

Child Maltreatment and the Science of Resilience

Adapted from Cicchetti & Toth, 2016¹ and Cicchetti, 2013²

Research shows that youth who are maltreated are more likely than their non-maltreated peers to have mental health problems, physical health liabilities, and relationship concerns. However, not all individuals who experience child abuse and neglect develop physical or psychological challenges. In fact, despite their circumstances, some children thrive.

Youth who succeed in the face of adversity are considered resilient.

RESILIENCE IS NOT a trait or characteristic.

Instead it is a process of child development that unfolds over time. Youth may be resilient in some areas of life but not others, and at some times but not at other times.

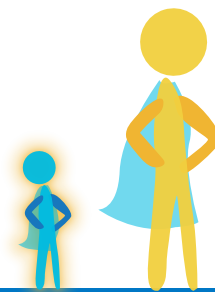
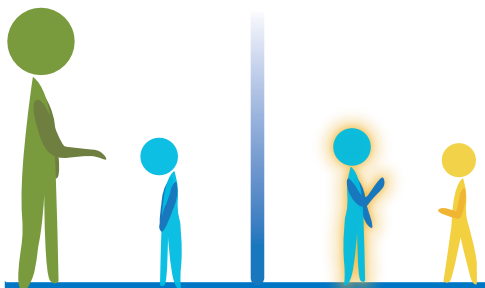
RESILIENCE IS ordinary.

The 'ingredients' for resilience are things that may seem quite ordinary, such as having a positive adult role model or being skilled at coping with tough emotions. Across studies, 10-25% of maltreated youth have resilient outcomes, but these percentages can vary based on how researchers specifically define resilience.

RESILIENCE CAN stem from individual traits, interpersonal relationships, and environmental factors.

Resilience stems from:

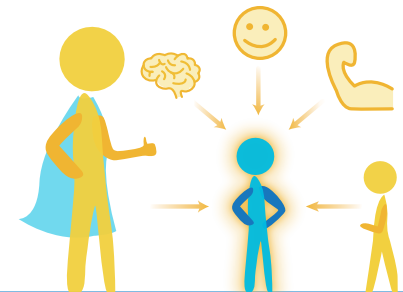
- Positive emotions
- Self-esteem
- Emotion regulation and coping skills
- Self-control
- Close friendships
- Caring adults
- Specific biological factors like brain function, genetics, and hormone patterns



The science of resilience can help us improve the lives of maltreated youth.



10 - 25% of maltreated youth have resilient outcomes



If we can discover the reasons why some maltreated youth thrive, we can use this information to shape prevention programs and interventions to help other maltreated youth.

¹ Cicchetti, D., & Toth, S. L. (2016). Child maltreatment and developmental psychopathology: A multilevel perspective. *Developmental Psychopathology*, 1-56.

² Cicchetti, D. (2013). Annual research review: Resilient functioning in maltreated children—past, present, and future perspectives. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 54(4), 402-422.

A SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RESILIENCE

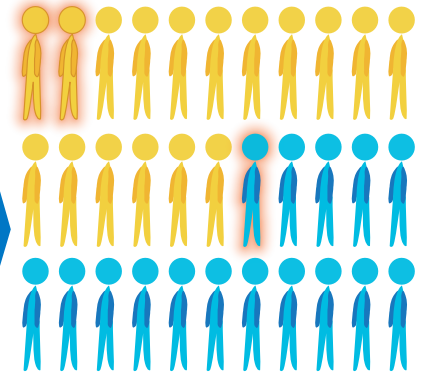
In an investigation conducted by Cicchetti and Rogosch (2007), researchers studied youth who attended a summer camp. Approximately half of the youth attending the camp were maltreated, while the other youth were not maltreated but had similar backgrounds. Researchers found that there was a small group of youth who were maltreated but showed resilience, as measured by their social competence and mental health.



= roughly 20 children

■ non-maltreated

■ maltreated



□ high resilience scores



Researchers then tested whether aspects of youth's personality and biology were related to whether or not they were resilient. Results shows that maltreated youth who were resilient tended to have more self-control and were able to adapt their behaviors to the demands of their environment. Resilient youth also had unique patterns of hormones that are related to a more adaptive stress response.

WHAT CAN WE DO?



If you are an educator, social worker, or other professional who works with maltreated youth, offering your care and support can help youth succeed.



Help maltreated youth build social skills and friendships with their peers.



Clinicians can work with youth to enhance coping and emotion regulation skills and self-esteem.



Family-focused interventions can help build youth's resilience. Child-parent psychotherapy intervention has been shown to be effective in children 5 and under.

REFERENCES

Cicchetti, D., & Rogosch, F. A. (2007). Personality, adrenal steroid hormones, and resilience in maltreated children: A multi-level perspective. *Development and Psychopathology*, 19(3), 787–809. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579407000399>