Understanding the Resiliency Framework

Framework of Resiliency

Resiliency Initiatives presents the developmental strengths frameworks as a viable model to understanding the major components that contribute to the resiliency development and well-being of child, youth and adults in our communities. The resiliency factors/developmental strengths represent fundamental elements found to be essential for all youth to cope effectively with life challenges and to become productive and responsible adults in society.

Understanding Resiliency

A person’s resiliency can be defined as the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of stress-related, at-risk or adversarial situations. Resiliency Initiative’s primary goal is to provide an understanding through applied and scientific research of why some individuals are more resilient than others in the face of adversity. Based on this research, and the literature on resiliency and human development, the 31 developmental strengths framework identifies the protective factors that encourage and enhance the well-being and development of all individuals in our communities.

Role of Resiliency Factors in Youth Development

From time to time, most individuals experience considerable stress, hardship and misfortune as a result of various personal and/or situational experiences. While some of these individuals may develop serious and long-term educational, psychological and social problems, a greater number grow up to lead healthy and productive lives in adulthood. In a review of the literature and research on the development of resiliency, stress-resistant or “invulnerable” individuals have common resiliency factors operating as two broad sets of developmental strengths which encourage and support the coping skills of children and adolescents:
external factors such as family, peers, school and community, and
internal factors or personality characteristics such as empowerment, self-control, cultural sensitivity, self-concept and social sensitivity.

As such, the developmental strengths that contribute to resiliency exist within the individual and through the situational and relational experiences related to family, peers, school and community. In particular, the additive effects of both internal and external strengths have shown that children youth and adults are able to cope with adversity more effectively than those that experience few of the developmental strengths.
Importance of Resiliency and At-Risk Behaviours

The chart below shows how important resiliency factors/strengths are to youth (N=6,000) in helping them to restraint from risk-taking behaviours. Resiliency Canada’s research consistently demonstrates that youth with higher resiliency factors and developmental strengths are less likely to be involved with a number of risk-taking activities. The average number of 14 risk-taking behaviours from all youth surveyed are grouped by six strength categories (0 – 5, 6 – 10, 11 – 15, 16 – 20, 21 – 25, and 26 – 30). There are 18 general questions used that measure risk-taking behaviours such as substance abuse (alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs), antisocial behaviour, violence, school problems and gambling.
Importance of Resiliency and Constructive Behaviours

The diagram below shows how important resiliency factors/strengths are to youth (N=6,000) in helping them to engage in positive and constructive behaviours. Resiliency Canada’s research consistently demonstrates that youth with higher resiliency factors and developmental strengths are more likely to be involved with a number of positive and constructive activities. The average number of 14 positive behaviours from all youth surveyed are grouped by six strength categories (0 – 5, 6 – 10, 11 – 15, 16 – 20, 21 – 25, and 26 – 30). There are 14 general questions used that measure the constructive indicators (success in school, values diversity, helps others, maintains good health, volunteerism, exhibits leadership, resists danger, delays gratification, and overcomes adversity).
Conclusion

Those who embrace a strength-based perspective hold the belief that children, youth, and their families have strengths, resources and the ability to recover from adversity (as opposed to emphasizing problems, vulnerabilities, and deficits). A strength-based paradigm for evaluation offers a different language to describe children’s and families’ difficulties and struggles. It allows one to see opportunities, hope and solutions rather than just problems and hopelessness. The new paradigm avoids labeling and assumes power in children and families to help themselves as well as casting service providers as partners rather than as experts, authorities, initiators and directors of the change process.

External Factors that Contribute to Youth Resiliency Development

The external resiliency factors recognized as contributing to the protective elements of youth resiliency and the establishment of developmental strengths are family, peers, school and community. Subsequently, nurturing resiliency development amongst our youth requires inter-collaborative efforts of agencies organizations, municipalities and provincial/federal governments with youth, families, schools and communities.

External Strengths
**Importance of Family-Related Strengths**

The family resiliency factor consists of six developmental strengths, each identified as protective elements that lead to positive youth development. In particular, resiliency development in the form of parental support comes from the *caring family, family communications, adult family members as role models* and *family support* strengths. Also important to the development of youth resiliency are parental expectations through *parental involvement in school* and *high expectations*. The family resiliency factor is an important component of the resiliency framework shown below and has been found to play an essential role in the formation of youths’ developmental strengths.

