

Try these 10 steps to help Scouts develop resilience

By Mark Ray

These days, reading, writing and arithmetic are just a few of the skills children need to learn in order to achieve success. These “three R’s” sometimes get lost in a sea of other skills, including critical thinking, multitasking, leadership and teamwork.



And then there’s the fourth R: resilience, the ability to bounce back when obstacles challenge or prevent us from achieving our goals. Resilience might be the most important skill of all, because it can mean the difference between success and failure in every area of life.

“Resilience is about mindset,” says neuropsychologist Sam Goldstein, Ph.D. “How do you feel about your capabilities? What kinds of resources do you seek within yourself when challenges occur?”

Goldstein has researched and written about resilience with child psychologist Robert Brooks, Ph.D., of Harvard Medical School. In their book, *Raising Resilient Children* (McGraw-Hill, 2002), the two psychologists drew on a combined half-century of clinical practice to identify 10 “guideposts” parents can follow to foster resilience in kids.

Goldstein is a former Cub Scout who sees many Scouts in his practice. Experience has shown him that Scouting offers a great environment for teaching resilience. Here, then, is a Scouting perspective on the guideposts the two psychologists identified.

1. Be empathetic. Empathy is being able to look at the world through other people's eyes. For example, rather than criticize a shy Scout who's afraid to approach strangers during a fundraiser, say, "Many kids find it hard to talk to strangers. Let's find another job for you to do until you feel more comfortable."

2. Communicate with respect. Communicating effectively includes listening attentively, not interrupting and never putting the other person down. Respect also includes honesty. While you shouldn't discuss issues that are very personal or beyond kids' emotional or cognitive abilities, you also shouldn't hide the truth.

3. Be flexible. Insanity has been jokingly defined as repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results. If what you're doing as a parent or as a Scout leader isn't working, try something different. You're more likely to get the results you were hoping for, and, even more important, you'll be modeling flexibility for your kids.

4. Give undivided attention. How do kids spell love? T-I-M-E. Giving kids undivided attention is integral to their self-esteem. Schedule time with your kids — and turn off the TV and cellphones while you're talking. In Scouting, take advantage of Scoutmaster conferences, drive time and moments around the campfire.

5. Accept kids for who they are. Even when your kids don't meet your expectations, it's vital to accept them and recognize their innate temperaments. Rather than criticizing natural behaviors, find ways to change those behaviors in a way that doesn't erode self-esteem. Let's say you have a Scout who's chronically late to meetings. Give him a job to do before each meeting so he will be motivated to arrive on time.

6. Give kids a chance to help. When Goldstein and Brooks asked adults about their most positive memories of school, most mentioned contributing in some way: tutoring a younger student, running the projector in class, etc. Scouts have plenty of opportunities to serve. When scheduling service projects, take full advantage of youth leadership positions.

7. Treat mistakes as learning experiences. Every mistake is an opportunity to learn, but many adults overreact to mistakes, thereby teaching kids to avoid taking risks. Scouting, of course, encourages kids to try — and fail at — new skills all the time. As a Scout leader, emphasize that mistakes are a natural part of life (for kids and adults alike). And help your Scouts learn from their mistakes.

8. Stress your children's strengths. Every child has his or her own strengths — or "islands of competence," in Brooks' and Goldstein's words. It's your job as a parent and a Scout leader to draw attention to those strengths. Look for instances when kids do things well and offer specific praise. Resilient kids are buoyed by success.

9. Let kids solve problems and make decisions. Many parents and Scout leaders rush in too quickly to rescue kids from problems. When health and safety aren't at risk, it's better to hang back and encourage kids to figure out their own solutions. If the Cobra Patrol

ruins its dinner on a campout, don't immediately offer food from the adult patrol box. Instead, help them brainstorm ways not to go hungry.

10. Discipline to teach. Never discipline a Scout in ways that intimidate or humiliate. Praise in public and criticize in private.

One more thing: Model resilience in your own life. "I'm not convinced you can teach resilience without affording children opportunities to observe it in action," Goldstein says. "They need to observe resilient people in their lives." In other words, people like parents and Scout leaders.

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