



From the Playroom

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Developing resiliency in children

Welcome to spring! We love to see signs of the season – daffodils, children coming to school in shorts, baseball, jump ropes, and frisbees. All around us are signs of new growth and strength. This issue of *From the Playroom* continues to focus on the October conference theme of *Relationships, Relevancy and Resiliency*. With this spring edition, we turn the spotlight on the topic of resiliency.

While resiliency can be found in all children, military-connected children are especially resilient. They are no strangers to adjusting to new schools environments. While most children embrace this opportunity and adjust to new friends, classrooms, and communities with ease and strength, other children have more difficulty settling in. Dr. (Lt. Col.) Keith Lemmon from Madigan Army Medical Center Department of Pediatrics is quoted as saying, “Military children are resilient, there’s no doubt about it, but they’re not invulnerable.” It’s important to remember that each child is different, and will deal with the transitions in various ways.

Enjoy reading about Primary Project (Primary School Adjustment Program) at Pearl Harbor Kia Elementary in Hawaii and Black River Elementary in New York. Both schools serve a large number of children in military families and know just how important resiliency is to school adjustment.

Resiliency is a critical skill for all children to develop. It requires support from caring adults, which is why Primary Project is a natural fit to helping build resiliency, coping, and positive adjustment skills all necessary to successfully navigate change.

Understanding Resiliency

Daffodils are rather resilient, don't you think? As I was coming in from walking the dog yesterday afternoon, I noticed the tips of daffodils that were breaking through the long-frozen ground of Rochester. I am constantly amazed at their hardiness to reappear each spring.

Their strength reminds me of Gabby Giffords. Most of us are aware of her story: the congresswoman shot by a lone gunman one sunny day in Phoenix, Arizona. The medical community worked tirelessly to save her life, but it was Gabby, her fortitude, and the emotional support around her that has brought her to this point in her recovery. I would say Gabby is pretty resilient, wouldn't you? She has moved forward one step at a time, literally and figuratively, to where she is today. While there are many stories of dramatic resiliency, every day there are less dramatic, but no less important, stories of resilience happening to ordinary people like you and me.

Life is full of changes, challenges and adversity, and young children are not immune from these experiences. Small changes and challenges can begin early in the lives of young children, and while some adults may not view them as such, they are. Being scared of the dark, getting dropped off at daycare, starting kindergarten, or welcoming a new sibling can all present as difficulties for children. Then there are the BIG challenges – death of a pet, parents divorcing, poverty, changing schools, a mother deployed to war – all situations requiring coping and adapting skills.

How humans respond and adapt to adversity serves as a foundation for moving forward and responding to the new challenges. Let's look at a few definitions and descriptions of resiliency:

“Being able to adapt to life's misfortunes and setbacks.”

–Mayo Clinic

“An ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

–Merriam-Webster Dictionary

or

“That ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever.”

I personally like the last one! Some of the early research regarding resilience was done in Hawaii, on the island of Kauai. Emmy E. Werner and other psychologists wanted to understand how children born on Kauai in 1955 would develop, given the presence of a

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Understanding Resiliency (continued)

multitude of risk factors. What surprised them was that one third of the children deemed to be at high-risk developed into caring, competent, and confident adults despite their problematic developmental histories. Their work also identified a number of *protective factors* which helped to balance out risk factors at critical periods in the development of these resilient individuals.

Here's what we do know: a combination of genetics and environmental factors contributes to how well we adapt and our ability to be resilient. Over the years, the field has identified critical factors which contribute to one's adaptation in the face of difficult circumstances; among them are: a strong bond with a non-parent caretaker, the development of problem solving skills, age appropriate competences, and a sense of empowerment.

It is important to understand that resilience is best understood as a process, not as a personality trait. We develop resilience over time as we interact with the world around us and take on behaviors which promote well-being and protect us against the overwhelming influence of risk factors.

