

# BUILDING A FAMILY THAT CAN BOUNCE BACK



## Top 10 tips for creating resilient families.

Practical ways to help every member of your family — from the youngest to the oldest — bounce back from life's setbacks.

**Resilience is the knack of bungee jumping through life — when the inevitable pitfalls happen, something helps you bounce back.**

START HERE

## WHY RESILIENCE MATTERS

Developing resilience helps families manage many situations, and can minimise the negative effects of things like mental health struggles, alcohol and other drugs, self-esteem, friendships, and domestic violence. When a family promotes behaviours that build resilience, the whole family benefits — everyone becomes more resilient, from the youngest to the oldest.

### Top 10 tips at a glance

1 Promote belonging

2 Have some downtime

3 Rediscover family rituals

4 Provide consistency

5 Be clear who is in charge

6 Teach the skills of self-esteem

7 Love kids for their differences

8 Embrace spontaneity & curiosity

9 Know how to argue

10 Be reliably unpredictable

## THE TIPS, IN A LITTLE MORE DETAIL

1

### Promote belonging

A sense of belonging is a strong protective factor against self-harm, depression, and drug issues. Children are most resilient when they have three types of belonging: being part of a family, having different friendships, and having an adult outside the family who connects with them.

2

### Have some downtime

We live in a hectic world, rushing from activity to activity. When there's a lull we hear "I'm bored" — but quiet, unstructured time at home lets children develop creativity, resourcefulness and innovation. Find time each week to just be, with nothing organised happening.

3

### Rediscover family rituals

Rituals and routines are protective factors, and the best ones often cost nothing — Friday night pizza, the Sunday morning clean-up. These are the things your kids will look back on and say "we always used to..."

4

### Provide consistency

Children do best when parents agree on rules and standards, value compassion over coercion, and work as a team. Life isn't always so simple — if parents have different values, one solution is for each to take charge of a particular area. This applies in single-parent and separated families too. Shared leadership beats constant conflict or undermining each other.

5

### Be clear who is in charge

Families tend not to work well as democracies — research suggests they work best as benevolent dictatorships, with parents setting appropriate rules and boundaries with warmth and understanding. Taking charge doesn't cost you your children's friendship; often the reverse is true. Feel confident to be in charge, make decisions, and talk about them with your children.

6

### Teach the skills of self-esteem

Families that work well praise one another often. Even if a teenager just shrugs and says "yeah Mum", it doesn't mean they haven't heard it. Try teaching self-praise by asking questions like "How did you do that?" or "What did you do to do so well?"

7

**Love kids for their differences**

Every child is different, with a different brain and different strengths. In families that function well, people are allowed to be different and loved for it. Children take on all sorts of roles — and just when you think you've figured them out, they change again. A strong sense of individual identity is a sign of good parenting.

8

**Embrace spontaneity and curiosity**

Spontaneity and curiosity are building blocks of good mental health. You can't teach better mental health from a book — but you can show your kids what it looks like. If you want them to live happy, healthy lives, the best tool is to get out there and have a good time yourself.

9

**Know how to argue**

Families that work well do have conflict — they just know how to argue well. The family is where children learn to resolve disputes fairly, which becomes the basis for sharing, negotiating and problem-solving beyond the family. Kids should be allowed to express differing opinions, but also need to learn they can't always win, and that sometimes they're wrong.

10

**Be reliably unpredictable**

Young children need consistency and predictability, so they feel sure of you. But after a while, a little unpredictability goes a long way — to many kids, parents are as predictable as a clock. Structure matters, but a bit of spontaneity keeps your children interested in learning from you.

**MAKE IT YOURS****GIVE YOURSELF SOME GRACE**

Perhaps the most important trait of parents in healthy families is realising that, while all of the above is desirable, it isn't always possible. The best families focus on promoting good functioning, rather than spending energy blaming themselves for the times things don't go quite to plan.

You don't need to get it all right.  
You just need to keep the rope attached.

## WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

### Recommended resources

[andrewfuller.com.au](http://andrewfuller.com.au)

[mylearningstrengths.com](http://mylearningstrengths.com)

[tuneinnotout.com](http://tuneinnotout.com)

[relationships.org.au](http://relationships.org.au)

### If things feel harder than this factsheet can help with

Family life is hard sometimes, and that's normal — but if things feel like more than you can manage alone, support is available. **Visit [alwf.org.au/support](http://alwf.org.au/support) for options, or call Lifeline: 13 11 14.**



[alwf.org.au](http://alwf.org.au)

Content by Andrew Fuller, Clinical Psychologist and Family Therapist — Fellow in the Departments of Psychiatry, Learning and Educational Development at the University of Melbourne.