Nurturing Resilience
As a Relational Practice

Psychotherapy Networker Symposium
March 21-24, 2013

Froma Walsh, PhD
Co-Director, Chicago Center for Family Health
Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor Emerita
The University of Chicago
fwalsh@uchicago.edu  www.ccfhchicago.org
www.facebook.com/chicagocenterforfamilyhealth

Myth: No Worries!

The New Normal: Stress, Change, Uncertainty

Resilience
Strengths in dealing with adversity
The ability to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges --- emerging strengthened and more resourceful

Crisis
Challenge + Opportunity

Resilience
How we Deal with Adversity
Coping + Adaptation + Positive Growth
More than Surviving: Ability to Thrive
Common Misconception of Resilience:
NOT “Just bounce back!”

With Major Crisis & Life Challenges:
Suffering and Struggle

May not be able to “go back to normal”
e.g. Life Before / After divorce, disaster
Requires constructing “New Normal”
Revising Hopes & Dreams

Myth of Resilience:
Individual traits:
• “The right stuff”
  Some have it / some don’t
“The Rugged Individual”
• Invulnerable
• Self-Reliant

“We encourage everyone to rescue themselves”

Most Therapy: Individually-Based

Clinical Field
Skewed Focus On Family Dysfunction
The New Normal Families

- Changing Family Structures, Gender Roles
- Varied, More Fluid Child & Family Life Course
  - Outdated Life Cycle Model: Normative stages, sequences
  - Likely to transition in / out of several households and kinship arrangements
  - No single model of family health fits most families
- Research: Healthy child development for most in varied family arrangements with caring, committed relationships; effective family processes matter the most.
- For resilience, families need to buffer transitions and learn how to live successfully in complex arrangements.

Resilience is Nurtured in Relationships

To overcome life challenges, individuals need “Relational Lifelines”:
Supportive Bonds; Models & Mentors who:

- Believe in their Worth and Potential
- Draw out, Affirm Strengths, Abilities
- Inspire Hopes and Dreams ~ Future Vision
- Encourage Best Efforts
- See Failures as Opportunities for Learning, Growth
- Celebrate Successes

Studies of Resilient Youth: Credited Relationships with Models and Mentors


Strengthening Resilience with At-risk Youth:
Re-Focus from Problems to Positive Vision

- Who Can Support? How?
- Obstacles to Overcome
- Steps toward Vision

Multigenerational Family Tree: Search for Positive Influences

Nourishing Bonds
Relational Resilience:
Strong Bond Mutual Support

Guardian Angel

Bonds with Companion Animals

Identify and Draw on Extended Family Resources

Family Photos, Stories of Resilience
Pet Role -- Child Resilience in Family Transition

Figure 1. Young girl's penogram drawing of her most significant family members, revealing importance of bond with her dog in recent stepfamily transition.

Strengthening Relational Lifelines for Resilience:

Facilitate Coping, Adapting, & Positive Growth Through Vital Connections:

- Intimate Bonds
- Family Network
- Social & Community
- Cultural & Spiritual Resources
- Therapeutic Bond

Family & Couple Resilience

Team Effort Collaboration Mutual Support

Walsh Family Resilience Framework

Conceptual and Research Foundations:

- Family Systems Theory / Family Process Research
- Family Developmental Theory
  - Multigenerational Family Life Cycle
  - Family Stress, Coping, Adaptation
- Studies of Resilience & Well-functioning Families
- Positive Psychology
- Trauma Studies: Resilience & Posttraumatic Growth

Walsh Family Resilience Framework

- Practice Map to guide clinical & community-based intervention & prevention with youth, couples, & families facing adversity
- Useful with all collaborative, strengths-based models
- Informed by 3 decades of research on resilience & on couple and family functioning under stress.
- Identify & build on key relational processes & resources:
  - Practices that strengthen resilience
- Wide range of applications, formats:
  - Consultation; Brief Counseling; Couple & Family Therapy
  - Multi-family / couple Groups; Workshops; Community Forums
Chicago Center for Family Health
Resilience-Oriented Practice Applications

- Recover from Crisis, Trauma, Loss
  - Traumatic Loss; Community Disaster
  - Refugees; War-related trauma;
- Navigate Disruptive Life Changes
  - Migration; Separation / Divorce; Foster Care
- Cope, Master Multi-Stress Conditions
  - e.g. Chronic illness, Disabilities
  - Financial strain, Unemployment
  - Ongoing complex trauma
- Overcome Barriers to Success
  - At-risk youth: — Family - School Partnership;
    — L.A. Gang Prevention / Youth Development

KEYS TO RELATIONAL RESILIENCE

Belief Systems
1. Making Meaning of Crisis & Challenge
2. Positive Outlook: Hope - Master the Possible
3. Transcendence & Spirituality
Organizational Resources
4. Flexibility to Adapt
5. Connectedness
6. Kin, Social, & Economic Resources
Communication Processes
7. Clear, consistent messages
8. Emotional Sharing; Humor / Joy / Respite
9. Collaborative Problem-solving / Proaction

Belief Systems
The Heart and Soul of Resilience

Rooted in Cultural & Spiritual Heritage
Multigenerational Legacies
Dominant Society Norms, Values, Biases
Past Experience & Future Expectations
Influence our Approach to Adversity

