The Bounce Back Book

Building Resiliency Skills in Your Preschooler
We’ve all experienced life’s ups and downs. Things don’t always go our way or as planned. Ever wonder why some people have difficulty moving forward after a challenging situation, while others seem to be able to overcome their difficulties and carry on?

How well we cope with hardship and change is based on a concept called resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and cope with adversity. In other words, it is our ability to react positively and adapt well to change when things go poorly.

There are a number of factors which influence resiliency, many of which are beyond our control such as the family in which we grew up, the conditions in which we live, the amount of money we have to live on and/or loss of our health or loved ones. However, skills associated with resiliency give us the ability to control our reaction to these events and our attitudes towards them. Also, people who are resilient are more likely to have the confidence to seek support from
others in times of trouble. Children who are resilient typically have at least one significant person in their life – a parent, family member or other caregiver. You may be that significant person.

You as the parent or caregiver play a vital role in helping your children respond well – even flourish – when life throws them a curve ball. The Bounce Back Book is designed to help you nurture your children to be strong and resilient. Helping children develop self-confidence, problem-solving skills, emotional regulation and empathy skills will equip them to be successful in life.

So what are you waiting for? Have fun with these activities! Get silly with your kids! Build resiliency in your children that will last a lifetime.

A Few Tips Before You Begin:

• The best teaching tool for your child is a strong relationship with you. When you provide loving care and help your child get his/her needs met you create an emotional bond that gives your child the strength, trust and security they need to take on life's challenges.
• Play is not only fun, it is the best way for children to learn to solve problems, build relationships and foster learning and well-being. Play is how children cope with and understand their world.
• All children are unique. Know your child’s temperament. Some are quiet and sensitive. Others are boisterous and courageous. Tailor activities and ideas in this booklet to match your child’s individual and unique personality.

Note: For ease of reading, this activity book is worded for parents; however, it is also intended for all caregivers of toddlers and preschoolers.
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Being a Resilient Parent

Parenting is one of the most important roles in our society. Like any other important work, staying healthy, balanced and connected with others will help you be a flexible and resilient parent. Here are some tips to ensure your own health and well-being:

• Keep in touch with other parents and make time to connect with friends and other family members (even if it’s a phone call at naptime).

• Look for resources in your community to learn more about fostering resiliency. Check out the Alberta Mental Health Board website (www.amhb.ab.ca) for additional resources and information.

• Like other important jobs, parenting and caregiving can be stressful. Little breaks and small vacations on a regular basis may be just what you need to keep going, re-energize and practice self-care.

• Get enough sleep, exercise and eat well.

• Arrange babysitting on occasion.

• Find community programs that teach resiliency.

• Don’t take on too much – too many structured activities for your toddler and preschooler are not necessary and can wear out you and your child. Play and free time are very valuable to both of you.
Introduction

Children who have self-confidence have a strong, realistic belief in their abilities. How young children feel about themselves is largely driven by relationships with important adults in their lives. It is vital for children to feel valued, loved and that they matter to you. All of us, children included, need a sense of belonging and acceptance. This starts with family and extends to school and community.
Giving your child opportunities to do tasks they are capable of helps build their self-confidence. It is important to provide your child opportunities for trial and error, age-appropriate decision-making, free-play (also known as child-led playtime), and to give genuine, specific praise to acknowledge their talents and abilities.

Self-confidence is important to toddler and preschooler development because it helps children cope with challenges, take risks (such as reaching out to new people or trying new activities), and get along with others.
Wall of fame

Create a space in your home to showcase the unique accomplishments of your children. This can be a bulletin board or the side of your fridge – anywhere you see fit.

This dedicated space will be a place to showcase your child’s special talents and traits. You may choose to hang or display their artwork, homemade crafts, photographs, pictures, awards and certificates.

Noticing and praising your child’s accomplishments helps them feel motivated by their successes. Children thrive on adult attention and approval.

