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### Raising a resilient child

1. **Share family meals together as often as possible.**
2. **Tell your child stories about their family history, such as where their grandparents grew up, how they met, what their parents did for a living.**
3. **Talk openly with your child about positive and negative events.**
4. **Don't avoid talking to your child about negative events. Bad things happen. Don't pretend they don't.**
5. **Help your child see that people can overcome obstacles.**
6. **Find opportunities to be together as a family and talk together when these moments occur.**

Almost every family dinnertime conversation begins with parents asking the child how school was that day. As the meal progresses, the conversation often turns to "remote events," which tend to be shared narratives, such as "Oh, that reminds me of the time we went to Disney World," or "That reminds me of the time we went to Grandma's," Fivush said. These stories come up about every five minutes, and they tend to be collaborative, she noted, meaning that each person contributes from their own perspective. "Even when a child is telling what happened at school that day, the parents chime in, structure that conversation, ask questions," Fivush said. "But the families that are more collaborative in this effort do seem to have kids that are doing better."

Children benefit when parents listen to them and validate what they say and how they feel, particularly when a negative event is being discussed. The key is to allow the child to express emotion when talking about, say, the death of a grandparent, and to tell him or her it is okay to be sad. Family history is not defined by negative events, and understanding this fact nurtures a child's resilience.

"As the family talks about things, I think they are teaching the kids about assessment, about appraisal. How bad is this? How good is this?" Duke said. In addition, discussing negative events teaches children how to cope with the inevitable ups and downs of life. "How does the family deal with things?" Duke asked. "Do they turn to religion? Do they turn to each other? Do they turn to isolation? Do they hole up and sit and cry quietly?"

Kelly Marin, Amber Lazarus, and Jennifer Bohanek

Children learn a lot from listening to how their parents talk—often at the dinner table—about negative events, Duke said. They begin to understand that people may have different opinions about what happened and why it happened. Hurricane Katrina offers a good example of a devastating negative event and how to talk about it, Duke said. At first, children hear their parents talk about the needs of people who lost everything but survived and how the family might be able to assist some of the victims. In the following days, the conversation may turn to how the victims will rebuild or start new lives somewhere else. Children see that people are more important than buildings, but priorities change over time.

Robyn Fivush

"This is how the kids learn," Duke said. "They are embedded in this context of narrative, where they are constantly constructing bits of the story and dealing and coping and selecting what is important now and what can wait until later. And that's where I believe resilience is being built in." These narratives help children to "make sense out of the past and make sense out of what's happening now," Fivush said.

Duke worries, however, that many families have abandoned the family meal and may be losing the benefits that help nurture resilience in their children. "I think that the time we spend with the family, with the kids and the dinnertimes should be held sacred," Duke said. "It should not disappear, because you don't just lose the time together, but you also lose the impact that we've seen when families just sit around and talk."

Busy American families may need to adjust their priorities for the sake of their children. "If their schedule is such that they can't have dinner together during the week, then it is important that they think about other ways to facilitate a time when the whole family is sitting down together and sharing the events of their lives," Fivush said. Duke said families who don't share meals together may never get the chance to share family stories, which help children learn they are part of something bigger than themselves. Find an opportunity, even if it is just Sunday brunch, Thanksgiving, or Christmas. "Capture those moments when they arise," Duke said. Fivush concurred, noting: "Family stories build our belief systems." ■