

# Parenting in the Digital World

## Booklet Two: Resilience

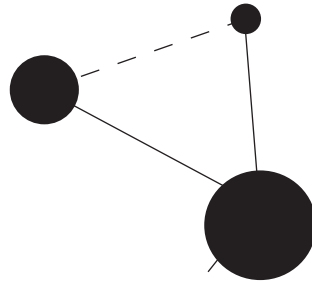
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# Intro

Resilience

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Resilience, an ability to move through life's challenges with strength and clarity, is required for our overall health and well-being. In addition to this ability to conquer setbacks, resiliency is a key component in our relational development, without which long-term relationships are not possible. Without this ability to navigate the ups and downs of life alongside trusted family and friends, a non-durable brain will react to every perceived offense by pushing people away. While a resilient person seeks to problem-solve with the help of others, a non-resilient person remains stuck and blames others for their adversity.

The path to resiliency begins when a maturing child encounters a turning point in their developmental journey. They must transition from viewing themselves as a victim of their surroundings to hopefully learning the wherewithal to respond to life. Prior to this change and based on where they are at developmentally, a young child believes that people and circumstances cause them to feel and act a certain way. Through each experience, their environment is either assigned blame or credit for their emotional state. Fundamentally, they are reacting and not responding to the external stimuli around them.

A child does not automatically learn resiliency, especially if their reactivity is never challenged. In order for there to be progression in this area, they must learn that they have choices when it comes to their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. This means they start to take responsibility for their life as opposed to viewing themselves as someone at the mercy of their surroundings. As an example, if they mature, their language shifts from “You made me mad” to “I am mad.”

As their exposure to screens increases, without a solid foundation of learned responsiveness to the world, they will be tossed around like waves on the ocean by every perceived negative online interaction. Without a few resilient real-life relationships to lean on, they will not have the wherewithal to filter social media feedback. Much like everyday life, the online world may be just as confusing and tumultuous for them.

In face-to-face interactions, we have the choice to react or to respond to those around us. When it comes to online communities, most communication by design is reactionary. Since the online world for the most part was designed to share common interests and experiences, quick reactions over thoughtful responses makes sense, especially since social media at its best is an enhancement and not a replacement for real-life.

Online interactions unfold something like this: scroll a site or app until something grabs your attention. Then click on one of the “reactions” the platform offers or add your own. Then return to scrolling until something else grabs your attention. In a few minutes, think about how many reactions you can share. Not to mention the fact that you can see how people react to your reactions!

While most threads are positive and offer a glimpse into someone’s daily activities, others may take a different turn. Regrettably, people may use online platforms to retaliate against or harm other people. From behind their screen, they are posting things that they probably would not say

in person. All the while, their resiliency takes a hit due to their impulsivity, giving no consideration to consequences, nor thinking about the feelings of others. In stark contrast, responsiveness involves mature choices even in the midst of emotional turmoil as part of a pattern of stepping back to see the bigger picture.

As part of life, we will and must face adversity, disappointment, and even failure, but through sustained help from others, we learn how to come out wiser and stronger on the other side. That is unless we are “left hanging” or remain in a state of confusion. Only person-to-person contact truly curbs our anxiety and returns us to calmness. Online communication can never and must never take the place of meaningful real-life interactions, especially in times of difficulties.

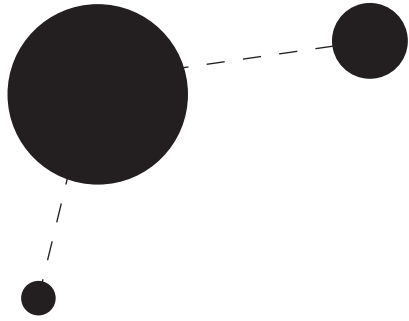
Resiliency is impossible without personal connections. Why? “From the moment you entered the world, your mind has been powerfully shaped by your environment, and no part of the environment is more important than the interaction you have with other minds.” (Dr. Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, page 30). Self-resilience is not a thing, because by design our mind was made to need other minds.

Unfortunately, the digital age may result in us competing for personal time and attention even amongst our closest family and friends. Screens and social media may become another distraction, diversion, or even substitute for real-deal connections. While side-by-side screen use is not a bad thing per se, if it is a replacement for the real thing, it is problematic.

Instead of offering someone our undivided attention, we may be partially present while scrolling through our devices. Even a phone turned over and on vibrate conveys a lack of being fully present. From childhood through adulthood, every person needs a few moments each day of the undivided attention of another person. Without such connections, we are at great disadvantage in our resiliency.

# Resiliency Tips

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**The goal is to foster impulse control, motivation, and being responsive rather than reactive.**

The following suggestions and tips are designed to teach resiliency in our digital age. The goal is to foster impulse control, motivation, and being responsive rather than reactive. The aim is for real-life connections to have the greatest influence in our life, meaning online communities are an enhancement and not a replacement.

It takes at least three months for new habits to form and for them to be more automatic. For individuals who may be accustomed to a lot of screen time, learning resiliency may take longer to take hold in their brain. Be gentle with yourself and

others. Change is difficult, especially when you are training yourself to let go of areas of comfort for perhaps a more difficult journey.



