

# Pressure, Perfectionism, [*Protectionism*] & *Privilege: The Perfect Storm for Teen* *Anxiety*

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# HOW DO WE RESPOND?

- ♦ Stress + Response = ?
- ♦ The Paradox of Adultification and Infantilization
  - ♦ Or the train wreck of increased pressure/demands and the decreased capacity to tolerate discomfort

# Are American Kids Becoming Less Resilient?

- According to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in 2015:
  - 3 million teens ages 12 to 17 had at least one Major Depressive Episode.
  - More than 2 million teens reported experiencing depression that impairs daily functioning.
  - 6.3 million teens ages 13 to 18 have had an anxiety disorder (represents 25% of the population of that age group).
- A survey by pediatrician, Dr. Stuart Slavin, of high school students in Silicon Valley found:
  - 54 % of students showed moderate to severe symptoms of depression
  - 80 % reported moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety

# Resilience

Resiliency is the ability to spring back from and successfully adapt to adversity.

Bouncing back from problems and stuff with more power and more smarts.“

Resilience has been defined as: *the human capacity to face, overcome and ultimately be strengthened by life's adversities and challenges.*

# How to interfere with the development of a robust psychological immune system



# A Cultural Shift in Parenting?

- The Price of Privilege, M. Levine
- The Blessings of a Skinned Knee, W. Mogel
- The Self-Esteem Trap: Raising Confident and Compassionate Kids in an Age of Self-Importance, P. Young-Eisendrath
- A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting, H. Estroff Marano
- Raising Unselfish Children in a Self-Absorbed World, J. Rigby
- How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success, J. Lythcott-Haim

# Sources of Pressure

## ◆ External

- ◆ Cultural: Competitive Environment
- ◆ Familial/parental expectations
- ◆ Social/Peers
- ◆ Social Media and No Escape
- ◆ *The Virtual Umbilical Cord*: Monitoring and Surveillance
- ◆ The ability to continue or maintain an affluent lifestyle
  - ◆ “Failure to Launch”

## ◆ Internal

- ◆ Not wanting to disappoint parents
- ◆ Perfectionism/Ego
- ◆ Performance/Achievement-based Identity
  - ◆ The Boy who is “nothing”
- ◆ Self-esteem and social comparison theory

# Factors That Undermine Resilience

- Breakdown of “authoritative communities”
- ♦ Perfectionism in children & parents
- Over-protective parenting (doing too much)
- Permissive parenting (doing too little in terms of limit-setting)
- Performance-based identity
- Technology and the *virtual umbilical cord*
- Culture of immediate gratification
- The Decline of Play
- Affluence: Advantage as Disadvantage



# Other ways to interfere with the development of a robust psychological immune system...

- ◆ Not teaching children to tolerate discomfort/frustration
- ◆ Overfunctioning/Underfunctioning relationships
- ◆ “The Power of NO”
  - ◆ “When we can no longer change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” V. Frankl
- ◆ Overemphasizing “cheap” self-esteem
  - ◆ “You’re the Best!!!”
- ◆ Not preparing children that life involves trials & tribulations
- ◆ Overvaluing achievement at the expense of prosocial values such as kindness and caring for others (“tending and befriending”)

“When mothers and fathers are seen as disproportionately valuing achievements: Implications for adjustment among upper middle class youth.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*  
*Luthar et al.*

- ♦ “In order to foster well-being and academic success during the critical years surrounding early adolescence, our findings suggest that parents should accentuate kindness and respect for others at least as much as (or more than) stellar academic performance and extracurricular accolades.”

# What Can We Do?

- ♦ Two sides of the coin
  - ♦ Decreasing the pressure
  - ♦ Increasing the resilience
    - ♦ Or Grit
    - ♦ Or Coping
    - ♦ Or Psychological Immune System

# Our Children: It Begins with Us

- ♦ “If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.” – Carl Jung
- ♦ “Who we are and how we engage with the world are much stronger predictors of how our children will do than what we know about parenting.” –Brene Brown
- ♦ “Let me *be* the change I wish to see in the world [or in others].” - Gandhi

# Parenting to Boost Resilience

## ♦ Parenting stance

- ♦ Parenting philosophy, beliefs, style, and values:
  - ♦ Do you believe in the capacity of your child to meet challenges, overcome adversity, and become resilient?
  - ♦ Challenging the myth of the fragile child

## ♦ Parenting strategies

- ♦ Teaching emotional regulation
- ♦ Teaching problem-solving & coping skills
- ♦ Praising children for the qualities they can control (e.g., effort) rather than “traits” (e.g. intelligence).
  - ♦ Growth Mindsets

# What Else Can We Do?

- ♦ Acceptance that stress, discomfort and even pain is part of the human condition!
  - ♦ The opposite of acceptance is avoidance
- ♦ We must give them the tools to tolerate discomfort
- ♦ Authoritative parenting style
  - ♦ “Connect before you Direct or Correct”
  - ♦ Promote problem-solving
  - ♦ The importance of VALUES
  - ♦ The purpose of discipline is to develop self-discipline
    - ♦ The Power of NO!
  - ♦ Building the psychological immune system:
    - ♦ When dealing with current suffering, 82% say they are drawing on strength developed from past stressful experiences

# “Hardwired to Connect”: The Importance of Community

- ♦ Caring creates resilience
  - ♦ “Tend and Befriend” instinct
  - ♦ Oxytocin: neurohormone for bonding and inhibits the fear centers of brain increasing
- ♦ Social support and the buffering hypothesis
- ♦ Transform self-focus into greater-than-self goals
  - ♦ What do you want to contribute to the world?

A philosophical musing: Happiness cannot be pursued (sorry Founding Fathers). Happiness ensues from {fill in the blank}.

- ♦ *“The purpose of life is not to be happy—but to matter, to be productive, to be useful, to have it make some difference that you lived at all.”*

- ♦ Leo Rosten



# More Parenting Tips to Boost Resilience

- ♦ Believe in the capacity of your child to meet challenges, overcome adversity, and become resilient
- ♦ Model resilient characteristics
- ♦ Communicate that mistakes are opportunities from which to learn
- ♦ Allow your child enough room to make decisions to bolster confidence
- ♦ Help your child set *realistic* goals
- ♦ Connect your child to community that teaches what it means to be a good person
- ♦ Give your child responsibilities and opportunities to contribute to the family and the larger community
- ♦ Give your child opportunities to practice problem solving
- ♦ Embrace vulnerabilities and imperfections
- ♦ Value hard work, perseverance & respect (of oneself & others)

Thank you!

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