



## Building Resilience during and post COVID-19

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from early childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has disrupted all of our lives at some level, whether physically, emotionally or financially as we try to navigate through this new normal. Young children need to learn positive coping skills from adults who model and teach these coping strategies in their daily life.

The good news is that over four decades of research on resilience shows that protective factors can buffer children from harm and increase their chances that they can adapt positively to adversities such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from difficult life events. Studies have found that children need one responsive caregiver to build their resilience. You can be that person!

In this newsletter, we will describe what you can do to provide protective factors – events, conditions and characteristics of children, families and environments – that increase a child's chances of healthy development and positive life outcomes despite exposure to significant adversity during these trying times. We will discuss what you can do with each age group: infant, toddler and preschool to help build resilience during and post COVID-19.



### This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants

Responsive relationships foster resilience. From the very beginning, infants come into the world completely dependent on their caregivers. According to Philip Fisher, a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, “The thing that makes the biggest difference, over and above one’s genetic blueprint is the relationship a child has with a primary caregiver.” He also states that the presence of a supportive, consistent and protective primary caregiver is the factor that makes the biggest difference in mental health development.

A strong attachment to a primary caregiver provides children with a sense of trust and security that gives them the freedom to explore their environment and form relationships with new people. You can do this by:

- ♡ **Making sure your infant’s needs are met.** Your baby needs to be fed, changed, engaged, and loved. If you need help making sure your



family’s basic needs are met, look for up-to-date information regarding food distribution events, COVID-19 testing sites, and subsidy or grant programs. Reach out to agencies such as the Aloha United Way 2-1-1 hotline.

- ♡ **Maintaining consistent routines.** Keeping consistent routines centered around feeding, diapering, and sleeping helps your infant to feel safe and secure in her relationships.

## Activity for Infants: *Alert Attention*

What You Need:

None

What to Do:

1. Respond to her cries with a gentle voice. Don’t let your baby cry it out. Crying is her way of communicating. Your response lets her know you hear her and care.
2. When your baby is awake, pay attention to her as much as possible.
3. Talk to her about the things and activities around her.
4. Smile at her often and respond to her smiles.
5. Cuddle her and gently stroke her face, arms, and legs.
6. Hold her so you are facing each other.
7. Encourage other family members to talk and play with her.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*



# Toddlers

Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage our own behavior and reactions. This self-regulation develops most during the toddler years and into preschool years. Self-regulation is important for building resilience. For example, it helps children with learning and social skills. If your child can recognize her emotions and learn how to respond to them, she will be able to self-regulate.

Protective factors that strengthen toddlers' resilience are closely tied to their social and emotional well-being – the ability to form relationships, get their needs met, regulate strong emotions and explore their world. Here are some additional ways that you can support your child's resilience:



♥ **Identifying feelings** – Show your child a poster of different emotions and ask her how she is feeling in the morning. Give words to the emotions throughout the day and validate them, letting her know that emotions are okay, regardless of how strong they are.

♥ **Choices** – As much as possible, support your child in making choices, when appropriate. For example, allow her to decide where and what she wants to play, or have her select how many crackers or fruit she wants on her plate during mealtime.

## Activity for Toddlers: *Freeze!*

What You Need:

Music (from a radio or a simple instrument such as a canister that you can use as a drum)

What to Do:

1. Play music and encourage your child to dance or move in whatever way she likes.
2. Then instruct her to stop and “freeze” when the music ends. This kind of activity encourages listening skills and self-regulation as she practices stopping and starting. This is a very useful skill for when she goes to school and has to follow a lot of directions!



*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*



# Preschoolers

Resilience in preschoolers is linked to being able to recognize and express emotions in appropriate ways and developing a growth mindset. The following emotion activities may help your child to recognize what the emotion looks and feels like. If she knows what the emotion is, it is easier for her to know how to respond to the emotion.

