- Parenting / Persistence

Building resilience in uncertain times

For parents and caregivers, doing this means intentionally managing their own feelings and experiences first.

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AS parents, we want to protect our children from all discomfort.



gained during difficult times.

We do so best when we intentionally manage our own feelings and experiences and show them how we cope with uncertainty.

"I feel like I am failing." Learning forgiveness in yourself is a great way to model that behaviour to children. Perfection is never an option, and getting even closer to your goals is harder during unpredictable times.

Know that if you forgive yourself and your child and still sometimes want to tear your hair out. We all have bad days when the stress load is high.

We cannot control the outside world, but we create sanctuaries within our homes. With peace in our homes, we can better handle the outside world.

Maintaining a calm presence

"I need a time out." Be a calming presence for others. In moments when the future is

"I feel helpless." Few things create discomfort more than feeling like there is too much to do or nothing you can do at all.

And few things restore comfort more than tackling what you can. "I'll NEVER _____!" can transform into "I haven't _____ yet." Don't accept failure or disappointment as permanent but instead view setbacks as opportunities to try again.

"I can't do

"I can't go through this alone." When times get tough, people unify. We hold those we love nearer and offer those who are vulnerable the extra support they deserve.

"Our community needs to come together." Sometimes during challenging times, some people use divisive language.

This is deeply unsettling to children and adolescents. We must reinforce our shared values and common humanity.

Uncertainty is frightening but

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The best way to protect our children is to shape the lessons gained during difficult times. — Freepik

At the same time, we know that preparing them to deal with challenges is important. It builds their resilience and offers the best lifelong protection.

When parents know precisely the problem to face, they can make an action plan to help their child learn about and manage it.

However, in unpredictable or uncertain times, it is harder for parents to know the best way to prepare their child.

Sometimes we go through uncertain times as a nation. Sometimes, uncertainty is felt most fully in your community or family.

The only thing fully predictable in life is that we all will experience curveballs. Humans have long experienced periods of uncertainty and we can draw from our collective wisdom to get through unpredictable times.

Wisdom embedded in our DNA tells us that working to strengthen our relationships during uncertain times is key to building family and children's resilience.

We can always offer reassurance by saying what so many of our grandparents said to us: “This too shall pass and you’ll get through this with me by your side.”

Shaping lessons gained

The best way to protect our children is to shape the lessons gained during difficult times.

We do so best when we intentionally manage our own feelings and experiences and show them how we cope with uncertainty.

“I feel like I am failing.” Learning forgiveness in yourself is a great way to model that behaviour to children. Perfection is never an option, and getting even closer to your goals is harder during unpredictable times.

Know that if you forgive yourself and focus on the good in yourself through self-compassion, your child or adolescent will learn to be a bit gentler with themselves. That is lifelong protection.

“My kids are frustrated, and so am I.” One of the most respectful things we can do is genuinely understand someone else’s point of view.

The best way for children to gain this perspective is by benefiting from it firsthand. You build their empathy for others by working to understand their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

“I don’t know how to handle how I feel.” Processing and releasing emotions can be hard, even as an adult.

A time of uncertainty with heightened emotions is the time to show that emotions are not to be ignored.

Our children must learn from us that having emotions is good, talking about them is necessary, and being honest with them is healing.

“I want to pull my hair out.” You can love your child and still sometimes want to tear your hair out. We all have bad days when the stress load is high.

We cannot control the outside world, but we create sanctuaries within our homes. With peace in our homes, we can better handle the outside world.

Maintaining a calm presence

“I need a time out.” Be a calming presence for others. In moments when the future is unclear and our minds begin racing, the presence of a reassuring voice makes all the difference.

“I don’t know how to respond.” Be clear and honest with yourself and others. Say what you do know. Admit what you don’t.

“My mind feels out of control.” Maintaining physical health strengthens emotional health. Strong bodies support our minds to best navigate the circumstances we confront.

“I keep thinking about the worst-case scenario.” Stay present and live in reality. Uncertainty can make our minds race to the worst possible outcome.

Catch those thoughts and tell yourself you are imagining the worst and it is better to focus on the here and now.

Young people can assume the worst because they have not yet had the experience to know that problems can come and go. Let them know they will get through this with you as their guide.

“I feel helpless.” Few things create discomfort more than feeling like there is too much to do or nothing you can do at all.

And few things restore comfort more than tackling what you can. “I’ll NEVER _____!” can transform into “I haven’t _____ yet.” Don’t accept failure or disappointment as permanent but instead view setbacks as opportunities to try again.

“I can’t do everything.” Stay healthy, strong, and compassionate. Take care of those who are vulnerable. Let family members know they are precious.

Do what it takes to keep a roof over your head and food on the table. Everything else can always wait.

“I am so disappointed.” Find joy in giving service and maintaining purpose. Help your children see the difference they can make in others’ lives and how good it feels to give service.

This may enhance their own resilience because they’ll learn the joy of giving. More importantly, they’ll learn there is no pity in receiving.

“I had so many plans that aren’t working out.” When you can’t change things, adapt. Focus on what you can make a reality and what you can do. Resilience is about more than bouncing back. It is about adapting. Growing. Becoming stronger. Being ready for the next challenge but also being prepared to savour all the good life has to offer.

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“Our community needs to come together.” Sometimes during challenging times, some people use divisive language.

This is deeply unsettling to children and adolescents. We must reinforce our shared values and common humanity.

Uncertainty is frightening but knowing that we are not alone to figure it out brings comfort. Any lone individual is vulnerable but joined together we are stronger than the combination of each of our individual strengths.

People together can take turns drawing strength from others and being a source of strength. We overcome challenges when we come together to remind each other that we belong to one another. — American Academy of Pediatrics/tribune News Service

Dr Kenneth Ginsburg is author of several AAP books, Building Resilience In Children And Teens, 4th Edition, Congrats You’re Having A Teen: Strengthen Your Family And Raise A Good Person and Lighthouse Parenting: Raising Your Child With Loving Guidance For A Lifelong Bond. He practises adolescent medicine at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and is a Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Dr Ginsburg directs Health Services at Covenant House Pennsylvania, where he serves Philadelphia’s youth enduring homelessness, and is also Founding Director of The Center for Parent and Teen Communication. His AAP multimedia toolkit, “Reaching Teens: Strength-based, Traumasensitive, Resilience-building Communication Strategies Rooted In Positive Youth Development,” prepares professionals to be the adults young people deserve in their lives.