If you believe that Primary Project supports children's resilience, then you're absolutely right! Each week as you spend time playing with a child, you are building a strong relational bond. By giving attention and support, you're helping children discover their world, create new endings to stories, develop problem solving skills, and develop a sense of empowerment using age-appropriate strategies. You are the caring adult, there to support and guide them as they take the lead. Yes, in just 30 minutes a week, the child, through your relationship, is working through the challenge of school transition.



*—Deborah Johnson, Ed.D.
Director of National Services, Children's Institute*

Resiliency and School Adjustment

Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School is located within Pearl Harbor Naval Station's housing area, Hale Moku. Approximately 620 students, ranging from preschool to the sixth grade, attend Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary, one of nine schools in the Radford Complex.

Ninety percent of families live in government quarters of Hale Moku, Hokulani, Ford Island, Catlin Park, Aliamanu Military Reservation, and Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. Military deployment and relocation of families affect all the schools in the Radford Complex. As a result of this concern, the complex initiated a transition program to assist with the influx of new families to the island. Transition Centers are now located in each school to provide support to the students and families as they transition in and out of the school.

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, Pearl Harbor Kai places student achievement as a priority goal Standards within its grade-level curriculum. In addition, the school sustains a rich environment and culture for life-long learners by striving to build partnerships and connections with students, families, and the community. The school continues to provide a secure and supportive learning environment focusing on students' civic responsibilities as well as achieving proficiency on the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards as measured by the Hawaii State Assessment.

Support services are coordinated within the school community and networked with the military and other service providers to support students with identified needs. Through counseling, health services, academic programs, and co-curricular activities, students receive the support needed to achieve the standards and school-wide learner outcomes. Many of the school's "value added" programs that support students and strengthen learning are offered to all students on campus.

The Primary School Adjustment Project has been a value added program on campus since September 2000. It received its first national certification in May 2003 and will be applying for recertification during the 2013-2014 school year, staying true to the Children's Institute model. Over the years, we have found that working with families has ensured the support necessary for all students to reach their aspirations, from early learning through to college, careers, and good citizenship. From the first day of kindergarten to the last day of their senior year, students appear to do better when they come to school ready to learn. Parents, caregivers, extended "ohana" (family), and community can provide crucial support and guidance to help students focus on and enhance their learning. We believe that education is a responsibility shared by all and the best results come when we work together with aloha, respect, integrity, and openness.



—Wesley Wee
Counselor, Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School

Resiliency in Military Family Students

When thinking of resiliency in an elementary school student, many examples of children come to mind. At Black River Elementary School, a kindergarten through fourth grade public school in the Carthage Central School District, more than half of the student body consists of children that are members of a military family. The school is located minutes away from Fort Drum, a US Army base that houses the 10th Mountain Division. The children in these families have an inherent resiliency that can be a necessity when part of a military family.



Many of the children who are members of Fort Drum families attend multiple school buildings throughout their elementary career, some attending multiple buildings within a school year. Resiliency is required in order to successfully transfer from school to school and remain a productive learner. In addition to transferring schools, many military students experience the deployment of one, or in rare cases, two parents. These deployments tend to last anywhere from 9 months upwards of 12 to 15 months. In times of deployment, students are expected to continue to achieve academically, grow socially and emotionally, and cope with the absence of one or both parents from their household. Not only is a parent not present to spend time with, help maintain the household, and support the other remaining parent, but more scary to the child is that their parent is likely in a war zone fighting to protect our country's freedom. It is easy to imagine how emotionally straining this time can be for a military student.

At Black River Elementary, we are able to offer deployment groups with our school social worker, support from our Military and Family Life Consultants, and also the treasured relationship that can be fostered with a Child Associate in Primary Project. With the addition of Primary Project five years ago, we have been able to support a larger percentage of students who may be at-risk of developing challenging behaviors, withdrawal, or academic failure without the intervention. Each year, many of the students that are selected for Primary Project benefit from the opportunity to develop a relationship with the Child Associate, have time to express themselves in a fun, playful atmosphere, and develop skills to help them be successful learners. Primary Project has been a wonderful asset to our existing support system for military students. We strive to continue to support all of our students - including the unique needs of a student in a military family - to help them maintain the level of connectedness to be happy, healthy learners while they attend Black River Elementary.

