What is resiliency?

Why teach about resiliency to children?
- When we teach about resiliency we focus on human capacities and gifts rather than challenges and problems.
- We let students know that the evidence says that resiliency most often prevails – even in extreme situations, such as those caused by poverty, troubled families, or violent neighborhoods. In the words of Dr. Carl Bell trauma expert, not “to provide lessons in resiliency to our children is to have a lack of vision and leadership.”
- We want our students to recognize their own strengths and challenges to learning and succeeding in school
- As teachers and counselors we want to care for our students by identifying how we can support and who we need to support. We can show care by offering the support of a mentor.

When to include the topic in the curriculum?
- Early in the school year after the teacher has had some time to get to know students.

Teaching resiliency to middle school students.
- Two researchers offer ideas.

“It is important to read about struggles that lead to empowerment and to successful advocacy, for resilient voices are critical to hear within the at-risk wasteland.” (Valerie Polakow, 1993).

“The sharing of stories from literature and one’s own experience is a powerful reframing strategy for helping people, young and old learn about their resilience, the power they each have to see themselves and their lives in new ways.” (O’Gorman, 1994).

Sample lesson based on the research literature.
• Students each get a copy of the biography of a successful person. (Investors Business Daily had a series, which they may still be running) Students can work individually/pairs/groups to read and discuss what resiliency looks like in the lives of people.
• This exercise connects students with the learn to live, learn to learn, learn to work, learn to contribute components inherent in guidance education.

What do we want our students to learn?
• Resiliency is what helps people bounce back. Natural talents and ability and hard work alone may not ensure success. People often have to stop and decide to take a positive step in the direction of their goal or dream.
• People need to rely on their inner strength to overcome challenges. It helps some people if they have someone else to believe in them.
• Caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation in home, school and community are the most powerful environmental protective factors (external assets) that facilitate healthy development in students.
• Personal strengths (internal assets) are associated with healthy development. Cooperation, communication, empathy, problem solving, self awareness and goals and aspirations are those the research suggests protect children from involvement in at risk behavior. They are the personal strengths that result from students experiencing home, school, community environments rich in protective assets.

Examples;

Vince Lombardi: Football Coach.
Gift: He inspired players by getting them to see themselves as champions. (opportunity for meaningful participation)
Personal strength: communication
Challenge: His father had a volatile temper and was stern and verbally abusive.

Dr. Dean Ornish: Making the case that lifestyle can reverse heart disease.
Gift: helping others. “There are million of people every day who I’ll never know or meet who will benefit from my work… At the end of the day that makes me feel good.” (opportunity for meaningful participation.)
Personal strength: problem solving
Challenge: When he was 19 he got mononucleosis and began to doubt his ability. He became suicidal.
Turnaround people: His family and spiritual teacher. (caring relationship)

How can we extend this knowledge so students can apply it to their own lives?
• Tapping resilience involves reflection. Give students opportunities to write and think about what they have learned.
• Teach children about thinking.

Works sited
Benard B., (2004) Resiliency: what we have learned. WestEd
What is a mentor?
- It is a person who takes the time to care as a protective factor in a youth’s life.

What the research says about being a mentor?
- Resilience research confirms unequivocally the power of one person to make a difference. No matter what official role we play in a young person’s life (teacher, parent, neighbor, social worker, youth worker, etc) and no matter for what length of time, we can do it in the caring and empowering ways exemplified by those, who become turnaround people for youth. We don’t have to be perfect but we do have to be mindful of our immense power, for good or ill.
- Being connected to family and school were the strongest protective factors associated with less substance abuse – more powerful than individual resilience traits. *Moreover being connected to school was even more powerful than being connected to family.*

What makes a successful turnaround person?
- An adult who believes in the capacities of their young people. Young people who experience such protective beliefs learn to respect and believe in themselves.
- A successful youth worker sees the potential not the pathology of youth including disadvantaged youth.
- These youth workers work from a resiliency perspective of having high expectations for their youth while also working from and playing to their young peoples strengths.
- Having a youth centered, strength based focus is another critical component of an effective turnaround person. To be youth centered means “talent scouting” or being on the look out for a young person’s gifts and also providing opportunities for each youth to discover and explore his or her interests, strengths, goals and dreams.

Here is the voice of a developmentally oriented mentor.

“[When he told me about a bad grade,] I kind of focused on his other grades first: he said that he had done a great job with the other ones. And then I asked him if he wanted to do better in it, and then I kind of asked him how he could do better. And it was a simple thing because he just didn’t do a couple of reports. So we decided that the next ones he got I would help him with them if he wanted. And we did that twice. You know, it’s like what we do together to do this.”

How to be a mentor for a student.
- Arrange when and where to meet with the student.
• Get to know him/her – dreams, goals and interests.
• Have fun
• Listen
• Believe in them.
• Encourage and support them while holding high expectations.
• Remind them of their strengths and abilities.

**Are there mentoring programs in schools?**

- I could not find any information on formal programs but there are other resources on the Internet. Some areas have community-based programs that work in partnership with schools. What I found interesting is the idea that teachers may decide they need more caring relationships with each other in order to provide more caring to students. Thus they may consider organizing some teacher support. This is really smart because studies show that a young person’s relationship with a mentor who is not caring enough is probably a risk factor and certainly not a protective factor.

**Resources**

[http://www.peer.ca/netwrk.html](http://www.peer.ca/netwrk.html)
[http://www.mentors.ca/mentorlinks.html](http://www.mentors.ca/mentorlinks.html)
[www.bigbrothersbigsisters.org](http://www.bigbrothersbigsisters.org)

**Works cited:**

Benard B., (2004) *Resiliency: what we have learned*. WestEd