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RESILIENCE

THE BIOLOGY OF STRESS & THE SCIENCE OF HOPE

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The Facilitator's Guide to *Resilience*

A discussion guide to accompany screenings of the documentary film





The child may not remember.

But the body remembers.

Researchers have recently discovered a dangerous biological syndrome caused by abuse and neglect during childhood. As the new documentary *Resilience* reveals, TOXIC STRESS can trigger hormones that wreak havoc on the brains and bodies of children, putting them at a greater risk for disease, homelessness, prison time and early death. While the broader impacts of poverty worsen the risk, no segment of society is immune. *Resilience*, however, also chronicles the dawn of a movement that is determined to fight back. Trailblazers in pediatrics, education and social welfare are using cutting-edge science and field-tested therapies to protect children from the insidious effects of toxic stress—and the dark legacy of a childhood that no child would choose.

-Synopsis from KPJR Films

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Introduction: What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to thrive, adapt and cope despite tough and stressful times. Resilience is a natural counter-weight to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The more resilient a child is, the more likely they are to deal with negative situations in a healthy way that won't have prolonged and unfavorable outcomes. Resilience is not an innate characteristic, but rather is a skill that can be taught, learned and practiced. Everybody has the ability to become resilient when surrounded by the right environments and people.

Toxic stress is a chronic activation of a physiologic response to stressors when there is no buffering protection, or support. The ACE studies and subsequent related research quantified the physiological effects of stress and suffering, but spiritual cultures have understood the relation between body and mind for eons and clinicians have observed and documented it for decades. The film *Resilience* contains a wealth of technical information about child development and how developing bodies and brains respond to stress, and offers steps everyone can take to promote resilience in children.

We all have a role to play in promoting the great childhoods that children deserve. As facilitators of discussions around this film, our job is to help ensure that viewers leave knowing how they can promote resilience in their families and communities.

Using this Guide

Many professional ideologies intersect around the concept of promoting well being for children. Prevent Child Abuse America chapters and our local partners are in an ideal position to promote the core message of *Resilience*. We want professionals to feel comfortable discussing the critical messages of *Resilience* with colleagues or peers, in their own language. Our intent is to engage the participants and motivate them to take action on behalf of children, their families and the communities in which they live. In order to accomplish this goal, we will need to appeal to the “heart” and “head” of the audience by leading a discussion that:

- (1) *Speaks to their heart by introducing them to the concepts behind the ACE studies and the life-long impact of exposure to multiple ACEs, and the normalization of ACEs in all of our lives; but then,*
- (2) *Engages their head through a guided discussion about the role they can play in the lives of the children and families they serve professionally and in their communities, encourage others to do so, support community members already playing a role and obtain the tools they need to do so.*

We want to help audience members see how all of the different professions participating in the community initiatives highlighted in the film made a difference. We can note that even when a trauma-informed approach was implemented by one profession, it was successful thanks to strong collaboration with staff from others.

Our goal is to elevate the dialogue to that of how an interconnected population or system, not just any particular teacher, child or family can make a change. If everyone takes a step, like the professionals behind the collaborative in New Haven, then we all move together to create a thriving community. In this guide, you will find specific moments in the film that support important strategies to build resilience and suggested discussion points. Later in this guide, you will find suggested questions to move the discussion toward a call-to-action for your organization or community.

“Resilience does not mean that children ‘get over it.’ It does mean that the caring adults in their lives have a lot of power to buffer, rather than cement, the effects of toxic stress.”

*-Amanda J Moreno, Ph.D.
Erikson Institute*

Before Staffing a Screening

Follow these steps to maximize the viewers' response to *Resilience*:

- (1) View *Resilience* at least one time and learn the name and perspective of each featured professional and community member, as well as the major facilities where the film takes place:



