



# Strengthening Resilience & Over Ruling Assumptions



How can we understand resilience as a process, as an ongoing experience that lean on protective factors built and shaped daily through renewed experience?

Boris Cyrulnik describes this process by analyzing the natural apparition of pearls: «When a grain of sand gets into an oyster, the oyster in order to defend itself, secretes a nacreous substance which settle around the grain of sand and round it off, little by little. The rough grain gets modeled and shaped until it assumes the new form of a precious pearl».

For this process to be effective, researches show that common set of protective factors must be active:

- The availability of at least one stable and supportive relationship between a child and the adults in his life. Even though these relationships begin in the family (nuclear family or enlarged family), they also include neighbors, providers of care and education, coaches and family friends among many others.
- Helping children build self efficacy and a sense of mastery over their life, thus enabling them to dream about future projects and future plans.

Those who believe in their own capacity to overcome hardships, and in building and strengthening life skills as learned experience, are far more likely to take control of their destiny and shape it as much as possible at their image.

- Developing strong self-regulation skills enabling children to manage their own behavior and emotions, to develop and execute adaptive strategies to cope with difficult circumstances, is at the core of resilience and success. It's important that children don't feel guilt when facing adversity, and are not seen as victims, but as active individuals.
- The supportive context of affirming faith or traditions without being blinded by them, indicate that children who are solidly grounded within such mechanisms are more likely to respond effectively when challenged. Faith, hope, rituals and religious beliefs, promote resilience process and the sense of coherence and meaning. Although everything seems uncontrollable, values often are a compass to find the right directions.

On the other hand, consistent findings from extensive knowledge base on resilience, provides an opportunity to over rule several widely believed assumptions about successful individuals.

Resilience requires relationships. There is no gene that determines the life course of an individual irrespectively of his experiences. A child is not born a hero or a victim. It is without a doubt, the reliable presence of at least one supportive relationship and multiple opportunities for developing effective coping skills that lead to the capacity to overcome significant adversity.

Resilience can be strengthened at any age. Resilience is built through a developmental process that occurs over an extended period of time, from infancy through adolescence and into the adult years. All is not decided in the first 3 years of age, even though these first years of life have high experience values. Increasing evidence suggests that brain structure can be altered, at all ages.

Forms of adversity are various, overcoming one form, may not necessarily mean overcoming another. Resilience is shaped by the accumulation of experiences - both good and bad - and the continuing development of the self. But when adverse experiences are extreme, even the strongest individual is likely to require therapeutic support. Resilience in the face of some hardships does not guarantee resilience in the face of all threatening circumstances, and asking for professional support is not a sign of weakness.

Too many education, health, and social policies that address the effects of adversity in individuals, do little to create conditions that are known to strengthen resilience. It could be, for every citizen living in Lebanon, for any organization working in the civil society, the aim, the goal, the vision we hold for our own future, for our children's future, and for their children.

