

# RESILIENT KIDS

NEWSLETTER by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator

## The power of optimistic thinking

**Optimists do better academically, socially and enjoy better health than pessimists. Helping your child look on the bright side is a significant life skill to develop. When children think that they can succeed they are more likely to give things a try. In other words, if they think THEY CAN, THEY WILL.**

Optimists look at the flip side of negative events for some good, some hope and some reason to be positive. It means having a strong self-belief and confidence to deal with situations.

**There are five building blocks to optimism:**

1. Trying and persisting
2. Practising
3. Having a positive view of failure
4. Planning and organisational skills
5. Having the confidence to try again

Importantly, these building blocks link optimism with competence so when children experience success they are more likely to believe that they can achieve and have more success.

Some children are natural optimists. They are born with optimistic temperaments and have natural dispositions to deal with challenges and problems. Others expect the worst and tend to see catastrophes where really small challenges exist.

Recent American research indicates that children learn their optimism from their experiences of success and through their interactions with parents, teachers and significant others in the first eight years of life.

So the way adults talk is significant in the way they



shape a child's belief about success or failure. The message is clear that adults need to be aware how they present the world to children as our explanatory style (the way we explain events) is on show.

**Optimists explain adverse events in the following ways:**

1. Adverse events tend to be temporary: "It takes time to find a friend" rather than "No one likes me."
2. Situations or causes are specific: "I am not so good at soccer" rather than "I am hopeless at sport."
3. Blame is rationalised rather than personalised: "I was grounded because I hurt my sister" rather than "I was grounded because I am a bad kid."

Pessimists have a tendency to build mountains out of molehills and give up before trying. The trouble with pessimism is that it tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. "I told you I wouldn't get a kick in the game. What was the point of me even turning up?" Such comments just reinforce pessimism and these feelings of hopelessness lead to helplessness.

## WHAT'S YOUR CHILD LIKE?

HOW OPTIMISTIC IS YOUR CHILD?

### DOES HE

1. Usually take blame personally when things go wrong? **Yes [0] No [2]**
2. Blow negative events out of proportion? **Yes [0] No [2]**
3. Take personal credit if things go well? **Yes [2] No [0]**
4. Believe that with work or better skills he can improve? **Yes [2] No [0]**

5. Always look on the bright side of any situation? **Yes [2] No [0]**

### SCORE:

- 10:** A raving optimist. What's it like living with a ray of sunshine?
- 6-8:** A bright spark. A little reframing may be useful.
- 0-4:** A leaning toward pessimism. Make sure you model optimistic self-talk so he can hear what optimistic thinking sounds like.



## TRY THIS...

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

**To promote optimism in your children try the following four strategies:**

1. **Model** positive thinking and optimism. Let your children hear your positive self-talk.
2. **Challenge** your children's negative or unrealistic appraisals. For instance, "Everyone hates me. I have no friends" can be challenged with "Sometimes it feels like we have no friends but you spent all morning with Melanie yesterday."
3. Teach your child to **positively track**. Children should look for the good things they do and say them to themselves or out loud. They can look for the good things that happen in life, no matter how small and say them to themselves or out loud.
4. Teach children to **positively reframe**. When something unpleasant happens or failure occurs they can actively look on the bright side. E.g. "I pranged my bike but at least I wasn't hurt."

## ACTION PLAN

First Step . . .

Next Step . . .

For more ideas about promoting resilience in children visit [www.parentingideas.com.au](http://www.parentingideas.com.au)

## QUOTE

"There is nothing sadder than a young pessimist."  
MARK TWAIN