

# PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: BUILDING IT AND SUSTAINING IT

SHEILA EMERSON KELLY  
LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST  
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER  
BUREAU FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
AND HEALTH FACILITIES

# What is resiliency?

Resiliency is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or other significant sources of stress.

Resiliency is the capacity to bounce back.

For a community to be resilient, its members must put into practice early and effective actions. If residents, agencies and organizations take meaningful and intentional actions before an event, communities can reestablish stability after an event.

Resilience implies that after an event, a person or community may not only be able to cope and to recover but also change to reflect different priorities arising from the disaster.

**PERSONAL RESILIENCY**

**DEVELOPMENT AND  
MAINTENANCE OF  
PERSONAL RESILIENCE**

# Personal Resilience is related to:

- Biological factors (temperament, emotions, intelligence, creativity, resistance to disease, genetic and physical characteristics)
- Attachment (capacity for bonding, for forming significant relationships with others; the capacity for empathy, compassion caring and joy)
- Control (capacity to manipulate one's environment, mastery, social competence; self-esteem; personal autonomy and sense of purpose)

# People who are resilient demonstrate:

- Sociability (form healthy relationships)
- Optimism (view self and future positively)
- Flexibility (change is part of life)
- Self-confidence (move toward goals, base decisions on confidence in one's abilities)
- Competence (be good at something and take pride in it)
- Insightfulness (understand people and situations; be able to see other sides)
- Perseverance (don't give up)
- Perspective (view crises as challenges to be faced, not insurmountable obstacles)
- Self control (manage strong feelings and impulses; internalization of locus of control)

# RESPONSE OF CHILDREN TO DISASTER DEPENDS ON:

- Extent of exposure to the disaster
- Family distress
- Loss of loved ones and/or property
- Available support systems
- Disruption of school programs
- Community's response to the disaster



# What characterizes resilient children?

- Positive peer and adult interactions
- Low degrees of defensiveness and aggressiveness and high degrees of cooperation, participation and emotional stability
- Positive sense of self
- Sense of personal power rather than powerlessness
- Internal locus of control (belief that one is capable of exercising control/impact over the environment)

# What are signs of vulnerability to stress?

- Substance abuse
- Poor anger management
- Lack of community integration/social isolation
- Multiple chronic illnesses or symptoms with minimal, vague or inadequate organic basis
- Chronic dysthymia and/or anxiety
- Dysfunctional relationships
- Inadequate school/work/community performance

# PROTECTION VERSUS VULNERABILITY

WHAT MAKES SOME  
INDIVIDUALS RESILIENT AND  
SOME VULNERABLE TO LIFE  
STRESSORS?

# Risk Factors

The background is a solid teal color. In the lower half, there is a faint, semi-transparent image of two hands shaking, symbolizing an agreement or partnership. The hands are rendered in a lighter shade of teal, creating a subtle watermark effect.

# Child Factors

- Low self esteem
- Poor social skills
- Poor problem solving
- Difficult temperament
- Lack of empathy
- Homelessness
- Early school leaving

# Family Factors

- Family violence
- Poor supervision
- Harsh or inconsistent discipline
- Lack of warmth or affections
- Abuse or neglect

# School context

- School failure
- Bullying
- Peer rejection
- Poor attachment to school
- Deviant peer group

# Life Events

- Divorce and family breakup
- Death of a family member





# Community and cultural factors

- Neighborhood violence and crime
- Lack of support services
- Social or cultural discrimination
- Community norms concerning violence

# Protective Factors



# Child Factors

- Social competence
- Attachment to family
- Empathy
- Problem solving
- Optimism
- School achievement
- Easy temperament
- Good coping style

# Family Factors

- Supportive caring parents
- Family harmony
- Secure and stable family
- Supportive relationship with an adult
- Strong family norms and morality

