

# Creating Resilient Families

## for children with special needs

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is defined as **“the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress.”** It’s about how you handle negative feelings and move forward in a healthy, positive manner. It is important to remember that resilience is something that is developed over time through thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Children with special needs and their families experience greater stress and need help building their resiliency.

Paula Davis-Laack, an internationally-published writer and a stress and resilience expert, authored “Seven Strategies for Building Your Family’s Resilience.” These steps include:

- 1 “Shut Down Catastrophic Thinking.”**  
This downward-spiral style of thinking invites panic, anxiety, and overwhelming stress that it may feel impossible to take action. Working to avoid this kind of thinking will help you stay calm and rational, even in the toughest of situations.
- 2 “Create a Strengths Family Tree.”**  
Take an opportunity to discuss and highlight what each family member does well. Take the VIA Inventory of Strengths at [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org), or for kids, take the test at [AuthenticHappiness.org](http://AuthenticHappiness.org). And when a stressful situation arises, have a discussion about how you can each use your respective strengths to come to a collaborative solution.
- 3 “Grab the Good Stuff.”**  
Practice optimism -- really practice it. Talk about daily highlights before going to bed. Studies show that making this activity a habit can lead to higher levels of happiness and optimism.
- 4 “Encourage Positive Risks and Discuss Lessons Learned From Failing.”**  
Mistakes happen to everyone, and they should be treated as learning experiences. Fear of failure may lead to fear of trying at all, which may inhibit you or your child from reaching for goals.
- 5 “Rejuvenate Regularly.”**  
When schedules get overloaded, it may be tempting to skimp on sleep or a meal every once in a while. But it’s crucial to remember that you can’t take care of anyone else if you aren’t taking care of yourself first. Personal health and wellbeing are crucial to fostering resilience.
- 6 “Be There For Each Other When Things Go Right.”**  
When good news arrives, your response can play a big role in shaping interactions with your family members. Focusing on the positive and celebrating those moments can strengthen family bonds and lay a foundation of optimism.
- 7 “Allow Family Members to Replicate Success.”**  
For example, instead of saying “Great job on that test, you’re so smart!” try, “You really got a head start on the material for that test, and studied so hard! I’m so impressed!” The latter gears praise towards the effort put in, which is in your child’s control, rather than the result achieved, which may be less so.

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