

Nurturing Resilience in Children Through Trusted Adults

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When we think about supporting children's healthy development, we often focus primarily on the family. Yet another place within the community—places like the YMCA—plays an equally important role in nurturing children's resilience. Resilience does not mean enduring hardship or adversity alone through sheer determination. Rather, it is the ability to face difficult circumstances, adapt, recover, and continue moving forward through the support of caring relationships and trusted people. Resilience is not a fixed trait that some children are simply born with while others are not. It is something that develops gradually over time through relationships with supportive people and positive environments.

Japanese children are among the healthiest in the world physically. According to UNICEF's Innocenti Report Card 19 (2025), Japan ranked first among OECD and EU countries in physical well-being. Yet the same report ranked Japan 32nd in psychological well-being. Young people in Japan reported feeling lonely at nearly three times the OECD average, and among 38 countries, Japanese 15-year-olds ranked last in the proportion who talk with their parents once or twice a week. While their physical health is well protected, many adolescents are experiencing a profound lack of emotional connection. This is one of the defining challenges facing young people in Japan today.

Adolescence is a unique stage of life—not simply older childhood nor younger adulthood. Physical development accelerates rapidly, while emotional and social development progresses more gradually. During this period, what young people need most is not adults who manage or control them, but adults who are consistently present—adults they know will be there when they need them.

Recent international studies involving more than 20,000 young people across nine countries have identified four key domains that strengthen resilience: a sense of purpose, emotional regulation, healthy relationships, and connection to nature and meaningful places. Among these, trusted relationships and a sense of purpose

emerged as especially powerful. Children do not need to excel in only one area. Rather, developing strengths across multiple areas—even gradually—helps build the resilience needed to overcome life's challenges.

This is precisely where organizations like the YMCA make such an important contribution. Outside the home, the YMCA provides a place where children can truly feel accepted just as they are. Whether through sports, camping, educational programs, or community activities, children discover their strengths, build friendships, and contribute to others. In doing so, they learn that it is safe to take on challenges, to make mistakes, and to rise again. This is the essence of resilience.

Professor Kenneth Ginsburg offers a powerful metaphor of the lighthouse. Children are like people navigating the sea, while adults are the lighthouse standing firmly on the shore. A lighthouse does not steer the ship. Instead, it faithfully shines from the same place, illuminating hidden dangers while allowing each sailor to navigate independently. In many ways, the YMCA itself serves as a lighthouse within the community.

No single parent is meant to raise a child alone. The more trusted adults a community offers, the stronger children's resilience becomes. I hope that everyone involved with the YMCA will remember that, for someone, you may be that lighthouse—a steady, trusted presence who helps young people find their own way forward.

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