

# EVERYDAY STRONG RESILIENCE HANDBOOK



Tools for parents, teachers, neighbors  
and other trusted adults

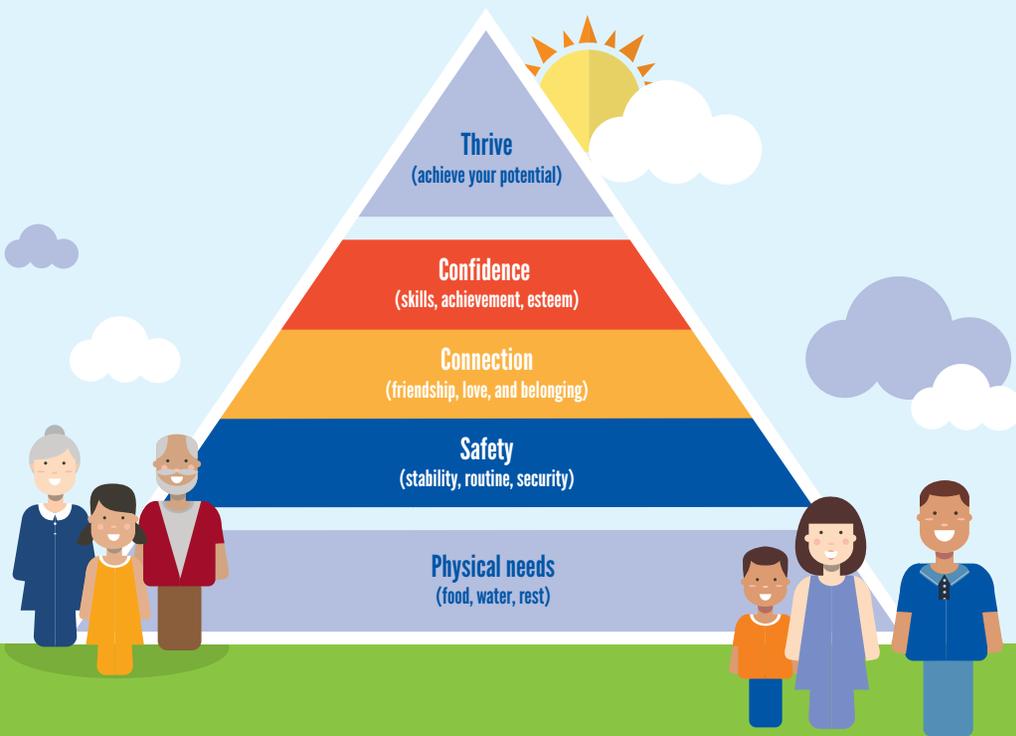


United Way of Utah County

## Children want to be happy.

We spend a lot of time in life assuming that the people around us need more motivation to become different. We look at a child or a friend who is struggling and ask ourselves, “Why can’t she just stop being anxious or sad? Why doesn’t it seem like she’s trying?”

But is that really the most accurate way to think about the problem?



## You don't have to be an expert

Here's the great news: anyone can build resilience in the children around them. You don't have to have a degree or specialized training to start exploring what needs are driving a child's behavior and feelings, or to start thinking creatively about how you can help care for those needs.

Let's use an example. We know that when a child is hungry or hasn't slept well, it's hard for her to learn or even behave well in school or at home. If those needs aren't met, it's much harder to do anything else.

What you might not know is that food and water and sleep are not the only needs that human beings have. According to psychologists, there are “levels of needs,” and they all ought to be considered and cared for. It starts with food and sleep and shelter, but it also includes:

- **the need to feel safe and secure**
- **the need to feel connected and that you belong**
- **the need to feel confident and valued**

These are legitimate needs just like food and sleep. And when these essential needs are cared for, children thrive.

In other words, when a child is acting out or expressing anxiety, aggression, or apathy, we often assume that he's choosing to be bad or feel bad. Instead, what if we got to work at caring for his basic emotional needs? What if we trusted that when his needs are met, he will thrive?

The truth is that parents and other trusted adults in a child's life are often uniquely equipped to problem solve because they experience a child intimately and over a long period of time. Even if she does need professional help, the child in your life will see much more success from working with those professionals if you've already focused on nourishing her basic needs of feeling safe, connected, and confident.

## Safe, connected, and confident kids are resilient kids

In fact, when you tend to children's emotional and social needs, you're helping them to be resilient. Another way to think about it: when you tend to a child's needs, you're removing her barriers to success.

A child whose needs are met is better equipped to overcome anxiety, depression, and all sorts of hard situations.

### Here's how to start:

- 1) understand that every child, no matter their circumstances, needs to feel safe, connected, and confident
- 2) trust that your child will want to succeed when those needs are cared for and
- 3) employ your own intuition and creativity to nourish their needs.

