

The Power of Relationships: Strategies to Nurture Resilience in Children and Teens

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To the attendees of the NH Prevention Conference:

I truly enjoyed presenting to such a warm and attentive audience. Thank you. There are several slides that I did not have a chance to show due to time constraints. However, they are included, since I believe the content is clear. The two video clips I showed may be found on YouTube. I also included a few photos that are not restricted by confidentiality or copyright issues.

The power of relationships

The lessons of the Upstream Parable—
a shift early in my career from a
deficit, crisis intervention perspective
to a strength-based, crisis prevention
approach: what I learned as the
principal of a school in a locked door
unit of a psychiatric hospital

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I began to ask the question, “How do resilient children and adults see themselves and the world differently from those who are not resilient?”

As I sought to answer this question, especially in my collaboration with my colleague Sam Goldstein, we identified the components of a “resilient mindset” and the behaviors associated with that mindset

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Identifying these components was not just an academic exercise but helped to create guideposts for nurturing resilience in children and ourselves

Very importantly, unlike some other theories of mindset, our concept of a “resilient mindset” included such variables as empathy, caring, and altruism

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A foundation for resilience—the significance of what the late psychologist Julius Segal called a charismatic adult, an adult from whom children “gather strength.” We must never underestimate the impact of one adult on a child’s life. Resilience is rooted in positive relationships

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Several questions I'm often asked:

“Do we as adults need charismatic adults in our lives?”

“Can we help youngsters be resilient if we are not feeling very resilient ourselves?”

“Can peers serve as charismatic adults?”

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“I want to be a charismatic adult for the children and adolescents I’m parenting or working with or teaching. What might I say and do to assume that role?”

A “charismatic adult” t-shirt



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Sometimes we don't even know when we've served as a charismatic adult in the lives of others

And sometimes we learn years later that someone has experienced us as a charismatic adult in their lives

Let's look at the mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To adopt an outlook of “personal control” and focus our time and energy on things over which we have some influence rather than on things over which we have little, if any, control

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

While there are many situations over which we have little, if any, control, what we have more control over than many of us may realize is our *attitude* and *response* to these situations—a point psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor emphasized in his remarkable book *Man's Search for Meaning*

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To understand the impact of seemingly small gestures or micromoments (when positive they are referred to as microaffirmations while when negative they are viewed as microaggressions)

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To appreciate the importance of empathy in understanding and responding to our children and students: Psychologist Daniel Goleman views empathy as a basic component of both emotional and social intelligence

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

Questions to help us to be more empathic:

“What words do I hope children and teens in my care use to describe me?”

“What do I *intentionally* say and do on a regular basis so that they are likely to describe me in the way I would like them to describe me?”

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

“How do I think they would actually describe me?”

“How do I understand their behaviors and struggles?” (How we understand their behaviors will play a large role in how we respond to them—this understanding is essential when we interact with kids who have experienced trauma)

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To believe that all children from birth want to learn and be successful:

Robert White emphasized an inborn “drive for effectiveness”

If such a drive exists, why do so many individuals seem unmotivated?

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To recognize that all people are motivated, but unfortunately, some are dominated by “avoidance motivation” as a way of protecting themselves from situations that they believe will lead to failure and humiliation and/or emotional and physical exhaustion

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

Thus, rather than asserting that children or teens are lazy or unmotivated or resistant, we should ask, “How do we lessen avoidance motivation in those who use it?” or “What changes should we implement in the strategies we use to lessen so-called resistance or avoidance motivation?”

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

There are strategies I have found very effective in lessening avoidance motivation while reinforcing intrinsic motivation, self-discipline, responsibility, and caring

These interventions include:

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To help children and teens develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in school, the community, and the home environments—to feel you are “welcome”

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

Clayton Cook, University of Minnesota, studied impact of Positive Greetings at the Door (PGDs) for 200 middle school students in 10 classrooms

PGDs expressed in the following ways:

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

Say the student's name

Make eye contact

Use a friendly greeting, such as a handshake, high five, or thumbs up

Give a few words of encouragement

Ask how their day is going

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Results:

20% increase in student engagement

9% decrease in disruptive behavior

Equivalent of an additional hour of
engagement over five-hour
instructional day

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To reinforce a child or teen's sense of ownership, self-discipline, and resilience by strengthening problem-solving and decision-making skills—invite the input of youngsters as they cope with challenging issues they face in their lives

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To identify, reinforce, honor, and display each child or teen's passions or strengths, or what I have labeled "islands of competence" without denying or running from problematic areas

The reinforcement of a youngster's "islands of competence" can nurture skills that lead to satisfying employment

ISLANDS OF COMPETENCE

"Island of Competence" is a symbol of hope and respect that all individuals have unique strengths and courage. If we can find and reinforce these areas of strength, we can create a powerful "ripple effect" in which children and adults may be more willing to venture forth and confront situations that have been problematic."

-Dr. Robert Brooks

An “islands of competence” form

Student name: _____

Date: _____

Completed by: _____

What are this student's "Islands of Competence"? (List as many as possible!)

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

How can you use these islands to help this student learn and feel more dignified?

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

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To realize that a sense of competence is associated with not being fearful of making mistakes or experiencing setbacks: Psychologist Gabriele Oettingen's concept of "mental contrasting" provides helpful information for preparing children and teens for inevitable setbacks and mistakes as well as effective ways to cope with these setbacks when they arise

The mindset and strategies of a charismatic adult

To provide opportunities for youngsters to feel a sense of purpose, which relates to the belief that one is making a positive difference in the lives of others—to engage children and teens in “contributory” or “charitable” activities