

## Exploring the Research Base on Resilience: Implications for Systems of Care

*Purpose of Workshop:*  
To explore the meaning of "resilience" and its implications for children's mental health and systems of care



Robert M. Friedman, Ph.D.  
Professor and Chair  
Department of Child and Family Studies  
Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute  
University of South Florida  
March 3, 2004

## The President's New Freedom Commission

"Resilience means the personal and community qualities that enable us to rebound from adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or other stresses – and to go on with life with a sense of mastery, competence, and hope."



## President's New Freedom Commission

Two principles for transforming the mental health service delivery system:

- Services and treatments must be consumer and family centered;
- Care must focus on facilitating recovery, and on building resilience, not just managing symptoms.



## Two Elements of Resilience

- Individual has experienced a significant threat or some significant adversity;
- The quality of adaptation or development is good, despite the threat or adversity.



## Other Important Qualities of Resilience


- Not a fixed attribute of an individual;
- A dynamic rather than a static concept;
- Does not and should not imply that children can overcome adversity by themselves or should be blamed for not overcoming it.
- Resilience as a contextually specific and culturally based construct;



## Other Important Qualities of Resilience


- What makes a child "resilient" at any point in time is the relative strength of individual characteristics and external protective processes (supports provided by families, communities, and schools) to the influence of risks and vulnerabilities in the external environment;
- Risk and protective factors can be viewed at the level of the child, the family, and the community;
- Protective factors are both internal and external to the individual, and buffer the effects of adversity.







**“Mental health problems among children and adolescents constitute a public health crisis for our nation.”**

(Subcommittee on Children and Family, President's New Freedom Commission, p. 1)



**Implications of Resilience for Children's Mental Health**


- Public Health Approach – Risk and Protective Factors
- External Protective Factors
  1. Positive Social Connections
  2. Skills and Competence
  3. High Standards
  4. Giving to Others
  5. Optimism and Hope

**Loss of Social Capital — Social Engagement**


- Americans today are increasingly disengaged not only from the public sphere but from informal and private social relations;
- Social bonds are the most powerful predictor of life satisfaction;
- Individually and collectively, we are paying a heavy price for the loss of our social capital;
- Loss of social capital is reflected in higher crime rates, lower educational performance, more teen pregnancy, child suicide, low birth weight babies, and infant mortality.

(Putnam, R. D., in "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community," 2000)



**Lack of Connectedness**


- The mental and behavioral health of U.S. children is deteriorating, creating a crisis in our communities;
- We treat this as an “individual” problem rather than a community problem requiring a community-wide solution;
- Children are “hardwired” for close attachments to other people, beginning with their parents and other relatives and extending out to the broader community;



**Lack of Connectedness**

- This crisis of American childhood is caused in large part by a lack of “connectedness”;
- As a solution we need to create “authoritative communities,” groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and to live a good life.


(From “Hardwired to Connect: The Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities,” Institute for American Values and the Commission on Children at Risk, 2003)



(One Example)

**School Size**

- Between 1940 and 1990, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the number of schools in our country declined by 70% and the average size of schools increased by 500%;
- Yet, research has documented that larger schools are related to poorer educational outcomes academically and behaviorally;
- The primary explanation that researchers offer of the link between school size and educational outcomes is that small schools provide more opportunities for the development of close connections between students and faculty.



## Our Responsibility and Opportunity to Reduce Incidence of Mental Health Problems

- Develop and promote policies, programs, and practices that create opportunities for positive social connections



## Implications at the Child and Family Intervention Level

- Assessment – Shift from deficit-oriented assessments to assessments that focus on internal and external protective factors;
- Intervention – Expand on strength-based approach to identify for people their strengths and protective factors, and also intervene to strengthen them.



## Implications at the System Level

- Vision and theory of change for systems of care;
- Workforce development;
- Cultural competence;
- Outcome evaluation and performance measurement.

