

## Helping Children Build Resilience

One of the most important qualities a person can have is resilience, the ability to stay strong through life's ups and downs and bounce back after major difficulties. Parents have a powerful influence on a child's development of resilience, and experiences in the earliest months are especially important. So, what helps children build resilience? And what major factors may hinder parents from providing those key experiences?

### I. How does resilience develop?

- Sensitive, responsive care builds trust and security  
*When parents read their babies' cues and respond promptly and sensitively, babies learn to trust their parents, feel confident that they will be heard and cared for and be secure enough to venture out to explore and learn.*
- Trust and security shape the stress response system  
*Babies who develop that trust and security produce lower levels of stress hormones, such as cortisol, and recover more quickly after a stressful experience.*
- A secure attachment is a buffer against toxic stress  
*Even in the face of a major loss or highly stressful experience, such as an invasive medical procedure, the presence of a secure attachment figure is a buffer against an extreme physiological reaction to stress. Stress becomes toxic when it is extreme, prolonged or repeated; a secure attachment prevents stress hormones from reaching toxic levels.*

### II. What risk factors may hinder parents from providing those key experiences?

- A history of abuse and trauma in their own lives
- Untreated mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety)
- High conflict (and/or abusive) partner relationships

### III. What can help parents overcome those risk factors?

- Understanding of child development
- Emotional support for themselves
- Appropriate intervention or treatment, especially when they first become parents  
*The cost is high for our society, both in dollars and human suffering, when we don't invest enough in appropriate services for parents and infants in high risk circumstances.*