1. Meaning - Making
- Encourage Relational View of Resilience
- Normalize, Contextualize Distress
  - De-pathologize; Δ Blame, Shame, Stigma, Guilt
- Gain Sense of Coherence
  - Approach Crisis as Shared Challenges:
    - Meaningful, Comprehensible, Manageable
- Appraise Situation & Options:
  Facilitative (vs. Constraining) Beliefs:
  - Explain Events, causal:
  - Future expectations / catastrophic fears:
    What can we do? Active Agency

2. Positive Outlook
- Instill Hope;
  - En-Courage; Build Confidence
- Affirm Strengths, Abilities;
  - Build on Potential
- Active Initiative & Perseverance
  - Seize Opportunities
- Master “the Art of the Possible”
  Accept what can’t be changed
  Tolerate uncertainty
Master the Art of the Possible:

Do all you can
With what you have
In the time you have
In the place you are

3. Transcendence ~ Spirituality

- Share Larger Values, Purpose
- Tap Spiritual Resources: Deep Faith, Contemplative Practices, Community, Nature
- Inspiration: Envision New Possibilities
  - Aspirations: Role Models, Life dreams
  - Invention; Innovative Solutions
  - Creative Expression—writing, art, music
- Transformation: Learning, Change, & Growth
  - Redirect life priorities; deepen bonds
  - Compassion ➔ Social Action to Benefit Others

Spirituality: a Dimension of Human Experience
We are Bio-psycho-social-spiritual Beings

 Streams of influence flowing through all aspects of life
  - Family & Cultural Heritage
  - Transcendent Beliefs, Spiritual Practices, Community
- Within or outside organized religion, can also express:
  - Through secular values, nature, the arts, social action
- Fosters Meaning, Wholeness, Harmony
- Deep Connection within Self & With all Others
- Influences Suffering; Promotes Healing & Resilience
Organizational Resources

**Relational Shock Absorbers**

4. Flexibility — to change, Adapt
   - Provide Stability — Structure, Reliability
   - Leadership - Nurture, Guide, Protect
   - Couple: Equal Partners, Mutual Respect

5. Connectedness — Mutual Support
   - Commitment, collaboration, care

6. Social, Community Supports
   - Workplace, Healthcare, Child / Elder care
   - Overcome odds / Change odds to thrive

Communication Processes

7. Clear, Consistent Messages
   - Information: Truth seeking / speaking

8. Share Feelings; Respect Differences
   - Suffering, Struggle, Fear, Sorrow
   - Pride, Appreciation, Joy, Humor, Fun
   - Respite: Refuel Energies & Spirit

9. Collaborative Problem-Solving
   - Build Resourcefulness
   - Celebrate successes; learn from mistakes
   - Become Proactive: Planning, Preparedness

From Crisis-Reactive to Proactive Approach

"Brad, we've got to talk."

Surviving but not thriving

Emerging Adulthood—the New Normal?

"Your mother and I think it's time you got a place of your own. We'd like a little time alone before we die."
Aging with Resilience

Learning New Skills

Relational Lifelines:
- Friendships & Sibling Bonds

Family Resilience Practice Framework

Shift Focus from family Deficits, Limitations to Strengths, Potential, Hopes & Dreams

Developmental, Systemic Perspective
- Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Influences
- Family Challenged by Adversity – timeline: stress events
- Family Response: Facilitates Adaptation of all Members, Relationships, Family Unit

Relational View of Human Resilience
- Resilience-focused genogram: identify kin, social, community, spiritual resources
- Recruit models, mentors
- Build relational life-lines, teams, networks

Varied Challenges and Pathways in Resilience:

- No single model fits all families, their values, situations, & challenges

Prevention: By strengthening resilience, families and their members become more resourceful to meet future challenges.

Facilitating Family Resilience: Practice Guidelines

- Express Conviction in Strengths, Potential of all Families, alongside Vulnerabilities, Limitations
- Use Language, Framing to Depathologize, Humanize
- Contextualize Distress; Decrease Shame, Blame
- Express Compassion for Suffering, Struggle, Losses
- Reframe Crisis as Opportunity: Learning, Healing, & Positive Growth
- Shift Focus from Problems to Possibilities for Mastery, Thriving, Relational Repair
- Encourage Steps toward Future Vision: Hopes and Dreams
- Integrate Challenges and Resilience into the Fabric of Personal & Relational Lives.

Guidelines to Facilitate Healing & Resilience from Complicated or Traumatic Loss

- Start by grounding in their family, community, cultural, & spiritual connections.
- Invite them to share their loss experience.
- Offer compassionate witnessing of recent (& ongoing) losses, hardships, or injustices suffered.
- Draw out, affirm strengths in coping efforts;
- Link with kin, community resources
- Re-member persons & relationships lost;
  - Continuing Bonds: Spiritual connection, Stories, Deeds
- Future orientation: renew / revise hopes, dreams

The Power Of Connection For Resilience
In strengthening our resilience, we strive to integrate the experience of adversity-- and our resilient response -- into the fabric of our individual and shared identity, influencing how we go on to live our lives.

“A hero is one who does the best of things in the worst of times. Seizing every opportunity.”

--Joseph Campbell

References

References (Cont’d)