You might be asking yourself, that sounds really simple, but how do I get started? What do I do? What if I think my child feels safe, connected, and confident, but I'm not sure if she actually does? In this booklet, we've got a few things to help you get started.

Questions for reflection pg. 5

Does my child feel safe, connected, and confident?

Journey to thriving pg. 8

A fun activity to guide you in building safety, connection, and confidence in your child

Questions for reflection:

## SAFETY

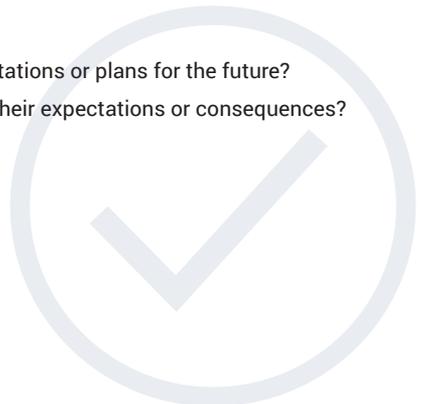


**After we give a child food, shelter, and a warm bed, it is easy to believe that she is safe. But even if a child may be safe, she may not feel safe.**

Many things can make a child feel unsafe, and often a child will act out or behave differently if she is feeling this way. Often, relationships and school performance can suffer if a child isn't feeling safe.

### Some questions to ask yourself

- Is this child overly self-conscious or shy?
- Is this child overly worried about adult expectations or plans for the future?
- Are parents or other adults unpredictable in their expectations or consequences?
- Is this child afraid to tell me things?
- Do I listen as much as or more than I talk?



Questions for reflection:

## CONNECTION



## Discover ways to open up communication between you and the child in your life.

Connection happens in the everyday moments of our lives. Connection isn't about flashy vacations or gifts. It's about quiet moments and conversations; it's about shared experiences and emotions.

### Some Questions to Ask Yourself

- Is this child isolating herself from others?
- How does this child feel about relationships? (Maybe she feels unlovable, or that she is a burden on others)
- Does this child have at least one or two friends who genuinely care about him?
- How much time do I spend genuinely connecting with things this child cares about?

*Don't forget to start with safety and work your way up! A child will connect more openly if you have already helped him to feel safe with you.*

Questions for reflection:  
**CONFIDENCE**



**Increased confidence will help a child be more resilient and begin to thrive.**

Confidence is a child's feeling that he's good at something. It's a sense of independence and his feeling that he has the ability to change things for himself.

