

## Do You Know What Your Child's Coping Resources Are?

This is a companion piece to our Q + A: *Is a little bit of arguing in front of your kids okay?*

Once we reviewed this Q + A video it struck us that although we, as psychologists, throw around terms like *resilience skills* and *coping resources* on a daily basis— that not everyone uses these terms – so we thought we would shed a little light on some of our terminology.

Okay: let's start with the word **COPING**. What we mean when we use this term – is basically anything that a child does or thinks in response to stressful events or episodes. This includes positive kinds of things like asking for hugs as well as things that we usually think of as less positive, such as biting their nails or teasing their siblings. Whether we give our seal of approval or not for these thoughts or actions – kids do these things to cope with their life circumstances. Our job as teachers, parents and leaders is to try to model and teach more positive health-inducing and adaptive coping actions.

The second word of the phrase, **RESOURCES**, refers to two main things:

- a) **Assets**. These are the positive characteristics or habits that reside within the child. So that could be competencies that they already have – anything from having a talent for collecting bugs to being a super-speller, also coping skills that they have acquired or developed e.g.) writing stories to relax or petting their cat; and self-efficacy (a.k.a. self-sufficiency) which is their ability and belief in themselves to do things on their own e.g) the degree to which they feel that others need to save them and/or do things for them vs. feeling like they have the skill and know-how to do some things for themselves.
- b) **Supports**. These are people or services in their child's life that help them: families, teachers, religious leaders, coaches or instructors / classes (such as yoga or martial arts) and aid with shaping teaching and modeling healthful actions and thoughts to deal with life's challenges.

There's a few other things to think about as you're trying to think about your child(ren) as you read through this article:

There are two kinds of general categories of **COPING RESPONSES** that kids have at any time in their lives:

1. **Instinctive or reflexive responses**: Are thoughts or actions that children just figured out or developed on their own (very sensitive children, for example might make up an imaginary world that they retreat to, for example, or they may sing loudly to themselves to 'escape'/ avoid parental arguments).
2. **Learned responses**:
  - Those things that children do that those around them have **taught** them, such as deep breathing or looking at photos of loved ones; or
  - Those things that others around them have **modeled**, such as things we'd rather they didn't pick up (but do), such as yelling to get

what they want, if they live in a house of yellers, or things we hope they do pick up, like commenting verbally about things that they loved about their day.

**COPING RESOURCES** tend to be focused in one of two areas:

**Problem-focused coping:** This type of coping focuses on fixing or removing the thing that is bothering or upsetting a child, such as reaching down to take a stone out of their shoe, asking a teacher for protection from a bully, going to get a drink of water from the water fountain.

**Emotion-focused coping:** This type of coping is focused on increasing happy, peaceful feelings and reducing upsetting ones. These could be adaptive, such as thinking thoughts such as: 'It's okay if I can't have that play date. I can play with my hamster instead', or maladaptive, such as self-harm behaviors.

\* You can guess that children who can access resources to solve both the problem and to soothe their emotions in adaptive ways end up healthier and are thought of as more resilient to problems over time

In keeping with the themes of two's here: there tends to be two general approaches that kids are drawn to (but in practice most children do some type of a mix of these):

**Take action kids:** These kids are often described as more Type A and they tend to 'get the job done' when it comes to coping. They fix their own problems, ask for help when they need it, do things and think things that help themselves. These could be adaptive or positive things (such as asking a taller child to reach a ball that is stuck up in a tree), or maladaptive less positive things (such as being lippy to a teacher they feel treated them unfairly).

**Avoider kids:** These kids are the repressors that tend to avoid, neglect and escape from problems or discomforts. Sometimes this is a good idea, such as when they run away from a big, burly playground bully who would have hit them square in the nose if they stayed put, or sometimes this could be a bad idea, such as those kids who sit through 7 classes of math in a row and have no clue what to do but still do not ask for help – instead they daydream and doodle on their workbook.

Not to make this article too long and unduly complex, here, we'll finish off with talking a bit about **protective factors**, which are the bits about the above details that we have described, which reduce the harmful effects of stress and problems – big and small – that your child experiences over time. Your child doesn't have to own all of these things in order to be okay, we're just running through these so that you can have some things to think about and pay attention to in your parenting and help you to have a focus when you have a window of time or opportunity to connect with your children:

- Children who can be flexible when life challenges or changes occur tend to cope better
- Children who can 'reframe' a problem so that they can look at the less threatening parts of an event tend to cope better

- Children with securely attached relationships and those who can build relationships tend to cope better
- Children whose self-esteem and belief in their ability to impact change in their lives tend to cope better
- Children who have an ability to see themselves and their world from an optimistic perspective tend to cope better
- Children who are less responsive or reactive to their environment (not overly-sensitive) tend to cope better
- Children who find ways to compensate adaptively to problems tend to cope better over time
- Children who learn to recognize and embrace their strengths tend to cope better

So where we started with all this stems from our question to you in our Q + A about knowing what your child's **coping resources** are. We're hoping that with this read you have a bit better understanding of what we are talking about. The more that you have clear in your mind what your child does and what you show or teach your child that helps him or her to cope in a positive and healthy way – the more power you have as a parent to help.

If you have any more questions about any of the above, drop [RealParentingLab.com](http://RealParentingLab.com) and write to us on the Q + A Sessions page!