

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN OUR STUDENTS

By Tim Matheney and April Gonzalez

As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, top infectious disease experts are warning Americans to steel themselves for a challenging spring.

"We're going to be seeing some serious things that the American public unfortunately is going to have to get used to seeing," Dr. Anthony Fauci of the White House Coronavirus Task Force commented on March 31. "What we're doing with the mitigation is to try and blunt that, but no matter what we do – even with the positive effects that we're seeing with the mitigation – it's going to be a tough couple of weeks coming up."

With such warnings as the backdrop, we are already facing a variety of circumstances that can affect our students' learning:

- Many families, some of whom are already in their third week of stay-at-home restrictions, are already feeling the stress of being cooped up at home. At least one political leader, California Governor Gavin Newsom, has expressed concern that people will grow tired from obeying social distancing guidelines, which could ultimately extend the life of the pandemic.
- Parents are experiencing the stress of being stretched between supervising their children's learning and working from home. Routines, which are important to all of us, have had to be rewritten.
- Many parents are concerned about paying their families' grocery bills and mortgage or rent payments. Two in 10 Americans, according to a CNN poll, have been temporarily furloughed or suspended while almost as many say their employers have shut down their place of work entirely.
- The likelihood of tens of thousands of deaths from COVID 19 – potentially considerably more – has shaken many of us. The pandemic will assuredly impact many families of educators and students across the nation.
- Finally, fears are especially heightened in families with parents who are first responders and work in health care.

As the pandemic has greater and greater impact, it will be more important than ever for teachers and parents to support the growth of children's resilience. The American Psychological Association has identified ten tips for building resilience in children and teens. Four of those tips, discussed below, are especially relevant during the pandemic:

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The [Spire Leadership Group](#) is an education-focused consulting firm based in Philadelphia. Spire Leadership is led by founder and president Tim Matheney, who previously served as a high school principal, the New Jersey Department of Education's Chief Intervention Officer, and the founding Executive Director of the Philadelphia Academy of School Leaders. Spire's team includes Consulting Associate April Gonzalez, a veteran principal, assistant principal, and curriculum supervisor. For more information on Spire Leadership, please email Tim (tim@spireleadershipgroup.com), call 732-309-2296 or visit spireleadershipgroup.com.



The [Spire Leadership Group](#) is sharing COVID-19 bulletins for K-12 educators throughout the coronavirus pandemic. If this advisory was forwarded to you, and you wish to receive it in your inbox, **please email the word "SUBSCRIBE"** to tim@spireleadershipgroup.com.

This document is intended to provide resources to school, district, and charter network leaders during the COVID-19 outbreak. For authoritative information on COVID-19, consult information from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and your state health department.

"No matter how bleak or menacing a situation may appear, it does not entirely own us. It can't take away our freedom to respond, our power to take action."

- Ryder Carroll, author

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Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook

“An optimistic and positive outlook enables your child to see the good things in life and keep going even in the hardest times,” notes the APA. “Expressing thanks,” [the Harvard Mental Health Letter reminds us](#), “may be one of the simplest ways to feel better.” Psychologist [Martin Seligman](#), a leader in positive psychology research, found that writing and personally delivering a letter of gratitude to someone who had not been properly thanked for his or her kindness can increase the author’s happiness. While personal delivery isn’t a recommended practice at the moment, it’s possible that mailing the note and following up with a FaceTime or Skype call might have the same impact. This is a great practice for both children and adults.

Teach children self-care

Teachers could create lessons that addresses the importance of eating properly, exercising and getting good sleep. These lessons could include [some simple ideas for exercising at home](#). Parents and teachers should encourage students to find a balance between their virtual school day and time for fun and rest.

Through approaches like these, the APA insists, “resilience skills can be learned.” In these challenging times, we can take confidence in the amazing adaptability of the human brain. We know that children with the support of parents, teachers, and other significant adults in their lives, have tremendous potential for growth.

“Resilience is shaped throughout life by the accumulation of experiences – both good and bad – and the continuing development of adaptive coping skills connected to those experiences,” the Harvard Center on the Developing Child notes. “What happens early [in a child’s life] may matter most, but it is never too late to build resilience.”

RESILIENCE RESOURCES

American Psychological Association
[Resilience Guide for Parents & Teachers](#)

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child
[InBrief: Resilience Series](#) (Includes [summary](#) and videos such as [How Resilience Is Built](#))

Encyclopedia on Early Child Development
[Resilience](#)

Articles

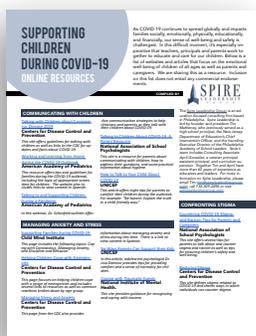
[A 4-Step Process for Building Student Resilience](#)
[27 Resilience Activities and Worksheets for Students and Adults](#)
[Resilience in Children: Strategies to Strengthen Your Kids](#)

Books

[Building Resilience in Children and Teens](#)
[The Yes Brain: How to Cultivate Courage, Curiosity, and Resilience in Your Child](#)

SPIRE LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

The Spire Leadership Group is publishing free resources for parents, teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Follow the links to our first two resource documents:



Supporting the Well-Being of Children During COVID-19:

This document lists a variety of websites with resources for providing support for the social and emotional well-being of children.



[Supporting Children with Disabilities](#): This document provides a list of websites with resources for parents and teachers of children with disabilities.