*—Jodie Delaney, NCSP
Primary Project Supervisor*

Bringing the Lessons Home

Building children's competence

Teaching children to be resilient is an essential part of making sure they have the tools to respond to difficult challenges as they grow into young adults. Pediatrician Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg has identified seven important skills to help build resilience. For *Bringing the Lessons Home*, we are focusing on **competence**. To explore the other six skills, we encourage you to visit www.fosteringresilience.com or check out Dr. Ginsburg's book, *Building resilience in children and teens: Giving kids roots and wings*.

By definition, the term competence means "the ability to do something effectively." In young children, competence is built through everyday life experiences. For example, when a child builds with blocks, he eventually learns that the base needs to have a solid foundation in order to support the rest of the structure. As parents, it is our job to not immediately rush in to show them how to make it work, but to let the child discover this on their own. It is through the struggle of trying that children build competence. Naturally, we can guide, but should avoid "taking over."

We can help develop children's competence by:

- Ensuring that your desire to teach or to protect your child from frustration or challenges doesn't mistakenly send a message that you don't think he or she is capable of handling things
- Empowering children to make decisions leading to discovery
- Recognizing the competencies of siblings individually and avoiding comparisons

Competence is acquired by mastering tasks and facing challenges. As parents, we balance when and how parental involvement helps or hurts. By supporting children's problem solving skills, occasionally "getting out of the way," and offering gentle guidance when necessary, we foster our children's growing sense of independence.

Please feel free to copy this page and share it with Primary Project parents.



Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

Acrecentar la competencia en los niños

Enseñar a los niños a ser fuertes es una parte esencial para asegurarse que ellos tengan las herramientas necesarias para responder a los retos difíciles a medida que se convierten en adultos jóvenes. El pediatra Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg ha identificado siete destrezas importantes para ayudar a los niños a desarrollar resistencia. Para *traer las lecciones al hogar*, estamos centrándonos en la **competencia**. Para explorar las otras seis destrezas, le animamos para que visite a www.fosteringresilience.com o lea el libro de Dr. Ginsburg, *Building resilience in children and teens: Giving kids roots and wings*.

Por su definición, el término competencia significa “la habilidad para hacer algo efectivamente”. En los niños jóvenes, la competencia se desarrolla a través de las experiencias de la vida diaria. Por ejemplo, cuando un niño construye con bloques, eventualmente él aprende que la base tiene que ser sólida para poder sostener el resto de la estructura. Como padres, no es trabajo nuestro el apresurarnos inmediatamente para enseñarles cómo funciona, sino dejar que el niño(a) lo descubra por sí mismo(a). Es a través de la lucha de tratar que el niño(a) desarrolla la competencia. Naturalmente, nosotros podemos guiarle, pero debemos evitar el “hacernos cargo” de la tarea.

Podemos ayudar al niño(a) a acrecentar la competencia:

- Asegurando que su deseo de enseñar o proteger a su niño(a) de la frustración o retos no envíe equivocadamente el mensaje de que usted no le cree capaz de manejar las cosas
- Empoderando a los niños para que tomen decisiones que conduzcan al descubrimiento
- Reconociendo las competencias de los hermanos individualmente y evitando las comparaciones

La competencia se adquiere por el dominio de las tareas y el encararse con los retos. Como padres, nosotros balanceamos cuándo y cómo la participación de los padres ayuda o perjudica. Al apoyar las destrezas de los niños para resolver problemas, ocasionalmente “saliéndose de en medio”, y ofreciendo orientación delicada cuando sea necesario, nosotros fomentamos el creciente sentido de independencia de nuestros niños.

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Congratulations to our newly certified schools:

All Primary Project schools in Florida are certified – Quite impressive!

- Freedom Shores Elementary: Boynton Beach, FL
- Greenacres Elementary: Greenacres, FL
- North Palm Beach Elementary: Palm Beach Gardens, FL

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