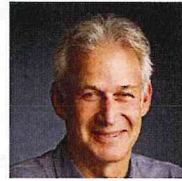
*Rob Anda, MD
CDC*



*Vince Felitti, MD
Kaiser Permanente*



*Nadine Burke Harris
Center for Youth Wellness*



*Jack Shonkoff, MD
Harvard University*



*Victor Carrion, MD
Stanford University*



*Alice Forrester, PhD
Clifford Beers Clinic*



*Laura Lawrence,
Home Visitor*



*Cynthia, Mother
working with Laura*



*Laura Porter
CEO, Ace Interface*



*David Johnson, PhD
Post-Traumatic Stress
Center*



*Susan DeNicola
Strong School*



*"Miss Kendra"
Curriculum
Center*

- (2) Read this discussion guide in its entirety. This guide contains more material than one person could possibly use in a single post-film discussion, but can be valuable for different audiences at different times. While *Resilience* focuses primarily on health care, education and social services, they refer to connections with others such as the private sector, law enforcement, psychology, elected officials and the community at large. Review the materials, then make notes with two or three talking points to introduce the film. The section "Strategies to Build Resilience" has suggested questions; choose those that most resonate with you after viewing the film!
- (3) Learn as much as you can about the audience and choose the most applicable discussion points from this guide, but be prepared to be flexible if the conversation moves to other areas. If you are speaking to an audience outside of your own profession, consider getting a perspective on the ACE studies from a member of that profession before the event. **A panel discussion with members of multiple professions can be most effective!** Sample questions offered in this guide can be posed to panel members as well as an audience. Here are some general discussion questions to help you get started (*Refer to Appendix E for more question ideas*):
 - Now, what does resilience mean to you?
 - From your perspective or profession, what stood out?
 - What do you consider the key strategies in the film?
 - What is one thing you heard or saw that touched you?
 - What one thing surprised you the most?
- (4) Learn about ACEs-related programs in your community and contact them for resource materials. See Appendix A for state specific resources.
- (5) Print copies of the informational postcard containing information for viewers on how to download handouts. Contact Zach Hiner (zhiner@preventchildabuse.org) for more information.
- (6) Decide if you want to ask viewers to complete a post-film survey. Contact Janet Rosenzweig (jrosenzweig@preventchildabuse.org) for more information.

Prepare to Inspire: Create a Call-to-Action

As Laura Porter of ACE Interface says late in the film, “If we can weave the science through these different professions and get it into the hands of the general population, they will invent very wise actions.” Your job as a facilitator is to inspire your audience to follow through and invent these actions. Washington State showed that through a comprehensive approach to educating communities and empowering local leaders to take action, the state experienced reduced rates of childhood trauma and health problems in the next generation.

Here are some questions and activities to help inspire a call-to-action:

- What are you going to do now that you know this information?
- How can you influence the professionals in your field?
- List five people who need to see this film and learn this information. What would it take to arrange that?
- List three things that you will do now that you’ve seen this film...
 - One short term (NOW)
 - One medium term (this month)
 - One longer term (within the year)
- How might we inspire community members to stand up and be an ally for children with high ACE scores?

There are more steps you can take in your community after facilitating discussions of *Resilience!* Join a local or state **ACEs task force** or form one if none exists. You can also work with local prevention partners to develop in-service training for different professionals. **Contact Prevent Child Abuse America** for help taking these next steps.

Sherry Fair

For more discussion question ideas, refer to Appendix E - “Asking Powerful Questions.”



Strategies to Build Resilience

Change begins by building resiliency. When we respond with compassion to those who have experienced trauma and give families the tools they need to raise healthy children from the start, we develop systems that enable people to thrive, adapt and cope despite trauma.

**“It’s not something
you’re born with.
It’s something that
gets built over time.”**
-Dr. Jack Shonkoff (22:30)

In the following sections, you will find more information on the strategies to build resilience or mitigate the effects of ACEs that are mentioned in the film.

Each section includes a brief overview of the strategy, relevant quotes and their timestamps from the film and sample discussion questions that can be used with your audience to dive deeper into these ideas.

STRATEGY: Defining resilience

The introduction to this guide defines resiliences as the ability to thrive, adapt and cope despite tough and stressful times. How does a child build resilience? The presence of a caring, stable adult and being raised in a safe, stable and nurturing environment are two critical factors to build resilience.

But learning how to be resilient isn’t just for children – adults can learn these skills as well. Two main approaches that stand out in the film as being most effective *are working with parents directly* (like at the Clifford Beers Clinic) and *intervening early with children who have experienced toxic stress* (as seen at Dr. Burke Harris’ center).