**Importance of Peer-Related Strengths**

Approaching the end of childhood, youth begin to look more towards their peers for support directly and indirectly. With the onset of adolescence and the greater expectations that come with this stage in their development, youth tend to connect with peers to help them in the development of their own individual personality. The peer resiliency factor consists of two developmental strengths, each identified as contributing to positive youth development. In particular, resiliency development in the form of appropriate peer relationships is reflected in the *positive peer relationships*, and *positive peer influence* strengths.

**Importance of School/Work-Related Strengths**

The school/work resiliency factors consist of two broad categories: school/work culture and commitment to learning/working at school/workplace. An integral part of most child and youth development will be determined by the commitment of time and effort they place in our schools to become well educated and socially responsible individuals. The school culture resiliency factor consists of four developmental strengths, each identified as being protective school environment strengths that lead to positive youth development; *school boundaries, caring school climate, bonding to school*, and *high expectations*. In addition, the commitment to learning at school resiliency factor provides an indication of youths’ external commitment to *school engagement, achievement* aspirations and completion of *school work* related activities and assignments. Correspondingly, we see similar parallels draw in the workplace where adults become influenced by their respective workplace cultures (i.e., *workplace boundaries, caring workplace climate, bonding to the workplace* and *high expectations*).
at work) and in their decisions to make a commitment to their growth and development through their work-related roles and responsibilities (work engagement, personal achievement and completion of work-related duties).

**Importance of Community-Related Strengths**

Of the protective factors that contribute to youth resiliency development, community-based strengths receive the least attention and, subsequently, are one of youths’ greatest need for action. Although target specific interventions tend to focus on internal, family, or school-related issues, the community-related factor is well represented in the literature as essential to the development of resiliency strengths. Correspondingly, the community service sectors have generally demonstrated that they are more flexible to responding to the needs of youth through various services and programs. The community-based resiliency factor consists of four developmental strengths: caring neighbourhood, adult relationships, community values youth and neighbourhood boundaries.

The external resiliency factors shown above are important components of the youth resiliency framework and have been found to play essential roles in the formation of youths’ developmental strengths. In a review of the literature and research on resiliency, youth that have caring families, positive peer relationships, supportive schools and compassionate communities, tend to cope with adversity more effectively than youth that do not experience these external factors. The importance of these findings assists us in recognizing that the fundamental approach to building youth resiliency derives from the strengths that currently exist within our communities. Subsequently, youth will tend to draw on the external strengths they encounter in their day to day lives to overcome hardship and participate in positive and healthy lifestyles choices.
Internal Factors that Contribute to Youth Resiliency Development

The internal factors that contribute to the protective elements and the youth resiliency developmental strengths framework are empowerment, self-control, self-concept, cultural sensitivity and social sensitivity.
Importance of Empowerment

Empowerment to youth is related to having a sense of safety (i.e., non-threatening environment) that is related, to a large degree, to a sense or feeling of control over their destiny.

Importance of Self-Control

Youth that have been found to have restraint and resistant skills are less likely to participate in at-risk behaviours and are more capable of avoiding trouble or saying “no” to adversity.

Importance of Self-Concept

The self-concept resiliency factor provides insights into youths’ planning and decision-making skills, beliefs about their own capabilities (self-efficacy) and sense of purpose (self-esteem).

Importance of Cultural Sensitivity

With the diversity of cultures that exist in our communities and the easy access to information about all peoples through telecommunication networks, cultural awareness, acceptance and spirituality have become important components of youth resiliency.

Importance of Social Sensitivity

Part of the fundamental values and beliefs we share in our communities and society as a whole are that we are caring of others, have empathy for those around us, and believe in the importance of equality and social justice for all.

It is important to note that the development of internal resiliency factors will depend largely on the external-related strengths that youth experience in their daily routines. As such, the strength of the internal factors will be influenced by the degree of support and quality of relationships youth have with family, peers, school and community.