**remember that if your child is old enough to complain about any changes, they are old enough to understand the importance.**

An additional consideration for parents as you adapt and apply some of these suggestions for you and your family: remember that if your child is old enough to complain about any changes, they are old enough to understand the importance. Talk to them about the benefits of being more responsive over being reactive and encourage their vulnerable path of face-to-face conversations during times of difficulty. Teach and model for them the value of goal-setting and the motivation this

requires. This does not necessarily mean they will jump on board, but over time and as the benefits are repeatedly highlighted and emphasized, they may come to understand and even embrace them.

Before diving into the tips, parents...please remember this and remind yourself of it often: God chose you to be the parent for each one of your children. He knew exactly what He was doing when He selected you. Please be kind and gracious to yourself in this tough journey called parenting... you deserve it!



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## **NEGOTIABLE RULES**

Teach children how to think and to be responsible. After the parents firmly decide the rules required for the kiddo's overall safety and security (non-negotiable), then the child can co-create some negotiable rules. Encourage them to do this. It goes something like this. The child wants fewer restrictions in some area or wants more privileges. What do they need to exhibit to show they are ready for this? How can you set them up for success, meaning how can you break this down into incremental change? If they struggle with the new rule, instead of going back to the starting point, can you help them pull back and then try again? The goal is to teach problem-solving and resiliency... allow them to keep trying. In place of being reactive and pulling the new rule, model for them responsiveness by brainstorming and then implementing new strategies.

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## **MOTIVATION**

Starting at a young age, help children set and achieve goals. Help them come up with their own goals, because they will be more invested. Continually talk to them about the personal satisfaction of reaching their goals; therefore, fewer external rewards will be needed. Help the entire family set and reach collective goals. Family serving projects, especially if ongoing, are an optimal way to teach motivation and self-sacrifice as part of goal setting.

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## **RESPONSIVE FAMILY GAME**

This game is designed to practice thoughtful responses amongst family members.

**Option One:** You will need a large sheet of paper for each family member, plenty of crayons, and a timer. To start the game, and for 10 minutes, each person will draw their response to this: "My perfect day is



\_\_\_\_\_.” Once the timer goes off, everyone hands their paper to the person on their right. You now have two minutes to add to this person’s picture. What do you think they would like? Add it. Once the time is up, hand the paper in front of you to your right. Repeat this process until every paper passes by each family member and then returns to the original artist. You now have 30 seconds to add anything you want to your original picture. Keeping the 30 second timer, hand your paper to the right and complete the entire process again, until everyone has their original. After the activity, take some time and allow people to talk about their picture, to ask questions, and to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings while doing this exercise.

This game teaches responsiveness since it places people in a position to provide thoughtful feedback to one another. There is risk involved to both add to another person’s picture and to be vulnerable enough to receive input

in return. This game can be repeated with such items as: your worst day, your dream vacation, your favorite thing to do. The list is endless. When practiced, and over time, a closer sense of connectiveness and belonging is achieved amongst family members.

**Option Two:** Focus on the primary love language of each family member. (Resource: The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman.) Either for one day or for a full week, ask all the family members to focus on one individual and meet their love language needs.



## SHADES OF GREY

Most people follow or are followed on their social media platforms by people they have never met. This unlimited access to people is a top advantage of our digital age. Furthermore, online gamers can compete with other top-notch players from all around the world.

The list of positives goes on

and on. Even with all these positives, there is a potential downfall if some of the ways that we relate with one another online spill over into everyday life.

If you are offended or are annoyed by someone online, you have the option of blocking or muting them. What if you start shutting people out of your life based on one or a few offenses or annoyances? In your professional life, do you quit your job at the first sign of relational conflict?

With the anonymity of our devices, we can post whatever we want and not have to look someone in the eye. Do we know how to have difficult face-to-face conversations? If there is an offense, do we try to resolve it, or are people expendable and we simply move on?

Especially on social media platforms, most of our reactions fall under black and white thinking. Essentially, something is either all good or all bad, and there is nothing in between. If we get accustomed to “loving” or

“hating” everything that we see, we may become rigid when trying to work with others in everyday life. For the sake of having and maintaining long-term relationships, we must have a degree of comfort with shades of grey in order to be more flexible, more tolerant, and more gracious. Relationships are messy, but they are worth it. Here are some tips for parents to teach and model for their children when it comes to building a solid relational resiliency:

When your child comes home and they complain about another student or students, take the opportunity to teach them conflict resolution skills. First, help them to identify and then practice self-calming skills. Second, help them to practice removing themselves from a situation when they are upset and then re-engaging once they can be more responsive. Brainstorm with your child how they can resolve the problem with a high emphasis on how they can take ownership of both their contribution to the

conflict and the solution. Teach them how to be good at apologizing. Help your child understand that the other party or parties may not be on board with their resolution plan, but to do it anyway. If there is not a positive outcome, be prepared to be a sounding board for your child and help them verbalize their frustration.

Discourage your children from getting rid of friends over a few offenses or

when their interests do not perfectly align with someone. Help them to see the value of longevity. Although relationships change, there is value in having at least one person who knows our entire story. Every so often, scroll through social media with your children who are at least seven years of age, and discuss what you see. Discuss the pros and cons of people's posts and the reactions.

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Most importantly, pray for your child's resiliency. God will graciously guide you and your children. He knows what you need before you even tell Him. You are His beloved child.