Related Quotes

“We need to do more than give parents information and advice: we need to build their capabilities”
- Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Harvard University - 24:00

“By using techniques to allow them [children] to express what their worries are and their stress, to lower their experienced stress, we are going to be able to help them maintain their resilience. And that’s our goal.”
- Dr. David Johnson, Clinical Psychologist, Post Traumatic Stress Center - 36:45

Suggested Discussion Questions

- Can you think of a time when a parent or caretaker exhibited resilience in the face of some really tough times?
- What gives you hope and strength during hard times?
- What strategies or methods are helpful to build resilience in your everyday life when facing adversity?

STRATEGY: Change the discussion from “what’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?”

Neuroscience teaches us that the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins prenatally and continues into our twenties. While ACEs undermine this development and negatively affect the foundation of the brain, resilience can help repair these structural problems and allow a person to “bounce back” from the trauma or adversity they had experienced.

Knowing what we do about ACEs and brain architecture, we must work to change the conversation when a child is acting out from “what’s wrong with you” to “what happened to you and how can we help fix it.” For children, the presence of compassionate teachers, caring coaches, or other adult mentors can help build resilience. Adults dealing with other adults affected by ACEs need to show empathy in their interactions. These approaches can teach both children and adults how to behave empathetically as an instinct and create the compassion necessary to change this conversation.

Related Quotes

“I could not make a diagnosis of ADHD because a lot of the kids I was seeing had so many traumatic experiences in their life.”

- Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Center for Youth Wellness - 15:00

“Exposure to early adversity and trauma literally affects the structure and function of children’s developing brains.”

-Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Center for Youth Wellness - 18:09

“An ACE score of 4 or more makes children 32 times as likely to have problems in school.”

-Dr. Nadine Burke Harris (16:50)

Suggested Discussion Questions

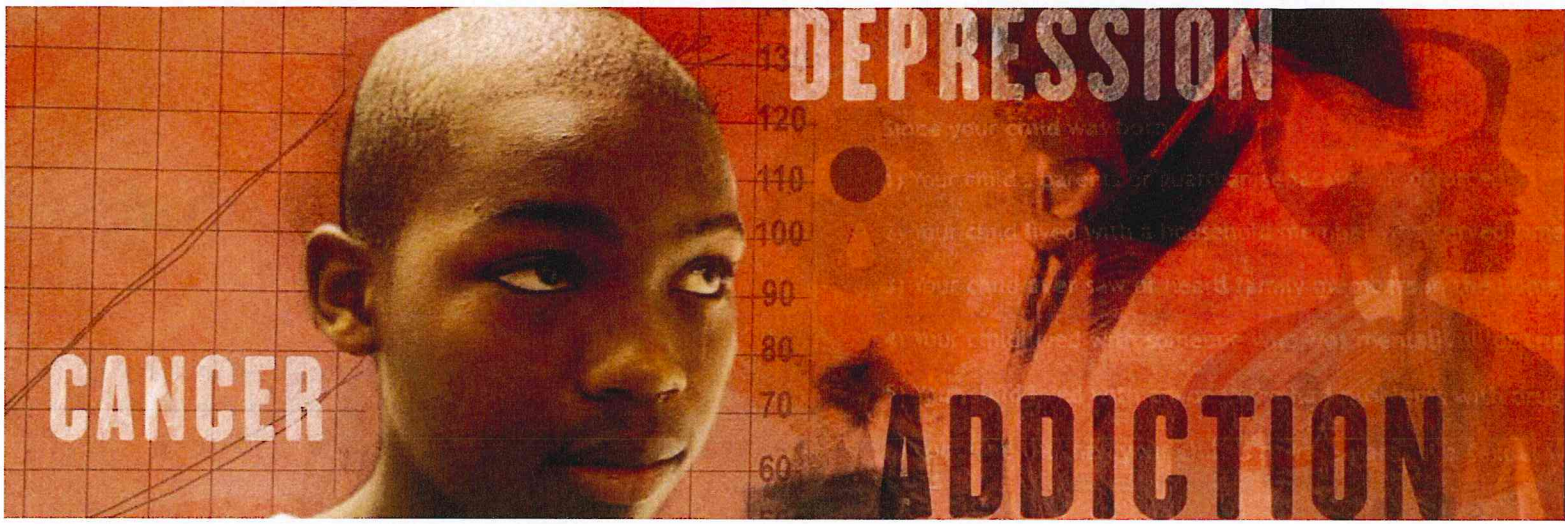
- Based on what you learned in this film, what are your thoughts about zero-tolerance policies for “bad behavior” in schools or youth-serving organizations?
- How can we help children who have been exposed to trauma?
- What are some examples of situations where you could have asked “what happened” instead?
- What would you do differently after seeing *Resilience*?

