

RESILIENCE *and* a GROWTH MINDSET



Importance for Adult and Child Survivors of Domestic Violence

Being resilient and having a growth mindset strengthens survivors' optimism, self-compassion, and belief in their own ability to achieve what they want for themselves and their loved ones; and helps them to heal from the effects of domestic violence and other forms of oppression.

Overall Role of Practitioners

Practitioners can create conditions that help adult and child survivors call on their inner strength, improve their situations, and manage stressful events.

Examples of How Practitioners Can Help

1. Focus on the strengths, potentials, and resourcefulness of adult and child survivors.
 - Help survivors to see their own strengths. For example, ask a teenage survivor "How do you stay positive and hopeful even though you didn't make the team/get the job you wanted?"
 - Help a survivor to think about their situation from a different perspective. For example, say to an adult survivor, "I hear that you feel like a failure. If (a loved one) was in this conversation, what would they say about what kind of parent you are/how you help people in this community?"

2. Talk with survivors about significant stressors or worries in their lives.

- Coach survivors on how to recognize and reduce their and their children's stress and types of stress responses.
- Help survivors secure resources, services, or opportunities to address identified stressors.

3. Encourage adult survivors and older youth to visualize and describe what their desired future looks like. Explore who can help them achieve that future, and discuss action steps that will help them get there.

4. Avoid labeling choices as good or bad. Instead, explore how survivors' choices are aligned with what they want for themselves or their children, and how their choices have been influenced by the actions of their partner, their access to resources, or obstacles they had to overcome.

5. Share genuine encouragement that strengthens survivors' optimism, self-compassion, and proactive behavior.

- "Stay strong. Stay positive. Feel proud of how hard you've worked and know you're doing the best you can."
- "Remember how people who love you have helped you to accomplish the things you want in your life."
- "Don't give up on your recovery. Think of this relapse as an opportunity to grow or learn."

6. Share grounding techniques that help survivors to stay in the present moment when they begin to experience uncomfortable memories or challenging emotions. For example, encourage survivors to:

- Take 10 slow breaths, focusing on each inhale and exhale.
- Remind themselves of who they are now. Direct them to say, in sequence: their name, age, where they are, what they did today, and what they'll do next.
- Focus on the space they are in. Ask if they can name 3 things they can see, 3 things they can hear, and then 3 things they can touch

7. Affirm for adult and child survivors that the violence in the home is not their fault and that you hold the person using violence responsible for their own behavior. Explain that alcohol, drugs, oppression, financial pressure, depression, jealousy, etc. are never excuses for violence or coercive control or abuse of any kind. Repeat this whenever survivors suggest that violence is their fault.

“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”

Alexander Den Heijer



Advancing an Adult & Child Survivor-Centered Approach

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Examples of Questions to Ask Survivors

1. In what circumstances do you feel strong and capable?
 - What personal strengths do you call upon when you’re faced with challenges or adversity?
2. What impact has your experience with domestic violence had on you? On your child?
 - What have you learned from the experience?
 - How do you want things to be different?
3. Tell me about a positive change you’ve made in your life and what helped you to make that change.
 - What helped you to act on your desire for things to be different?
4. How does your child act when they are experiencing emotional stress?
 - How do you help your child ease or overcome their emotional stress?
5. What do you do for yourself to keep your current challenges/trauma experiences from negatively impacting your relationship with your child? How did you learn to do that?
6. If in 6 months you look back on this and say “I’m in a much better position than I was 6 months ago” what would be different for you and your child? What does that future look like?
 - Who do you imagine would have helped you to get to a better position?
 - What steps will it take to get there?

This is part of a series of Practice Tips on Protective Factors for Adult and Child Survivors of Domestic Violence. Find the others here: <https://dvchildwelfare.org/resources/protective-factors-practice-tips/>