

Youth & Family Consensus Statement on Children’s Mental Health Resiliency

Resiliency Definition

Resiliency is an inner capacity that when nurtured, facilitated, and supported by others—empowers children, youth, and families to successfully meet life’s challenges with a sense of self-determination, mastery and hope.

1) Validation and Valuing

A resilience-oriented mental health system is affirming of youth and family with unconditional acceptance. Supportive, emotionally safe environments are created, where youth and families can share their vulnerabilities and weaknesses safely and without judgment. Validation is a shared experience in which each provider journeys to discover and appreciate the family’s culture, circumstances, and life realities. The youth and family are validated for their courage, efforts, and persistence, knowing that progress is sometimes very difficult, and that “hanging in there” is sometimes all that is possible at any given point in a family’s life. Youth with mental health disabilities and their families are doing the best they can, not only maintaining, but “surviving well.”

2) Basic Needs, Safety, Supports and Services

Children thrive in emotionally and physically safe families, communities and neighborhoods. Families and communities take an active role in the protection, monitoring, and comfort of every youth. Families are supported in their efforts to secure safe housing, and appropriate education for their children - through graduation. Services and supports address the complete mental health needs across developmental ages and stages and are delivered in the least restrictive, most dignified environment. Mental health care is affordable, available, and accessible, where no family has to give up custody, or experience extreme financial hardship to receive any level of mental health care.

3) Sanctuary

Youth and families need safe and calming people and places for refuge, respite, recovery, and rejuvenation. Both youth and parents need their own protected space where they can feel and be calm. Youth need multiple safe options for sanctuary in different contexts, including home, school, and the community. Designated and predictable breaks are important for coping with the ongoing challenges of mental illness.

4) Supportive Connections

Resiliency is nurtured by family and friends, facilitated through helping relationships (formal and informal), and supported and embraced by the community. Children, youth, and families thrive when they feel understood and connected to positive and supportive family members, adults, peers, institutions, and culture. Youth and families benefit from social support systems that are responsive to their needs and that offer tangible, emotional, educational, and advocacy supports. The community actively reaches out to develop positive relationships with every youth and family.

5) Hope and Optimism

Resiliency is an ordinary process that is available and expected for all youth. All children have the right to hope and success starting at birth and lasting a lifetime. Communities, providers, and families foster opportunities and possibilities so that youth with emotional challenges have hope for a positive future with a self-determined and fulfilled life. We believe that even the smallest victories are significant, sustaining our hope, and giving us the courage to persevere.

6) Contribution & Participation

Youth with emotional and behavioral challenges thrive when given opportunities for contribution, participation, and positive involvement. Active involvement and meaningful belonging in community activities and schools are fostered and supported. Youth’s viewpoints and opinions are valued and meaningful leadership roles are created for them. Community service and helping opportunities are made available for all youth. Communities

actively seek out youth as community partners. Communities believe that youth can and do make significant contributions.

7) Self-Wisdom and Self-Acceptance

Youth and families are experts in their own experiences and develop practical knowledge about coping with, and managing, behavioral and emotional challenges. Youth and families know what works best for them, under what circumstances, and by whom. They know the situations when they can handle a problem by themselves and the conditions when they need help. They also recognize that not knowing the answer or solution to a problem is OK. Youth cultivate self acceptance, recognizing they are doing the best they can given their current abilities, life experiences, and circumstances. Youth may have setbacks, but learn from each experience, always growing emotionally stronger and wiser. Youth learn to appreciate who they are becoming including their unique abilities, talents, and strengths.

8) Competencies (Skills, Abilities, Talents)

All children, youth, and families have unique strengths, abilities, and talents that when nurtured can grow, develop, and flourish. With the right supports, encouragement, and active facilitation, youth with emotional or behavioral challenges can achieve their full potential. Each community commits to creating positive learning environments that enhance abilities, teach skills, and offer sufficient opportunities for expression of each youth's unique talents.

9) Justice

All child serving systems make a commitment to provide safe and non-traumatizing care with all children and families, and to, above all else, do no harm. A resilience-oriented mental health system is sensitive to the culture, values, and situation of every person, treating each with dignity and respect regardless of the person's life circumstances. Providers advocate for the rights of all youth and families and are proactive in facilitating and developing meaningful accommodations so that the youth can achieve success in all environments. Youth and families, of all cultures and life situations, have a legitimate voice at all levels of policy, services, and supports. This voice is supported and elevated through community champions and resiliency ambassadors.

10) Expectations and Accommodations that Maximize Success

A resiliency-oriented mental health system promotes the expectation that resiliency is available to all youth. Reasonable and achievable expectations that maximize the functioning and potential of each youth are promoted. Youth with special needs succeed when they have flexible and accommodating environments with personal champions that support them in reaching their potential.

11) Courage and Confidence

Maintaining mental health involves great personal courage and bravery to deal with life stressors and obstacles, especially for individuals with emotional/behavior challenges. The daily act of coping is itself a heroic act. Youth and families have the courage to stand their ground and say "I can" regardless of what others tell them is possible, and to face situations that appear insurmountable. Youth and families grow in confidence through each life experience, developing self-assurance and belief in their abilities not only to cope, but to thrive. A resiliency-orientated mental health system stands with youth and families and fights stigma and stereotypes through comprehensive mental health education that transforms the community.

12) Sense of Meaning and Joy

All children, youth, and families seek to find happiness, meaning, and joy that bring satisfaction and quality into their lives. Having a sense of purpose and fun promotes wellness and resiliency, and gives us something to look forward to each day. Environments that foster creativity, playfulness, and humor, allow youth and families to experience lightheartedness and joy. In resiliency-oriented systems youth are supported in finding meaning and joy in their lives.