TEACHABLE MOMENT: The ‘Miss Kendra’ curriculum



Miss Kendra teaches children that trauma is not the norm and that grown-ups do care about what is going on in their lives.

Non-educators can use this tool too! Show the children in your life that you care and there to listen and help. If a child discloses abuse, contact local authorities immediately.



1 STRATEGY: Recognize toxic stress as the largest public health issue of our generation.

We know that ACEs can have long-term effects on the utilization of our healthcare system. By making an effort today to equip our children and families with the tools they need to overcome ACEs, we can cut down on the costs that future generations will have to bear. Eliminating toxic stress among children would have a profound impact on the health and well being of individuals and entire populations.

Related Quotes

“When you look at ACEs they’re actually a stronger predictor of heart disease than any of the traditional risk factors...and yet I was never trained on this in one day in Medical School.”

- Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Center on Youth Wellness - 11:00

“We coined the term toxic stress to try to explain to people how there is stress and there’s **stress**. Unfortunately, over the years a lot of people have misused the term... toxic stress is this chronic activation of stressors with no buffering protection, no support.”

- Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Harvard University - 20:45

“If all day long you feel like a truck is coming at you, day after day after day, that’s going to take a toll on the body.”

- Dr. Victor Carrion, Stanford University - 17:30

Suggested Discussion Questions

- What is a health or social issue you noticed in the film that you were surprised tied back to ACEs and other toxic stressors?
 - What are some of the responses in this film that might help you address those issues?
- How can you spread the word about toxic stress in your personal and professional life?

STRATEGY: Build critical collaborations

We know that the consequences of ACEs cut across professional disciplines, personal relationships and all socioeconomic demographics. In each of the trauma-informed agencies and disciplines shown in the film (for example, the Centers for Youth Wellness, Clifford Beers Clinic and Strong Elementary School), multiple disciplines were collaborating.

Our work to build resiliency can't be concentrated on an "at-risk" population, but we instead need to consider the entire population at-risk. To implement such a universal approach, **we need to form connections** between entities like the Department of Public Health, local universities and local schools, health care, law enforcement and the faith-based communities to affect the kinds of change necessary to build the skills of resilience on a scale larger than the individual. Proof of this can be found in Washington state, where through a coordinated, community approach, many indicators of child and family well being improved!

Screenings of films like *Resilience* and *Paper Tigers* offer an excellent tool for helping people from multiple professionals connect around building resilient children, families and communities.

“Faith and hope are fundamental aspects of resilience, for as you think you are, so you are!”

*-Rev. Dr. Darrell Armstrong
Pastor, Shiloh Baptist Church*

Related Quotes

“We tend to divide the world of mental health separate from the world of physical health, but the body doesn't do that.”

- Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Center for Youth Wellness - 16:11

“If [people] already know that these [ACEs] are common, they are more likely to be relieved, I think, than frightened...they don't feel alone anymore. That ‘I'm not the only one that experienced these kinds of things.’”

- Dr. Robert Anda, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - 49:14

Suggested Discussion Questions

- What are some examples of how our community is coming together? Are there other professional groups with whom you could connect?
- The potential cost savings may appeal to the business sector; what other lessons from the film would resonate with various audiences, e.g. the faith community, law enforcement and others?

TEACHABLE MOMENT: Cooperating with connections to build resilience



In *Resilience*, every agency we meet has people from multiple disciplines who work together, such as at Strong Elementary.