Cuddle on the couch

Share your time and attention with a cuddle on the couch. Part of daily routine should include a cuddle or some other quiet time together.

Copy cat games

Take a break from being the leader. Let your child direct the play!

When you see your child having fun on his/her own, join right in by copying whatever he/she is doing. This could be as simple as mimicking their actions to playing with their toys.
Dance, dance, dance

Tune into your favourite radio station or put in your favourite CD – it’s time to dance!

Turn up the music and dance with your child. Throw on a costume if you like (i.e. a hair brush or wooden spoon for a microphone, sunglasses, hats, scarves, ties, dressy shoes, whatever!). Follow your child’s lead.

This opportunity for free-play helps children develop their individual interests and competencies and promotes creativity. Structure is necessary in everyday life and certain situations; however, free-play protects children against stress.
Four seasons of fun

Turn-off that TV and get outside!

These fun outdoor activities provide opportunities for pre-schoolers to play with you and their peers. This helps them develop social competence (i.e. the ability to share and take turns) and strengthens their interpersonal skills.

Spring

Take time to:
- fly a kite (adults, help your kids out!)
- take a walk
- jump through puddles
- plant a garden
- have a ‘pretend’ parade
- ride a tricycle

Summer

Take time to:
- run through the sprinkler
- have a picnic
- build a sandcastle
- help out in the garden
- kick a beach ball
- colour with sidewalk chalk
Fall

**Take time to:**
- rake leaves and jump in them!
- find different coloured leaves for your scrapbook
- go for a wagon ride
- throw around a ball
- go to the park

Winter

**Take time to:**
- sled, skate, ski
- shovel snow together
- build a snowman
- jump in the snow banks
- make snow angels

Story time

Tell your children the story of your family. At bedtime instead of reading a book, tell your child a funny story about when you were a child, or tell them stories you heard from your parents, grandparents and other relatives, or stories and legends that were told to you when you were little. Or tell stories about adventures and things you did with your friends when you were little. Tell them the things you admire about your family and your community. Show them photos of grandparents, places where family members lived, special traditions and practices in your family or community.
**Widening the circle**

Make a point to visit grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and ask them to tell you and your child stories about their life, where they grew up, their favorite toys or things they liked to do. Ask them to tell you and your child who was special in their lives and what they learned about from their parents and family.

**Extended family not close at hand?**
- Think about helping children to mail handmade pictures to grandparents (and read out loud letters mailed in return) or to call relatives on the phone.
- Help children to connect with neighbours or other close family friends.

**Fears**
- It is normal for toddlers and preschoolers to develop fears from time to time.
- Fears can be real or imaginary. Some common fears at this age include: animals, insects, the dark, doctor/dentist visits, heights, monsters, robbers, storms and imaginary dangers.
- You can help by: giving reassurance without acting overly concerned, providing information to help your child develop understanding, encouraging your child to talk about fears and helping your child remember previous times he/she overcame fears.
- Don’t dismiss fears (“Don’t be silly, there is nothing to be afraid of”) or try to talk your child out of them. Support your child in learning how to cope with fear and allow your child time to gradually let go of the fear.
How to give praise

- Pay attention to your child’s accomplishments
- Take Notice: “I see you built a tower all by yourself!”
- Be Specific: “I like the way you put away your crayons and paper.”

How to give direction

- Talk about behavior rather than the child as a person
- When possible recognize the child’s strengths
- “You picked up all your blocks. I noticed there are some toys that are still on the floor.”

Let your child make choices

Children need to feel they have some control. Whenever possible give them choices to make. Two choices are enough – and you should be comfortable with either option offered.

For example, ask them “Which shirt would you like to wear today the yellow or the green?” “Would you like to go to the park or play in the yard today?” “Macaroni or soup for lunch?” Do not offer choices in situations where an adult’s decision is needed or where there is no real option.