♥ **Feelings Thermometer.** Ask your child to choose a feeling, such as anger, to make “My Anger Thermometer.” Use a picture of a blank thermometer that is divided into 3 sections (small, medium, and big). Have your child color in a thermometer, using a different color for each level. Talk about what behaviors she exhibits when feeling this emotion (e.g., stomp her feet). Help your child identify coping strategies to deal with the feeling as it moves from small to big. Strategies might be belly breathing or taking a walk. She can show you where she is on the thermometer when she is feeling angry and you can remind her of the strategies to use to calm down.



♥ **Growth Mindset-** Praise your child’s effort in tackling challenges rather than praising the outcome. For example, “You are working so hard on that puzzle. Your brain is growing as you look at the shapes and discover how they fit together!”

## Activity for Preschoolers: *Calming Sensory Bottle*

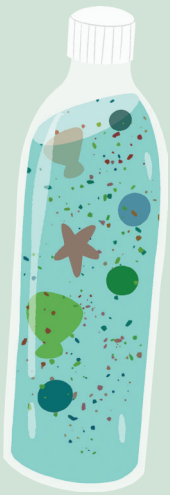
What You Need:

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| Clean, clear plastic bottle (e.g. water bottle)           | Food coloring (Optional)   |
| Water   | Glitter                    |
| Clear shampoo   | Glue or heavy packing tape |
| Small lightweight items (small shells, sand, beads, etc.) |                            |

What to Do:

1. Help your child fill the plastic bottle halfway with warm water.
2. Fill the remainder with shampoo, leaving space at the top for lightweight objects.
3. Add one drop of food coloring, glitter and little objects that will float.
4. Glue or tape the cap shut.
5. When your child is having strong emotions and a hard time calming down, have her shake the bottle, watch the floating objects of glitter sink back down to the bottom, and take deep breaths.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*



## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

### Physical Development

- ♥ Learn to use her body with intention
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to interact with others
- ♥ Develop a close bond with you

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Increase her observation, listening, and understanding skills
- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills



## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

### Chocolate Banana Drink

Ingredients:

- 3/4 C Milk
- 1 Banana
- 3T Sugar
- 3T Unsweetened Cocoa

Directions:

1. Help keiki slice the banana into round pieces.
2. Together, put the banana slices into a blender container and then add cocoa and sugar.
3. Blend until smooth. Have your child notice how the mixture has changed.
4. Add ½ cup milk, then blend until foamy.
5. Pour in rest of milk and blend well.
6. Serve immediately or keep in the refrigerator. Stir well before serving. Makes 2 servings.



## Resources

### *Just Breathe*

<https://youtu.be/RVA2N6tX2cg>

Sometimes, the best thing to do is just breathe, which is exactly what's at the heart of the matter in this short video from filmmakers Julie Bayer Salzman and Josh Salzman, titled "Just Breathe." In the 4-minute long video, the duo spoke to several young girls and boys about how their emotions affect them and how they physically feel.

### *Sesame Street in Communities*

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/traumatic-experiences/>

Sesame Workshop has resources and tools on a wide range of topics to help families and young children with the challenges that may come their way and the challenges they face.



## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

***The Tiny Seed*** by Eric Carle

This story follows the life cycle of a tiny little seed. Smaller than any of the other seeds, the tiny seed manages to keep up on their perilous adventures around the world.

***The Feelings Book*** by Todd Parr

The colorful pictures show emotions that we all experience. "Sometimes I feel silly, sometimes I feel brave." Toddlers will identify with the feelings and faces in this book.

### Preschoolers

***The Rabbit Listened*** by Cori Doerrfeld

All the animals think they know what Taylor is feeling when his block castle is destroyed. They tell him how he should feel, but he still doesn't feel better. All Rabbit does is just listen, which is all Taylor needs to feel better.

***Whistle for Willie*** by Ezra Jack Keats

Peter really wants to be able to whistle for his dog Willie, but just can't seem to do it. He sees other boys whistle and how their dogs run to them, and he wants to be able to do the same thing. Again, and again he tries, but nothing happens... until it does.



**Learning to Grow** is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at [www.learningtogrowhawaii.org](http://www.learningtogrowhawaii.org) or visit us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii](https://www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii)