

# learning links



Helping Kids Learn

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Information Sheet 23

## Raising resilient children

How to teach your child to buckle up and enjoy the thrill of life's rollercoaster ride!

By Janine Zimbler, Family Therapist

**The greatest challenge for parents in our world today is to raise children who are 'non-stick' or as Andrew Fuller describes in his book *From Surviving to Thriving*, 'teflon coated'.**

Non-stick children are those who can cope with the 'rough and tumble' of home, school and relationships and are able to carry this ability through to their teenage and adult years. They are children prepared for and capable of transcending all the difficulties, uncertainties and insecurities that life will bring their way.

Resilience is the term used today to describe the protective factors that children who are mentally healthy have.

Resilient children have a positive sense of self and their place in the world. They are children who can stand up for themselves and bounce back when facing a difficult, hurtful or disappointing situation.

Resilient children feel safe enough to make mistakes and try again. They are also children who are predominantly happy and joyful, interested in and curious about the world and generally hopeful and positive about the future.

In the past, many parents have focussed their energies largely on helping their children achieve successful outcomes measured in academic, sporting or social terms.

In today's climate of growing rates of relationship breakdown, depression and suicide, substance abuse, high school drop out rates, high youth unemployment, delinquency, bullying and violence, many parents are rethinking their primary parenting task.

The new focus is shifting to the need to raise resilient children who will have the skills to be happy and successful regardless of the ever-changing context of their lives.

### Foundation Stones

Love is the most powerful protective factor that parents can give their children.

Children only need one person whom they feel loves and believes in them for insulation. Where possible, however, children need to feel loved by all parents, siblings and extended family members. It is not enough for children just to hear that they are loved or to have love demonstrated in material terms. Children need to be constantly comforted by messages that their family members like and value them as a person regardless of their physical attributes, achievements or failures.

For parents the aim is to work towards building a unique relationship with each child – a relationship which allows parents to enter the inner world of each child, try to connect with it and tune in to the child's feelings.

Building this kind of relationship takes work. It involves lots of hugs and quiet chats; lots of time spent together talking, debating or just doing 'things' together, lots of laughter and fun; lots of celebrations and support at critical times.

The kind of love that energises resilience is in the messages of every interaction.

These are messages that emphasise that all human beings are quite different from each other and are loved for these differences. They are messages that

stress that everybody has their strengths and imperfections and needs to laugh at their foibles.

They are messages that remind that everybody often tries and fails many times before they reach a goal. They are messages that give a child permission to express pain, hurt and anger.

This powerful love coaches and teaches rather than punishes and puts down. It rewards effort and 'having a go' rather than just winning. It encourages children to praise themselves and attribute their successes to their own efforts, not just to good luck and good fortune. Initiative, courage, tenacity are qualities revered.

### Self Esteem

Good self-esteem is an essential ingredient for resilience. Every child needs to have his or her special talent, ability or gift in this world recognised and fostered, and be given opportunities to shine. If this cannot occur at school, children can be enrolled in extra curricular activities or groups.

All children also need to be allowed to live a part of their life that is exclusively theirs – untouched by the shadow or star of any other member of their family.

### Social Skills

To be resilient, children need to have good social skills and parents can easily help coach this area.

Some children find it hard to understand that other people have feelings and emotions and parents can teach their children to interpret the emotional intentions and behaviour of others and the core values of sharing, caring

EMBRACING THE DREAMS OF FAMILIES FOR THEIR CHILDREN

**Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.**

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

**Early Childhood Services** for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

**School Age Services** for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

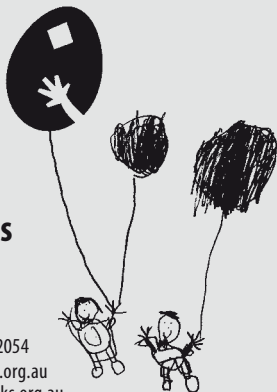
**Family Services** helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

**Professional Development** for teachers and health professionals.

Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

**Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.**



## Learning Links

### Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road  
Peakhurst NSW 2210  
Tel: 9534 1710 Fax: 9584 2054  
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au  
Website: www.learninglinks.org.au

Enquiries regarding this Information Sheet should be directed to Robyn Collins  
Tel: (02) 9534 1710 Fax: (02) 9584 2054 Email: rcollins@learninglinks.org.au

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and saying sorry when interacting with others.

Parents can help children develop a vocabulary of emotions and encourage them to use it to express feelings.

This sets up a 'context' or way in which feelings can be acknowledged and shared. Children with language difficulties for instance can be shown pictures of emotions to identify feelings if necessary.

The best way to learn how to interact in socially appropriate ways is to have good role models and lots of practice!

Parents can assist by inviting school friends over to play or to birthday parties. They can also take children to public places and social events.

Parents can help children who find making friends difficult by taking the initiative and inviting other families over or enrolling children in group activities.

Resolving conflict in acceptable ways is probably one of the more important skills children need to learn from their parents. Parents can also model ways of calming themselves down in a positive way so that their children can learn skills to settle themselves down when feeling frustrated, angry or distressed.

## Building Blocks

Belonging and connecting are other important building blocks of resilience.

Parents need to work towards maximising their child's level of connection to each of his or her family members. This is especially important in situations of divorce and custodial planning where children can often feel that they do not belong to any family or are not connected to anybody.

Children with special needs often feel left out of the mainstream of family relationships.

Other than in situations where it is not in the child's best interest to spend time with certain family members or where there may be safety issues at stake, parents can set up situations where connections with family members can be forged. Mother and daughter days, sleepovers at granny and grandpa, brothers' trips to the movies, cousins-only days etc should be encouraged.

Children also need to develop a strong sense of connection to their school.

To foster this, parents can establish contact with schoolteachers, attend excursions whenever possible and generally involve the family and the child in the life of the school. Parents should also give their children positive messages about teachers and the school. By doing this, they are giving their child permission to establish connections.

Encouraging participation in school activities fosters a sense of belonging.

As children often spend more time with their teachers (especially in infants and primary school) than with their parents in the 'waking hours', a teacher can actually become the child's social parent. The more parents support and reinforce their teacher's role in relation to their child, the better the outcome for the child.

Outside their school, it is also good for children to develop a strong sense of belonging to their community. This can be achieved initially by encouraging children to participate in local sport and recreational clubs and in community events.

Finally, children need to be connected to a something greater than themselves.

Whether this connection is to something spiritual, cultural or to a cause is of no importance. What is imperative is for a child to be enabled to view his or her own life and issues in perspective and relative to the world around them.

## Capping it off

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly parents can build up a child's resilience simply by setting an example.

Having fun – that zany dance in the kitchen to your favourite tune, picking yourself up and dusting yourself off after a disaster, getting over a crisis – how parents respond to their own life events are truly a child's greatest lesson.

*There is a bibliography available for this article as well as a number of books in our library for our members to borrow.*

## How Learning Links can help

Learning Links offers a variety of programs to enhance parents' relationships with their children and foster children's social and emotional development:

- Positive Parenting (Triple P) Program
- Raising Difficult Children Workshops
- Sibshops for brothers and sisters of children with special needs
- Social skills workshops for school age children and preschoolers
- FRIENDS Program to help increase a child's emotional resilience



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**Early Childhood Services**  
– all enquiries to Head Office

**School Age Services**  
– contact your local branch

**Family Services**  
– contact your local branch

**All other enquiries**  
– Head Office

**Head Office**  
12-14 Pindari Road  
Peakhurst NSW 2210  
Telephone: (02) 9534 1710  
Preschool: (02) 9533 3283  
Facsimile: (02) 9584 2054  
Email: [mail@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:mail@learninglinks.org.au)

**Northern Suburbs Branch**  
2 Alfred Road  
PO Box 634  
Brookvale NSW 2100  
Telephone: (02) 9907 4222  
Facsimile: (02) 9907 4244  
Email: [nsb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:nsb@learninglinks.org.au)

**Western Suburbs Branch**  
Unit 7/9 William Street  
PO Box 1026  
Fairfield NSW 1860 (2165)  
Telephone: (02) 9754 2377  
Facsimile: (02) 9755 9422  
Email: [wsb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:wsb@learninglinks.org.au)

**Southern Suburbs Branch**  
10 Railway Parade  
Penshurst NSW 2222  
Telephone: (02) 9580 4888  
Facsimile: (02) 9580 4788  
Email: [ssb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:ssb@learninglinks.org.au)

**South West Sydney Branch**  
88 Shropshire Street  
PO Box 42  
Miller NSW 2168  
Telephone: (02) 8783 7111  
Facsimile: (02) 8783 7222  
Email: [sws@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:sws@learninglinks.org.au)

**Eastern Suburbs Branch**  
1/20 Silver Street  
Randwick NSW 2032  
Telephone: (02) 9398 5188  
Facsimile: (02) 9326 5364  
Email: [esb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:esb@learninglinks.org.au)

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- I would like to be a member of Learning Links. *Please tick appropriate box below.*
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