Bringing together diverse stakeholders from the community - including businesses, social service agencies and government - will have a stronger impact than if one group tries to go it alone.



STRATEGY: Promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships & environments

The presence of caring adults and stable environments are a necessary component for a child’s healthy development and for building resilience. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships between children and their parents or caregivers act as a buffer against the effects of toxic stress and other ACEs. In fact, **research is now showing that the presence of supportive relationships is more critical than the absence of ACEs in promoting well-being.**

If parents are struggling, other adults – like teachers or coaches – can be present to provide the safe, stable, nurturing relationships that a child needs. We can also invest in supports and promote policies that strengthen families and set them up for future success.

Related Quotes

“Scientific research points to the presence of a stable, caring adult in a child’s life as the key to building the skills of resilience.”

- Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Harvard University - 23:26

“I think that one thing adults fail to do for children is recognize that kids have stress because our stress seems so much more important.”

- Charles Warner, Support Staff, Strong Elementary - 34:10

Suggested Discussion Questions

- What can we do if a child we know needs our support; such as one of our child’s friends?
- What other supports or resources can we provide to build resilience in children and strengthen families?

5 STRATEGY: Prevent intergenerational transmission of toxic stress

To create good outcomes for children we need to support adults. *Resilience* makes very clear the intergenerational effects associated with ACEs and trauma. What a parent teaches their children will get passed on to their children's children. A good example of dealing with intergenerational effects is the Clifford Beers Clinic, which works with both parents and children in order build the adult's capabilities so they can better support their children.

Cynthia, the woman who is having difficulty ending an abusive relationship, is working with a home visitor – another domestic violence survivor – to try and break the cycle for her daughter. But developing resilience also has intergenerational benefits, and as Cynthia demonstrates the resilience she learns through her home visits, her daughter will respond to these lessons as well.

Related Quotes

“The sad thing is a lot of our students think that what they are going through is normal, this is their normal. If no one has given them anything to think otherwise, I think that is where the cycle just keeps going and going.”

- Cynthia Manfold, Kindergarten Teacher - 39:05

“One day, some of them will be coming here as clients. Why are we waiting for them to fall apart? We need to be where the kids are.”

- Dr. David Johnson, Clinical Psychologist, Post-Traumatic Stress Center - 35:35

“We need a two generation approach recognizing that the child is experiencing ACEs now and the parent likely experienced ACEs during their own early years.”

-Angelo P. Giardino, M.D., Ph.D.
Texas Children's Hospital

“If we want to produce dramatic impacts on the outcomes for kids experiencing toxic stress, we have to transform the lives of the adults who are taking care of them.”

- Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Harvard University - 23:26

Suggested Discussion Questions

- How do we let people know that all parents need help sometimes and it's okay to ask for help?
- How do we ensure that community members offer help or support even when parents don't ask, but obviously need it?

TEACHABLE MOMENT: Parents need support, too!



When Cynthia is having a bad day, she asks her home visitor to “stay with me.”

Our efforts cannot focus on children alone. Efforts like home visiting will be much more successful when they work with both parents and children; building the skills of resilience in both and helping to break cycle of ACEs.



STRATEGY: Promote hope

One great takeaway from *Resilience* is that there is always hope!

Science shows the effects of ACEs are not permanent. Lessons like those in the Miss Kendra curriculum teach children that misfortune isn't normal and that others care about what happens to them and want to help. Teachers report being profoundly moved when they see the impact this curriculum has on children. Trained home visitors can help parents create the kind of stable, nurturing environment critical for healthy development while overcoming their own trauma.

“It’s therapeutic to be reminded that a high ACE score is nothing to be ashamed of!”

*- Laura Delman
Creative Director/Founder*

These kind of responses are examples of how different disciplines, agencies and people can come together and make a difference like that made in Washington state.

Related Quotes

“We need to put to bed forever the sense that children who are born under disadvantaged circumstances are doomed to poor life outcomes. Science is saying that is not true.”

- Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Harvard University - 19:33

Suggested Discussion Questions

- How can your community emulate the different approaches shown in *Resilience*?
- What are the programs and policies your community is already supporting to build resilience?
- What are barriers to implementing these strategies in your community? How can you help get around them?