A useful strategy when children are disappointed is to recognize their feelings and then offer alternatives. “I can see that you are upset that we can’t go swimming, but would you like to run through the sprinkler or go play on the swings?”
Problem-solving is the way in which we work through life’s difficulties and challenges. It is important for children to develop solid problem-solving skills for when they enter school and begin interacting with peers.

Like adults, all children face challenges, have to make decisions, have conflicts and handle stress. They need to practice problem-solving skills for themselves to build their self-confidence, learn right from wrong, and learn realistic thinking habits. To help your child learn problem-solving skills you can:
• Give them choices that are appropriate for their age. “Would you like cereal or eggs for breakfast?”
• Provide consistent limits so they begin to understand that there are predictable consequences for their actions.
• Offer help before the problem gets too frustrating for your child.
• Suggest appropriate solutions when necessary, for example, “Ask Sam if you can play with the truck when he is done.”
• Help your child develop realistic, positive thinking habits.
(see sidebar on how to develop realistic thinking)

Here are the basic steps of the problem-solving process:

• Acknowledge your child’s feelings: “You look mad.”
• Accept the feelings but limit the actions: “It’s OK to be mad. It’s not OK to hit. Hitting hurts people.”
• Define the problem: “I see two children who want to play with the same toy.”
• Invite the child to suggest solutions: “What can we do so both children will be happy?” Help with ideas, if needed.
• Together, decide on a solution and try it out.
• See if it works. If not, try out another solution.
• Offer praise for problem-solving efforts and positive behaviour.

If you repeat this process often, your child will have lots of opportunity to practice the problem-solving steps. As your child gets older, he/she will be able to do more of the process with less help from you, and will be able to apply it to more situations.
Hide & seek

This activity is Hide & Seek with a twist!

Hide a small toy in a room. Ask your child to look for the item as you give clues along the way. For example, hide a teddy bear behind a sofa cushion. Give your child the clue “Can you find the little bear? She’s hiding behind something that is soft and blue.”

Then let your child hide a toy and give you clues to find it.
How to develop realistic thinking

• Remember that it is not the problem itself, but the way the child thinks about it that determines how they behave.

• To help your child develop accurate and flexible thinking:
  - Acknowledge their feelings “I can see you are feeling excited.” As you identify and clarify feelings the child will come to understand their emotions better.
  - Assist them to identify the thoughts that are causing their current feelings. Try phrases such as, “What are you thinking inside your head?”  “What is your head telling you?” *
  - Gently challenge unrealistic thinking. Specifically, question children’s false belief patterns that suggest that:
    - they are always or never the cause of problems
    - that the problem will last forever
    - that a particular problem affects everything in their life

• By listening actively and asking open ended questions, you will better understand why your child engages in certain behaviours.

• Your child will also get a chance to practice identifying and communicating thoughts and feelings and will feel valued and special.

**Little shopper**

**Make a list and check it twice… you’re going grocery shopping.**

Make your grocery list as usual. Flip through your local grocery store flyer and cut out easily identifiable items (i.e. bananas, cereal, bread, toothpaste, etc.) Paste these items on to a blank sheet of paper to make a grocery list especially for your child.

At the grocery store have your child find these items and put them in the cart. Remember to say “Good job!” and other encouraging comments each time your child finds an item.

**Pieces of the puzzle**

**Turn an empty cereal box into some learning fun!**

Cut out the front of an empty cereal box. Then cut the picture into five or six large puzzle pieces. Ask your child to put the picture back together. If needed, you can give clues to your child by pointing out which pieces go where.
Grouping and sorting

Sometimes simple activities are the most fun for your child.

Find a plastic container and gather little things from all around the house such as coins, buttons, paper clips, beans, etc. Ask your child to sort them out into different categories. For example, you might sort buttons by colour, size or number of button holes. You can also ask your child to choose the largest and smallest, or identify which pile had the most items. This game can be played outside as well – with items like pebbles and stones. Sort these by color or by smoothness.