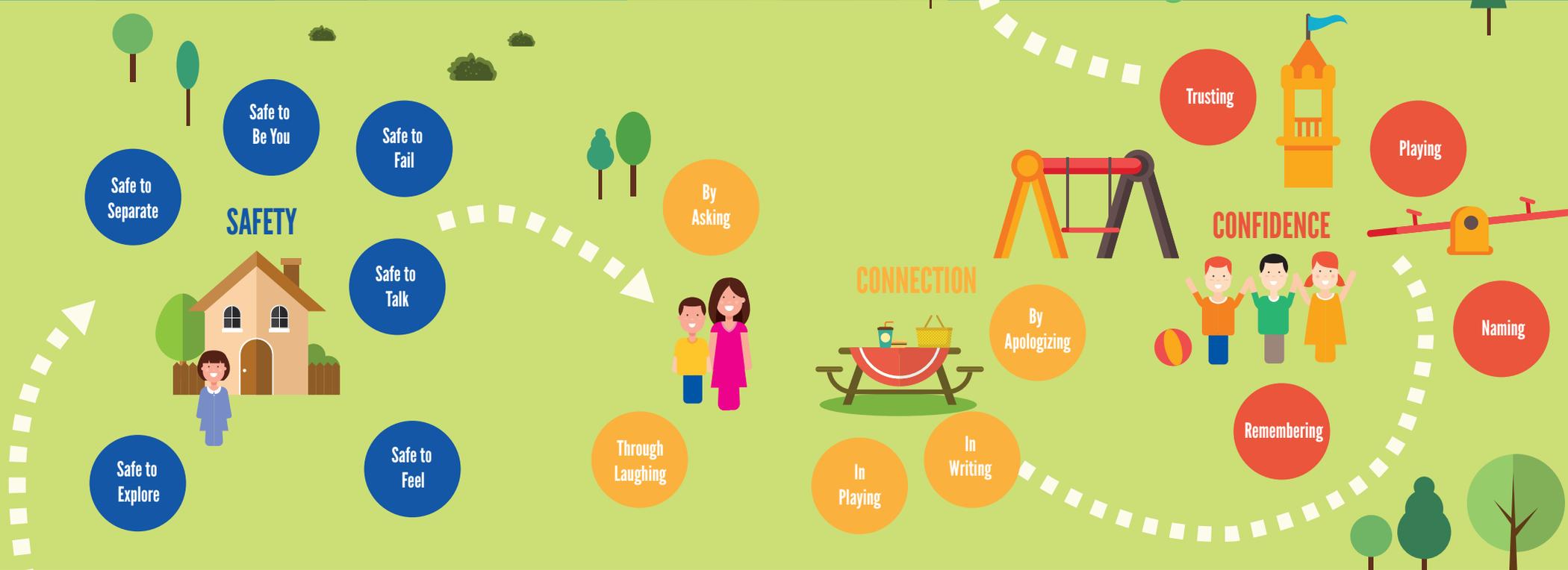
**Some Questions to Ask Yourself**

- Is this child often frustrated with learning, task completion, problem-solving, and/or emotional regulation?
- Do I have confidence in this child and do I tell her so?
- Does this child feel inadequate?
- How often do I remind this child of her strengths?
- Is there a chance that a difficult behavior is actually an attempt to feel more powerful or independent?

*Again, don't forget connection and safety! It is very difficult to build confidence if safety and connection needs are not cared for first.*

# JOURNEY TO EVERYDAY STRONG

Turn the page for simple, fun activities to build resilience. Come back here to check off each step of the journey.



## Resilience Adventure Hike

Don't forget about physical needs; every journey needs pre-hike preparation. Remember water, snacks, healthy food, enough sleep, and good medical aid, because you can't start solving emotional challenges until you are physically taken care of!



### Safe to Talk

**What to do:** During an emotionally charged conversation, imagine having put duct tape over your mouth for at least 2 minutes, but stay engaged, attentive and continue to communicate by listening in any way you could without speaking.

**Why:** When children feel they will be listened to and understood, they feel safe to share challenges, true feelings, and ideas. Without that feeling of safety to talk, they may overcompensate by becoming defensive and insistent.



### Safe to Explore

**What to do:** When a child hears or sees a situation where a person made a decision that is not consistent with the family's values, take a moment to ask the question, "How do you think it would affect our relationship if you made those choices?" Try to express reassurance, something positive, or at least a statement of "hope" that nothing could ever come between you.

**Why:** Too often, when we quickly condemn actions we don't approve of, such as swearing, bullying, grooming/clothing choices, smoking, lying, not going to church, etc., our children can feel their relationship is endangered if they ever do any of those things. That reaction creates a feeling of a lack of safety in a relationship that can be harmful to children's ability to make their own wise choices.



### Safe to Separate

**What to do:** Look for an opportunity to notice children as they navigate life and comment on what you observed. The goal isn't to express approval—instead, emphasize how you feel about your relationship with them. For example, "I saw you today playing with your friends! I love watching you enjoy life!"

**Why:** All people, especially children, carry fears of separation. They wonder, "Do they think about me when I am away?," "Will I be remembered?," or "Do others notice the effort I am making while on my own?" Children can feel safe to explore on their own if they are reassured that you are delighted to be a witness to their life, despite normal and necessary separation.



### Safe to Fail

**What to do:** Share a story about a significant failure or mistake you made in your own life. Be detailed and vulnerable about your feelings. Try not to emphasize how you overcame that adversity or learned a valuable lesson. The most important thing to communicate is that you understand failure, embarrassment, or disappointment.

**Why:** Failure is a part of every life. Yet, a child's early experiences with failure can be scary and feel threatening, even overwhelming. Learning from others' experience with failure, including their honest feelings of challenge, can help them relate and imagine themselves working through their own failures.

## Safe to Be You

**What to do:** Take a moment to praise something you find totally unique about a child in your life. Consider even acknowledging how unexpected, different, confusing or quirky this trait or interest is, but how you love or admire it.

**Why:** Everyone needs to recognize and seek fulfillment in their own unique abilities and desires. When they feel safe to be different from others, they can thrive as they feel independently able to make their own choices.

## Safe to Feel

**What to do:** Next time you see a child overwhelmed with anger, sadness, or anxiety, try to validate her emotions, instead of trying to eliminate or solve her problems.

Try statements like:

- “Wow, those are some big emotions...”
- “Emotions are good and often have something to teach us...”

**Why:** We often inadvertently invalidate children’s feelings. This can leave them feeling unsafe to have or express certain emotions. We say things like, “you’re OK, hop up!” when they fall, “seriously? Stop it!” when they pout, or, “go to your room!” when they rage. Even if you have to redirect the behavior, acknowledging that feelings are OK is an important lesson. This helps people recognize appropriate behavioral responses to feelings.

## JOURNEY TO THRIVING: CONNECTION



## Connect by Asking

**What to do:** Ask questions that show that you’re trying to connect; it doesn’t matter whether she has an answer, she just needs to hear you express your desire to be close.

For example: Ask the child what it is like to be her, or to walk in her shoes. Or ask, “Is there anything I could do to help us feel closer?”

