



## Making Children Resilient

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#### Definition

Psychological resilience to

- biological
- psychological and
- psycho-social development risks

#### Major studies

- Emmy Werner 1993: Entwicklung zwischen Risiko und Resilienz Kauai-Studie
- Laucht et. al. 2000: Mannheimer Längsschnittstudie

#### Risk factors

Risk factors are defined as conditions which favour disease, increase risks and hinder development and thereby endanger the healthy development of children.

(Holtmann/Schmidt 2004 on the basis of Fröhlich-Gildhoff/Rönnau-Böse 2009 p. 20)

#### Primary vulnerability factors

- Pre-, peri- and post-natal factors
- Neuro-psychological deficits
- Genetic factors
- Chronic illnesses
- Difficult temperament
- Early impulsive behaviour
- Poor ability in the self-regulation of tension and relaxation
- Poor cognitive abilities

#### Social risk factors

- Low social-economic status
- Poverty
- Background of migration coupled with low social-economic status
- Aversive home environment
- Criminality of parents
- Homelessness
- Social isolation of family



- Bullying/rejection by peers
- Frequent changes of school or house moving

#### Risk factors within the family

- Chronic disharmony
- Separation/divorce of parents
- Alcohol/drug abuse of parents
- Psychological disorder or illness in one or both parents
- Chronic illness or long-term serious illness of a parent
- Low educational level of parents
- Absent parent/single parent
- Educational deficits and unfavourable educational practices
- Mother pregnant under the age of 18
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Siblings with handicap or chronic illness
- More than four children

#### Highly problematic risk factors

- Sexual abuse
- Loss of close family members
- Family-related violence towards child
- Violence between parents
- Experiences of war or terror; refugee
- Natural catastrophes

#### Mechanisms of action

- Accumulation of problem fields
- Duration of problems
- Age and development status of child
- Gender-specific aspects
- Subjective evaluation of degree of risk

#### Protective factors

Protective factors are those which prevent or reduce the onset of a psychological disorder or inappropriate development and increase the probability of a positive development.

(Rutter 1990 based on Fröhlich-Gildhoff/Rönnau-Böse 2009, p. 27)



## Protective factors in child 1

### Babies

- Positive temperament
- High impulse levels
- Sociability
- Balanced nature

### Infants

- Independence
- Ability to request help
- Ability to deflect attention from painful experiences instead of focussing on these experiences

## Protective factors in child 2

### School age

- High degree of performance and self-effectiveness
- Children are able to make effective use of their talents
- Children have particular hobby
- Intelligence
- Variety of strategies for reducing stress
- Ability to reflect and plan
- Conviction of being able to exert positive influence on fate or everyday world
- Ability to plan realistically for the future
- Children do not utilise gender stereotypes but are simultaneously self-confident and caring, productive and friendly

## Protective factors within the family

- Opportunity to construct close relationship with at least one person
- Development of fundamental trust at the beginning of life
- Gap of at least two years between first and second child
- Competence of mother in dealing with infants – sensitivity
- Educational level of mother
- Establishment of substitute parents
- Undertaking of care of younger sibling or family members who are ill or handicapped
- For boys: clear structures and rules
- For girls: emphasis on independence coupled with support from a female attachment figure
- Religious belief



## Environmental protective factors

- Children can depend on relatives, friends, neighbours and older persons
- Connections with children from stable families
- Favourite teacher as positive role model
- Teaching staff who are interested in children and provide encouragement
- School can relieve stress in the family home through
  - activities which help the achievement of vital educational and professional aims
  - activities which strengthen the child's self-awareness
  - activities which provide support for other persons in an emergency situation

## Encouragement factors to increase resilience

- Self-perception and perception of others
- Self-regulation and/or self-control
- Self-efficacy
- Social competences
- Coping with stress
- Problem solutions

## Attitudes which strengthen resilience

- Clear, transparent and consistent rules and structures
- Appreciative environment
- Warm-heartedness
- High but reasonable performance standard
- Positive strengthening of the child's performance level and willingness to undertake efforts
- Positive friendly relationships
- Basic competences e.g. politeness
- Collaboration between parental home and other social institutions
- Competent and caring adults within the child's environment
- Existence of pro-social values and norms in society

## Literature

Opp, Fingerle, Freytag (Hrsg.): Was Kinder stärkt. Erziehung zwischen Risiko und Resilienz, München 1999

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