Note: If you are playing this activity with younger children (i.e. siblings), ensure that the items you choose are larger objects that cannot be easily swallowed.
Take-a-turn storymaking

Silly voices make a story come to life. Create a story with your child for this dynamic activity.

Invent a story with your child by taking turns adding sentences or story parts to the story. Add to the fun by making up a funny voice for the characters in the story. This is a good game to involve more than one child in. It creates a good opportunity to teach your child how to take turns – an important problem-solving skill in social situations.

For example:

Mom: “There once was a crocodile that lived in a swamp. Every morning, he would get up and …”

Child: “Eat his breakfast!”

Mom: “What would he do after breakfast?”

Child: “He would go to visit his friend the frog.”

Mom: (said in a silly voice) “Well hello Mr. Crocodile. Ribbit, Ribbit!”

Other Turn Taking Games

Turn-taking is an important and challenging skill for children to learn. With toddlers you can start to teach turn-taking by using simple ball games (i.e. “my turn” when you roll the ball to the child; “your turn” or “Emma’s turn” when he rolls it back to you.) With preschoolers, by taking time to play games such as Memory or Go Fish, you can support and guide your child in working on this skill.
Emotional regulation is how you manage your emotions and ensure you act appropriately and responsibly. Children’s understanding of emotions grows as they do. At age two toddlers start to understand that other people can have different feelings than they do. By age three they begin to comprehend that feelings extend beyond the here and now context. By age four they begin to understand and experience positive and negative feelings about others. As well, preschoolers begin to be able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality.
It is important for children to learn how to manage their emotions so they can develop successful interpersonal skills. This will help them have healthy, positive peer relationships as children and adults, and will prepare them for the social aspect of school.

The parent-child relationship plays a significant role in the development of emotional regulation in toddlers. All children need adults to help them learn how to deal with their thoughts and feelings. Modelling a positive and supportive attitude and expressing negative emotions (see sidebar) appropriately will help your child better manage his or her emotions.

By doing the following activities with your child you can help them learn to recognize, label and control their emotions instead of being overwhelmed by them.
Word wizards

Encourage your child to use their words to express themselves, rather than relying simply on emotional displays such as crying, whining or throwing tantrums. For example, you can help your child to learn words such as food, bottle, hungry or gestures such as raising his/her hands to mouth – as if he/she is raising a spoon to mouth – to indicate hunger.
**Cookie faces**

Whip up a batch of your favourite sugar cookie dough.* Use a round cookie cutter or the rim of a glass to cut out circular shapes that will be used to create different faces. Using assorted candies (see suggestions) create all kinds of cookie faces: happy, sad, mad, silly, etc. Use this activity as an opportunity to discuss emotions with your child.

Suggestions for making candy faces: string licorice, your favourite chocolates and candies, sprinkles, coconut, candied fruit or anything your heart desires!

*Not really a baker? No problem! Head to your local grocery store and pick up pre-made cookie dough.

**This is a fun, interactive activity that reinforces what your child is learning about identifying emotions. Not to mention a great excuse to indulge your sweet tooth!**

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*The Bounce Back Book Building Resiliency Skills in Your Preschooler*
Double bubble the fun

Breathing exercises are a classic calming and relaxation technique. Relaxation is one way to help manage emotions. Toddlers are capable of learning controlled breathing.

Make some homemade bubble solution or purchase some at the local discount store. For homemade bubble solution mix together:
1 Cup Water
2 Tablespoons Glycerin*
4 Tablespoons Dishwashing liquid

*Wondering where to buy Glycerin? Look for it in the baking aisle of the supermarket.

Note: Bubble wands can be purchased from your local discount store – or be creative and make your own wand!