# School Context

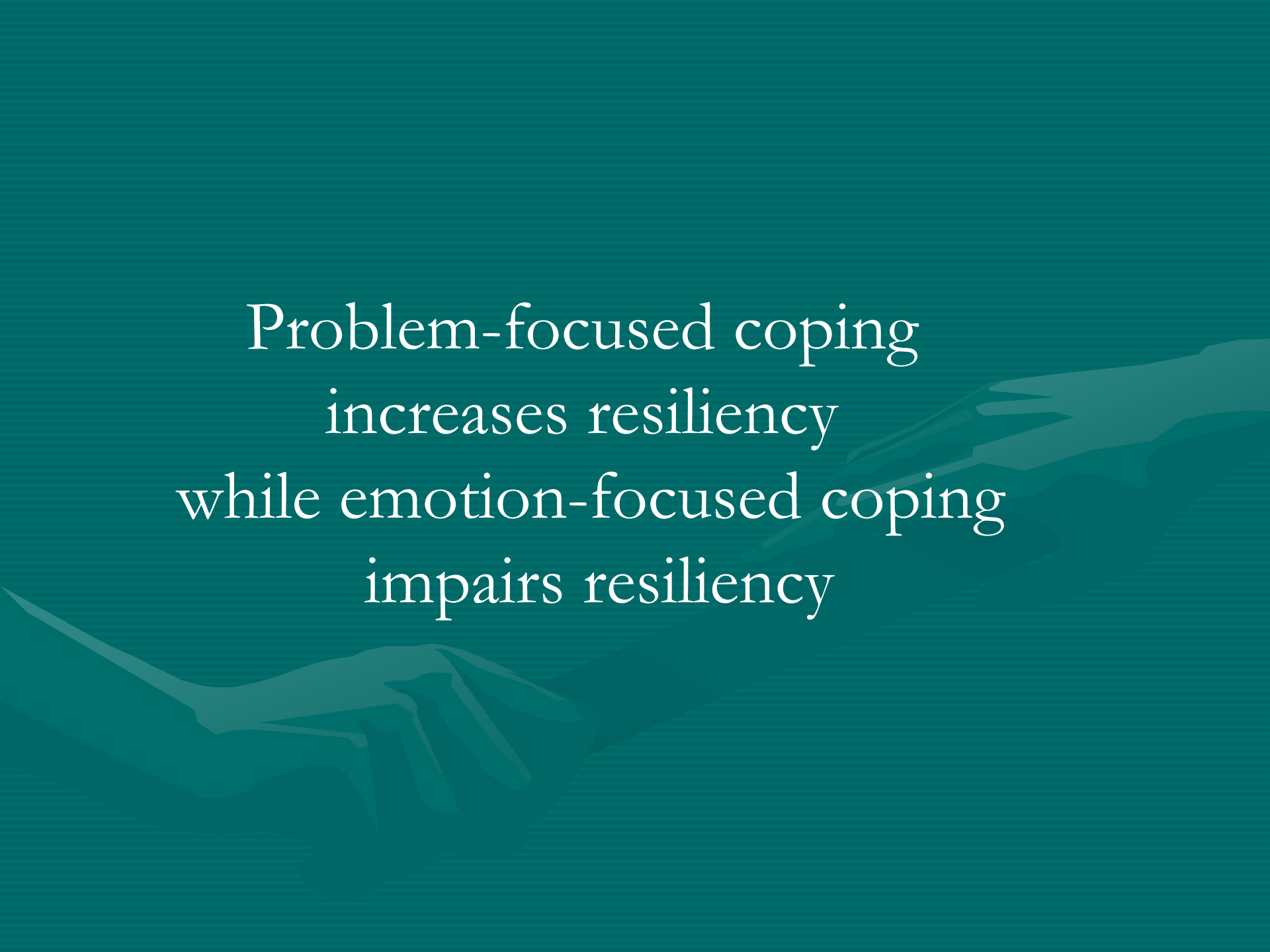
- Positive school climate
- Prosocial peer group
- Sense of belonging
- Opportunities for success at school and recognition of achievement
- School norms regarding violence

# Life Events

- Meeting significant person
- Moving to new area
- Opportunities at critical turning points or major life transitions

# Community and Cultural Factors

- Access to support services
- Community networking
- Attachment to the community
- Participation in community group
- Community/cultural norms against violence
- Strong cultural identity/ethnic pride



Problem-focused coping  
increases resiliency  
while emotion-focused coping  
impairs resiliency



When faced with a setback or challenge  
focus outward on the things that must be handled,  
not inward on emotions.

Emotions cannot become the focus of attention.

People who focus  
on solving their problems  
are the most resilient  
(and are sick less often).

# Problem solvers:

- Examine the situation to see what solutions may be possible
- Consider various actions
- Select the best
- Take action
- Observe effects of the action
- Modify for best results

# People bounce back from disaster, tragedy, trauma, stress by having:

- Caring and support
- High expectations for success
- Opportunities for meaningful participation
- Positive bonds
- Clear and consistent boundaries
- Life skills

Just as people  
can be taught to be resilient,  
so can communities.



# Community resilience

A resilient community can respond to crises in ways that strengthen community bonds, resources and the community's capacity to cope.

Community resilience is the individual and collective capacity to respond to adversity and change.



