



What works in building resilience?

Author Tony Newman

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Barnardo's has been promoting an evidence-based approach to children's services since the mid-1990's. During the past 10 years we have commissioned leading academics and expert practitioners to review research about 'What works?' for children in a wide range of subject areas.

We have recently re-launched the series of 'What works?' publications, bringing the material up to date and also including new titles.

What works in building resilience? is a new title in the series and seeks to review strategies, interventions and approaches that can help to build resilience in children and young people. The book addresses the following questions:

- what is resilience and why is it important to child welfare services?
- why are some children and young people more successful than others at resisting and overcoming stressful episodes?
- how can child welfare services promote resilience?

The principles of resilience are explored with extensive reference to published research. The weight of evidence suggests that incorporating resilience-promoting strategies in services to children and young people can make a real difference. The book explores what those strategies are in relation to different stages – early years, middle childhood, adolescence and early adulthood – and what the practical applications are.

What works in building resilience? will offer all professionals in social care invaluable information to enable them to identify and implement factors that promote resilience in all phases of the life cycle.

Contents and key messages of *What works in building resilience?*

Principles of resilience and practical applications

- Risk factors are cumulative – the presence of one increases the likelihood that more will emerge.
- Transition points in children’s lives can be both threats and opportunities.
- Where the cumulative chain of adversities can be broken, most children are able to recover from even severe exposure to adversities in early life.
- Managed exposure to risk is necessary if children are to learn coping mechanisms.
- Key factors promoting resilience in children are support from family and/or peers, good educational experiences, a sense of agency or self-efficacy and opportunities to contribute to family or community life by taking valued social roles.
- Acute episodes of stress are less likely than adversities to have long-term effects on children’s development.
- The promotion of resilience involves trade-offs—the goal is effective adult adjustment rather than eliminating the legacy of all childhood difficulties.
- Children and young people who have experienced difficulties report more often being helped by non-professional supporters (friends and family), rather than by professionals. Social-care professionals should avoid weakening informal sources of support.

Effective strategies for the early years (antenatal to 4)

In the antenatal period:

- adequate maternal nutrition throughout pregnancy
- avoidance of maternal and passive smoking
- moderate maternal alcohol consumption
- social support to mothers from partners, family and external networks
- good access to antenatal care
- interventions to prevent domestic violence.

During infancy:

- adequate parental income
- social support for mothers, to moderate perinatal stress
- good-quality housing
- parent education
- safe play areas and provision of learning materials
- breastfeeding to three months
- support from male partners

- continuous home-based input from health and social care services, lay or professional.

During the pre-school period:

- high-quality pre-school day care
- preparatory work with parents on home–school links
- pairing with resilient peers
- availability of alternative caregivers
- food supplements
- links with other parents, local community networks and faith groups
- community regeneration initiatives.

Effective strategies for middle childhood (5 to 13)

- Reception classes that are sufficiently flexible to accommodate a range of cultural and community-specific behaviours.
- Creation and maintenance of home–school links for at-risk children and their families, which can promote parental confidence and engagement.
- Positive school experiences: academic, sporting or friendship-related.
- Good and mutually trusting relationships with teachers.
- The development of skills, opportunities for independence and mastery of tasks.
- Structured routines, and a perception by the child that praise and sanctions are being administered fairly.
- In abusive settings, the opportunity to maintain or develop attachments to the non-abusive parent, other family member or, otherwise, a reliable unrelated adult; maintenance of family routines and rituals.
- Manageable contributions to the household that promote competencies, self-esteem and problem-solving coping.
- In situations of marital discord, attachment to one parent, moderation of parental disharmony and opportunities to play a positive role in the family.
- Help with resolving minor but chronic stresses as well as acute adversities.
- Provision of breakfast and after-school clubs.

Effective strategies for adolescence and early adulthood (13 to 19)

- Strong social support networks.
- The presence of a least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute.
- A committed mentor or other person from outside the family.
- Positive school experiences.
- A sense of mastery and a belief and one's own efforts can make a difference.
- Participation in a range of extra-curricular activities.

- The capacity to re-frame adversities so that the beneficial as well as the damaging effects are recognised.
- The ability – or opportunity – to ‘make a difference’ by helping others or through part-time work.
- Not to be excessively sheltered from challenging situations that provide opportunities to develop coping skills.

Tony Newman is a Principal Research Officer for Barnardo’s. His areas of interest are parental disability and its impact on children, the promotion of resilience and evidence-based social care practice.

A prologue to this book has been contributed by **Tuppett M Yates** and **Professor Ann S Masten**, Director of the Institute for Child Development and Distinguished McKnight University Professor, both at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

The full report is available to purchase on-line from www.barnardos.org.uk/resources

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