Next time your child exhibits signs that he or she is angry, frustrated or extremely excited, break out the bubble solution and help him/her through this exercise. Children understand best when instructions are given one step at a time with pauses in between and when adults both say and model what they are teaching.

a) Take your child to a quite space and sit down so you are at eye level with them
b) “Take a slow deep breath.”
c) “Pull air SLOOOWWWLY down deep into your chest/tummy... all the way to your belly button.”
d) “Pucker your lips like a fish! Blow out through the little hole in your lips.”
e) “Watch the bubbles float away.”
f) Repeat until child has calmed.

Note: If blowing bubbles is too difficult for your child, remove the bubbles and continue to practice the slow breathing on its own.
Animal crackers

This game is played like freeze-tag. At the start of the game, let the children pick an animal, such as a dog, tiger, elephant, etc. They will be the animal of their choice throughout the game.

The person who is “it” chases the other children and tags them. Once a child is ‘tagged’, he or she can only be unfrozen by acting out an emotion (i.e. happy, sad, mad, etc.).

For example, Lindsay (who has chosen to be a dog) is tagged. She freezes. She thinks up an emotion – i.e. happy. Now she must act like a happy dog. For example, “I’m a happy dog, WHOOF, WHOOF!” She freezes in that position. She is then unfrozen and continues the game.

Remember to periodically stop the game and change the person who is “it”.

Not only is this a great opportunity to get outdoors and get some exercise, this game reinforces how to identify and express emotions. Also, by asking children to ‘stop and freeze’, Animal Crackers helps children learn self-control.

Parents, don’t be shy! Take part in the game too.
How to be a Good Role Model

Young children can tell if you are upset, angry or sad. How you deal with your own mood can help children learn to manage their emotions.

It is helpful to give words to feelings. For example, “I feel happy that we can go out in the sun today.”

When your own feelings are negative or stressful for you, they are likely to puzzle or upset your children. As a first line of action, it is most helpful to find adult ways to manage your mood. When your own strategies fail, it is helpful to simply describe your feelings, the reason for those feelings, and that your feelings are NOT about something the child has done. For example, you could say to your child, “I just heard that Grandma is sick. I am sad for Grandma and a little worried. If I seem different it is because of I am feeling sad. I will feel better soon.” If you think that your child is still distressed, it is often helpful to reassure your child. For example, “I want you to know I am not upset with you.”
Introduction

Empathy is the ability to see the world through someone else’s eyes and to understand the needs of others. Other words to describe empathy: care, compassion, sympathy and kindness.

It is normal for toddlers and preschoolers to believe that they are the centre of the world, that everyone else thinks like they do and that everything belongs to them. Adults can help young children learn empathy by helping them identify and express different types of emotions and helping them learn skills to be kind, cooperative and a good friend.
It is important for children to start learning empathy so that they can build healthy, stable and solid relationships with other people. This ability to develop relationships with other children and adults is also vital to school readiness.

It is important for adults to model empathy for children. When you respond to your child by acknowledging their feelings, by comforting them when they are in distress and when you are kind and cooperative with your family, friends and in social situations, you are modeling empathy for your child.

The following activities are fun ways that you and your children can learn about empathy.
If you’re happy and you know it

Have fun with this classic children’s song!

Mix it up with verses such as:

“If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands, CLAP, CLAP!” (Clap hands).

“If you’re sad, and you know it, cry out loud, BOO, HOO!” (Blow nose).

“If you’re angry and you know it, stomp your feet, BOOM, BOOM!” (Stomp feet).

“If you’re confused and you know it, scratch your head, SCRATCH, SCRATCH!” (Scratch head).

“If you’re silly and you know it, dance around, DANCE, DANCE!” (Dance around).*

Can’t remember the tune or the song? Don’t worry! If you have access to a computer (public libraries offer free Internet access) you can tune into Baby Karaoke, from the Raising Children Network, an Australian parenting website: http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/happy_songsheet.html/context/604. Join in on the animated fun as you learn this song and other popular childrens’ songs.

