LEARNING FROM DISASTER
Perspectives from Research on Resilience in Children and Youth

Ann S. Masten
University of Minnesota

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Resilience

Capacity of a system to withstand or recover from significant disturbances that threaten its adaptive function, viability or development

What matters for children?

- **Dose**
  - Current, prior, ongoing, cumulative
  - Toxic stress
- **Context**
  - Historical, cultural
  - Recovery context
- **Developmental timing**
  - Sensitive periods
  - Risk, meaning, capabilities, expectations all vary with development
- **Individual differences**
  - Biological, cognitive, socioemotional, etc
- **Resources and protective factors**
  - Capable caregivers, self-regulation and problems solving skills, etc
- **Family resilience**
- **Resilience of other key systems**
Capacity for resilience

- Distributed in multiple, adaptive, interacting systems
  - In the individual
  - In families and relationships
  - In cultures
  - In communities and societies
  - In ecosystems

- Dynamic

- Interdependent
Many systems influence resilience in children

- **In the organism**
  - Immune system; stress systems
  - CNS in good working order; neurocognitive skills; executive function
  - Motivation and agency; reward systems

- **In relationships**
  - Secure-base attachment figures
  - Friends and mentors (older children)
  - Spiritual (older children)

- **In community and society**
  - Emergency response systems; health care systems
  - Schools
  - Cultural practices
Pathways of response vary

Onset of disaster

Adaptive Function

Optimal

Average

Maladaptive

Time

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To foster resilience in children

- Plan developmentally
- Target and time interventions strategically
- Consider multiple levels of action
- Define and prepare “first responders”
- Promote resilience of key systems for children
  - family, school, peers, community
Planning

- Prepare for children
  - medically, psychologically, pragmatically

- Recognize teachers and childcare workers as first responders

- Train first responders on typical responses and needs of children by age and development

- Keep in mind that first responders are likely to perform better if their own children are safe
Reduce or mitigate risk

- Avoid separations of children from attachment figures
- Monitor child exposures, including MEDIA
- Reduce stress of pregnant mothers
- Help parents regulate negative emotion
Support - protect - restore - mobilize

- Keep children & families together or reunite quickly

- Restore routine systems that symbolize normalcy & recovery to children, their families and communities
  - Family meals and routines
  - School and play opportunities
  - A place to call “home”
  - Cultural practices and religious observances

- Support families and teachers/schools so they can support and comfort children
  - Give natural and familiar adaptive systems a chance

- Provide older children and youth with meaningful but manageable roles in recovery
Remember

- Resilience is common
- There are many roads to resilience
- Children depend on the behavior of adults around them
- Needs, vulnerabilities, & strengths of children vary by development, individual differences, culture, and context
- Recovery depends on fundamental adaptive systems
  - In body, mind, relationships, families, schools, cultures, communities…
  - Restoring & protecting these systems are high priorities
- Resilience may take time and a positive recovery environment
- Given a favorable recovery context, most children will recover
Disaster


Masten & Osofsky (2010). Disasters and their impact on child development: Introduction to the special section. *Child Development*, 81, 1029-1039 [SRCD science brief on this special section at URL below]

[http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss1/art9/](http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss1/art9/)

Resilience

Masten (2013). Risk and resilience in development, in the *Oxford Handbook of Developmental Psychology*

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