

## Using a Proactive Approach to Build Resiliency

By, Bill MacLaney, PsyD

With the summer ending and back to school just around the corner, it is a good time to take a look at your child to see how much he or she has grown, not just physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally, but also in terms of resilience. Simply put, resilience refers to a set of skills and characteristics that allows individuals to adjust and cope effectively with life's challenges. Children and adolescents who are resilient believe in the ability to affect their life's course and are better able to adapt to challenging situations and bounce back after experiencing difficulties and hardships.

Resiliency is a skill that can be instilled in one's child through a proactive approach. Teaching your child to set realistic goals, problem solving, thinking optimistically, and building a positive sense of self can foster proactive coping skills leading to a more resilient child.

Kids tend to address problems in one of three ways: passively, negatively, or proactively. For example, if your child is struggling with a particular school subject, he or she may be tempted to ignore the problem or pretend it isn't a problem (a passive response), such as saying that "it doesn't matter" or engage in negative self-talk (a reactive response) such as "I'm so dumb" or "I don't read well" instead of taking on a proactive approach. The steps towards being proactive include:

- acknowledging the problem
- keeping perspective on the specific problem
- knowing that the problem will not last forever
- coming up with a plan to solve the problem
- acting on the plan

Teaching your child a proactive approach instead of taking on a passive or negative response style can foster success in future endeavors. If your child struggles on a test, get him or her to use positive self-talk to say "I didn't do well on this test. So, before the next one, I'll study more and ask my teacher for help with what I don't understand." If your child is unsure of how to do this, find examples in his or her past in which a proactive approach was utilized. Also, one can ask if the child does nothing, how do you think it will turn out. Or ask them if they react negatively by saying "I can't do it" or by getting physical, how do they think it will work out. Pointing out these inconsistencies can help kids see the value of taking on the proactive approach. Small successes tend to lead to larger successes. Teaching your child a proactive approach can help them develop the coping skills towards a healthy and resilient outlook on life.