*Run out of ideas? Take turns choosing an action.
Feelings, feelings, everywhere

Grab your child’s favourite storybook on the shelf or get one from the local library. As you read the book together, talk to your child about what each character is feeling. For example, in the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, you might say:

“Baby bear just lost his chair. Look at it – all broken in pieces! I think baby bear is sad because his favourite chair is broken.”

OR

“The bears just found Goldilocks in the bed! Look how fast she is running out the door. She is running fast because she is scared.”

Children need help identifying emotions in everyday situations. You can also do this in real-life situations. For example, “Michael is crying. He can’t find his bottle and he is sad. Let’s help him find his bottle.”
Helping around the house

Assign a special household task to your child. Explain to him or her that this is his or her responsibility as part of the family. This will encourage a sense of personal competence, foster cooperation and create a sense of inclusion.

Age appropriate responsibilities include: Helping to feed the family pet; helping to water the plants; setting the table for dinner; picking up their toys after play time; and putting dirty clothes in the hamper. At this age, children are still in the early process of understanding the concept of empathy. As they continue to grow and develop, they will be better able to grasp the idea of empathy and fairness.
Playhouse puppets

Build a cast of characters based on your family and friends!

Using the cut-outs on page 40 create your family in puppets. Use your creativity to colour the characters. Using the perforated lines, punch out the characters. Then glue them onto Popsicle sticks, straws, pencils – or whatever you find around the house. Have fun acting with the puppets behind a table, chair or in a cardboard box puppet theatre (See How to Build Your Own Puppet Theatre).

Now take to the stage! Get ready to act two scenes:

ACT 1: An adult is shopping in the grocery store. The child asks for a chocolate bar.
The adult says “No, honey, not right now. You’re going to have to wait. We’ll eat one after dinner.” The child says “No, I want it now!” The child then starts to scream and yell.

Ask your child, “How do you think the little girl/boy feels?” Why do you think the little boy/girl feels that way? Is this a good way for the little girl or boy to behave/express their feelings? How can the little boy/little girl make himself/herself feel better in a situation like this?”

ACT 2: An adult is shopping in the grocery store. The child asks for a chocolate bar.
The adult says “No, honey, not right now. You’re going to have to wait. We’ll eat one after dinner.” The child says “But mommy I’m hungry. I want to eat right now!” (Does not raise voice or throw a tantrum). The mom replies “Ok, now that I know you’re hungry, maybe we can have supper as soon as we leave the store.”

This activity demonstrates to your child that there are many ways to react to each and every situation. Explain to your child that feeling mad, sad or upset is okay, but not all behaviours to express these feelings are okay.
How to Build Your Own Puppet Theatre

1. Find a sturdy cardboard box
2. Open the top and bottom flaps
3. Turn the box on its side so that one open end is facing you
4. Fold the bottom flap in to create one half of the theatre floor
5. On the top flap sketch a scallop trim and cut it out
6. Sketch a curtain shape on either of the side flaps & cut out
7. Turn box around so that the other open end is facing you
8. Fold the bottom flap in to meet the other half of theatre floor
9. Fold the top flap in. Cut off the side flaps and discard.
Arts & crafts time

Put on your creative hat – it’s time for a picture party!

Prior to the party, purchase a few inexpensive photo frames from the local discount store (or make your own out of Popsicle sticks!). Invite two or three of your child’s friends over to your house for a play date to make fun, creative and personalized photo frames.

Step 1: Have the children draw a picture of one another or use a picture taken at the party!

Step 2: Have them place their favourite picture into the frames.

Step 3: Decorate the frames in way that shows off their unique personalities, characters and tastes!

Suggestions for decorations: Scrap pieces of fabric, string or yarn, feathers, big beads or buttons, markers, crayons, paint, glitter, glue stick, etc.

At this age, children begin to establish friendships with their peers that may last several years or longer. Help foster their relationships by encouraging healthy interaction with others.
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