# In communities, resilience is related to:

- Magnitude of shock a system can absorb and remain competent
- Degree to which a system is capable of self-organization
- Degree to which a system can build capacity for learning and adaptation

# COMMUNITY VULNERABILITY

- All vulnerability and resilience is local
- Vulnerability is differential – different people and communities are vulnerable in different ways to different hazards
- Vulnerability and resilience must be assessed in the context of general social and economic circumstances
- Strategies developed must be specific to the locale and the issue



# Building resilient communities:

- Is a long term project
- Grows through support and extension of natural caring relationships that must be nurtured
- Starts with strengthening natural helping institutions in neighborhoods
- Builds on strengths not weaknesses
- Arises from self-organization and self-control arising from mastery

# Elements important to building resilience include:

- Connectedness, commitment and shared values
- Participation
- Structure, roles and responsibilities
- Support and nurturance
- Critical reflection and skill building
- Resources
- Communication

# Connectedness, commitment and shared values

Children and families are more likely to feel part of a community when there is shared history customs, beliefs and values. This is influenced by:

- How families perceive their own well-being as tied to the well-being of the overall community
- How families perceive respect for and sensitivity toward their ethnic and cultural identification

# Strong connectedness results in:

- Increased trust in community leaders
- Increased compliance with messages and instructions in the event of an emergency
- Decreased conflict among diverse groups and individuals in the community

# PARTICIPATION

Families are more likely to participate in their community when:

- Community leaders encourage active involvement
- They believe their contributions and ideas are valued by community leaders
- They can see the benefit of being involved for themselves, their children and the entire community

# Structure, roles and responsibilities

Communities need clear organizational structure.

After a disaster, new roles may emerge. Conflict over roles can adversely impact resilience.

Anticipating changes in roles and incorporating them into disaster drills can improve resilience.

- Identify the responsibilities of community leaders, agencies and organizations prior to the event
- Provide information to the public about the structure and responsibilities of different sectors in the community
- Provide information to the general public about what families can do to help themselves in the event of a disaster.

- Knowledge of roles and responsibilities during disasters will enhance the public's acceptance of directives and compliance with procedures.
- Parents need to help children to know what is expected of them and what to do in case of disaster. The more their responsibilities are defined, the better they are prepared to cope. This will reduce anxiety and worry.,



# SUPPORT AND NURTURANCE

Community resilience is enhanced when families perceive support from community leaders:

- Opportunities to express concerns and ideas
- Provide feedback to leaders
- See their concerns addressed by actions such as community development, attracting new businesses, upgrading common areas, etc.

# CRITICAL REFLECTION AND SKILL BUILDING

Self-evaluation of:

- Successes or strengths
- Areas needing improvement
- Challenges or barriers to implementing planned responses
- Unanticipated problems
- Solutions
- Planning ahead (learn how to manage symptoms that arise in disasters in advance)

# RESOURCES

- Must be made available in an equitable manner
- Distributed with input from families
- Used effectively in adverse situations
- Expanded through accessing additional resources and supplies (e.g., Red Cross, FEMA, etc)
- Available resources need to be identified in advance.

# COMMUNICATION

- Must be understood by all ages
- Consistent themes but multiple messages (school, church, public health, etc)
- Must be two ways (families need to be able to express concerns, needs etc.,)
- Should convey that leaders have as priority the well-being of families and overall good of the community

Policy development and implementation  
leads to public awareness  
and community participation  
which leads to less vulnerability and  
enhanced resilience to disaster.

# What can faith-based organizations do?

- Join faith-based organizations such as VOAD and the American Red Cross. Help disseminate important disaster information within and outside traditional cultural and faith-based settings
- Work with others to designate potential shelters and distribution centers within buildings owned by the organization
- Provide joint programs with other community and religious leaders to strengthen respect for diversity

- Deliver disaster-related information to all residents through cultural and faith-based avenues (sermons, teaching programs) including referral sheets with names of mental health practitioners
- Develop alternative locations for worship
- Review, self-evaluate, adapt

# What can community leaders do?

- Develop a community disaster plan
- Ensure effective communication between leadership and families
- Create a centralized victim's assistance organization that has information about available services
- Work with non-profits with expertise in large-scale distribution of resources during disasters



- Implement guidelines for rotating, distributing and disposing of food stuffs to prevent health hazards related to food donations, working with public health
- Establish a system to control donations to community response and recovery to ensure equitable allocation of financial and other resources
- Implement a media plan to provide important updates to the community
- Review efforts, self-evaluate, adapt.

# What can mental health providers do?

- Develop and activate a mental health triage system
- Aid community leaders and others in distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate disaster mental health services for community residents
- Assist in training community volunteers
- Provide emotional support to community responders

- Supplement existing mental health resources that may need assistance in disaster (e.g., school counselors)
- Promote programs for mental health responders on:
  1. Disaster mental health and children
  2. Child bereavement and traumatic grief
  3. Interventions for children and families after disaster

# Create informational materials on:

- Building resilience in children and families
- Preparedness
- Stress and coping
- Managing a crisis
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Pediatric bereavement
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance abuse

- Anger management
- Behavior management/positive behavior supports
- Self-care
- Mental health concerns
- Community resources for mental health

- Provide interviews to the media about resilience and emotional recovery after disaster
- Evaluate capacity for mental health response
- Help to create a fund to support long term mental health treatment for survivors when necessary
- Review, evaluate, adapt