## Building Multisystem Resilience for Children in the Context of Disasters



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A systems definition of resilience for scalability & portability



## RESILIENCE

Capacity of a system (child, family, community, economy, society...) to adapt successfully through multiple processes to challenges that threaten system function, survival or development

Masten 2007, 2014, 2018, Masten et al 2021



# Systems in a child's life

- Embedded
- Interacting
- Interdependent



All embedded in cultural, physical, & historical context

#### Masten 2003



## From a developmental systems perspective

Resilience is dynamic, fluctuating, and changing

Resilience arises from multiple systems interacting

Child resilience depends on caregiver & family resilience

Family resilience in turn depends on many systems

Resilience can cascade (spread) across systems over time



## What matters for children in disaster?

- Dose (severity of exposure to adversity)
  - Current, prior, ongoing, cumulative...
- Context
  - Historical, cultural; Qualities of the recovery context
- Developmental timing
  - Risk, meaning, sensitivity, capabilities, expectations vary with development
- Individual differences
  - Biological, cognitive, socio-emotional...etc
- Resilience in proximal socioecological systems
  - Family, friends, work unit...etc
- Community resilience
  - Safety, healthcare, childcare, education, services, recreation...etc
- Societal/cultural supports for individuals, families, & communities



## The short list of psychosocial protective influences ~ observed at multiple system levels

- Attachment bonds, close relationships, social support
- Sense of belonging, cohesion
- Self-regulation, executive function, system leadership
- Problem solving, planning
- Mastery motivation, motivation to adapt
- Beliefs in self or system efficacy, agency, active coping
- Hope, optimism, confidence in a better future
- Purpose, a sense of meaning
- Positive views of self, family, group, community
- Positive habits, routines, rituals, traditions, celebrations







**3 basic strategies implicated by resilience science** 

Reduce risk

Boost resources

Leverage powerful adaptive systems



## Reduce risk Goal: Prevent, reduce, or mitigate exposure to adversity Examples

- Emergency planning for vulnerable children
- Equip & train for unique medical needs of children
- Safety, evacuation planning in families, schools, communities
- Build & fortify shelters, homes, schools for likely disasters
- Limit media exposure to frightening news & images
- Reduce child maltreatment & victimization



## Boost resources Goal: Increase assets or access to resources Examples

- Educate parents & teachers on needs of children in disasters
- Essential supplies for daily child needs
- A place to call home for families
- Spaces & equipment for children to play & learn
- Internet access, devices, electricity
- Childcare
- Cash assistance



### Leverage powerful adaptive systems Goal: Mobilize, restore, facilitate engines of resilience Examples

- Reunite families
- Provide care for unaccompanied children
- Support families in restoring normal routines
- Restore functioning of schools & childcare systems
- Provide opportunities for children to play
- Provide ways for children & youth to help with recovery
- Promote a sense of meaning & belonging in schools & community
- Restore, support cultural traditions & celebrations
- Expect and plan for recovery, resilience and a positive future



## Takeaways

- A multisystem perspective is crucial
- Risk can be prevented, mitigated, or countered
- Many contributors to resilience are malleable
- Resilience can be nurtured, supported, boosted, & protected
- Resilience of children & youth depends on resilience of other systems
  Families, communities, cultures, religions, health care systems, govts, NGOs
- Future resilience of societies depends on nurturing resilience of children