**Why:** To really connect with another person, we have to be willing to do so on the other person’s terms. Often a good start is to simply state that you want to connect with or feel close to someone. Make sure that in addition to asking the question, you follow up by listening carefully.

## Connect by Apologizing

**What to do:** Sincerely apologize for a past offense or hurt.

Even if it happened long ago and you might imagine the incident has been forgotten, the other person probably hasn’t forgotten.

**Why:** All of us carry emotional wounds from times we were mistreated. Children remember these times too. It is never too late to apologize for something you may have done or said, and often the further back in time you go, the more meaningful the apology.



## Connect through Writing

**What to do:** Write a note and leave it to be found. Emphasize your relationship and feelings about it. Put less emphasis on the specific behaviors, choices or accomplishments of the child.

**Why:** A written note often can express things in a different and sometimes more thoughtful way than verbal expression. It shows additional thought and effort and can be saved, re-read, and treasured for a long time to come.



## Connect in Playing

**What to do:** Take time to play, especially when you would have previously said no. If she never asks, find a time to invite her to play with you in an activity she would enjoy.

**Why:** Play and laughter are the most powerful tools for connection with young children. Playing with friends or “entertaining himself” are inadequate replacements for play with important adults. Join in with Barbie or Minecraft (even though you hate it) or dig out an old board game. Let older kids pick an activity and just go with it.



## Connect through laughing

**What to do:** Find ways to cultivate humor in your relationships. Watch a silly video together, share a joke together, and look for a chance to turn an argument into a laugh. Don't talk in a normal voice when you can talk in a silly voice. Lose your dignity to find your child!

**Why:** Laughter and humor improves health, strengthens shared connections and experiences, and creates positive memories. It also reduces stress and anxiety about everyday challenges.

# JOURNEY TO THRIVING: CONFIDENCE



## Build Confidence by Trusting

**What to do:** Next time you are concerned about a child's achievement levels in school, sports, or the arts, resist your urge to lecture on the seriousness of the situation or to problem solve for them. Instead, sit back without worry and give some calm reassurance and encouragement that the child will “be OK” or “figure it out.” Say something like, “I'm sure you can solve this.”

**Note:** listen carefully to understand why he's anxious. Sometimes it's not about confidence at all. Explore his feelings to help you understand if this is an issue of safety or connection. Is the child anxious about performing well because he's worried about his future survival in life if he doesn't do well on the ACT? Or is it more about relationships; for example, he's worried he won't be loved if he doesn't perform to his parents' expectations

**Why:** Kids, and especially adolescents, often hide their worries, which can lead adults to believe that they aren't taking life seriously. Just at a moment when they are feeling concerned and stressed, anxious parents pile on with added stress by

saying, “Remember that your grades now will be on your transcript forever,” “How will you ever learn to...,” “If you don’t...,” or “You may wish you were better prepared when...” Unfortunately, when a child is already anxious about those issues, an added parent’s anxiety just leads to even more paralyzing anxiety. Often the best way to build confidence is to express confidence.



## Build Confidence by Remembering

**What to do:** At the end of the day, take some time to reflect and review the positive things you did together and experienced that day.

**Why:** Negative memories are said to be more “sticky” than positive ones, so people often need help remembering their good deeds, successes, or accomplishments. For young children, just reviewing the events at the end of a typical day can improve their ability to reflect and reinforce successes. Older kids can use these memories to create important metaphors for hard work or success in life.



## Build Confidence by Naming the Problem

**What to do:** When a child frequently encounters a difficulty in their life, create a name for that challenge and refer to it as something external from them. It’s something that you’re working together with them to solve. For example:

- Instead of, “You shouldn’t be so scared, it’s not a big deal,” try, “It looks like the worry bug has pulled the alarm! Is this really an emergency? What do you think?”
- Instead of, “You have a problem being able to turn off the video games!” try, “It looks like the X-bot has taken over again!”
- Instead of: “I know you could do this if you would just try!” try, “I know you are working really hard, but ADHD is still getting in the way. What would be helpful?”

**Why:** Psychologists will often “name it to tame it.” This practice of “externalization” helps prevent feeling discouraged or demoralized by problems, and changes the problem-solving dynamic from a “me fixing you” to an “us fixing it.”



## Build Confidence by Playing and Practicing

**What to do:** Playtime can be a valuable time not only for connection but also for practicing confidence. Jump into an opportunity to play or do a meaningful activity together when you otherwise might have missed the chance.

- For example, if you’re pretending to be a prince or princess locked in a tower, encourage your child to take a risk, try something new, or solve a problem in the story in a creative way. Praise your child for the skill she exhibits through the imaginative game.

**Why:** In play, kids practice for life and challenges with power and courage, roles and rules, and there are constant opportunities for adults to acknowledge and praise their competence.



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