer from depression and are treated for it medically
- Increasing numbers of young people are taking medication for psychological illnesses
- Bullying in its traditional form and in its new electronic texting forms seem to be more unsettling for young people
- Optimism is not automatically part of most young people's outlook
  
- News sources are becoming more dramatic, revealing the sufferings of people in negative situations.

It needs to be stated and stated loudly that human nature has not changed in this modern world of ours but maybe its coping mechanisms have.

How resilient individuals happen to be is not simply a product of their genes, it has more to do with their attitudes and emotional responses to life situations. If one accepts this as true then young people can be taught how to be resilient in the face of what life dishes up. We teach them to read, to write, to drive, to relate properly to others and the list goes on – why not teach them how to be resilient?

Psychology over the last two generations has given people a range of tools which enable them, if they want to use them, to take greater control of their lives and not let the world's negativity dominate how they behave and react to others.

Positive psychology is a growing movement which concentrates more on mental health, rather than mental illness. If people feel lonely, lost and empty, it is possible to enable them to regain a state of happiness rather than to remain in negative space.

Easy access to drugs, family breakups, terrorism, bullying, low behaviour boundaries, unrealistic expectations, all can gang up on young people who do not have the coping mechanisms many adults have created for themselves.

We can inoculate our kids into becoming resilient if we build cultures in schools and families that support them during the vulnerabilities experienced while growing up. We are all fragile in some shape or form and young people are no exception. However, these types of actions help build resilience:

- Encouraging friendships
- Ensuring family culture and school culture enables youngsters to connect with significant adults
- Actively teaching how to positively manage one's emotions
- Teaching how to develop positive attitudes, social skills, effective communication skills, self knowledge, self confidence, resourcefulness, flexibility, and how to think.
- Teaching about the importance of delaying gratification for long term personal gain.

There seems to be a strong connection between resilience and having religious beliefs and spiritual values, in other words, having some reason for living and being. Connected to this is community connectedness which is given expression by some form of service to others.

The alienation too many young people experience doesn't have to be. If the adults in a young person's life seek to engage them and take them seriously adults can easily pass on the skills and knowledge they have accumulated over their years of life experience. If this happens, young people might not be as sad as many seem to be. They often have plenty of material goods but lack fortitude and are without the skills to quickly bounce back from some of the nasties life inevitably dishes up.

Both teachers and families need to work on building resilience in their young people by sharing their experiences of facing hardship. In the process each group will gain support from the other with our young people being the major beneficiaries.

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March, 2005