

COUNSELING CORNER

Monthly School Newsletter from Lutheran Counseling Services

Resilience Building

The 2020-2021 Counseling Corners will focus on **RESILIENCE!**

**WEBINAR: OPTIMISM
& How to Build It**
March 12 @ 12 pm
[Register Here](#)

Car Conversations

In the car, classroom or dinner table, try some of these ideas to promote resilience in yourself, your family or your class.



◆ While reading a book or watching a movie, pause at a climactic scene. Help each other to notice the positive things, focus on what the character can control, and talk about what the character could do next. Discuss how these are the elements that support an optimistic outlook. Talk about how each of you have looked for the positive, focused on what you can control and taken action in your own life.



Optimism

The work of Martin Seligman, considered to be the founder of the discipline of Positive Psychology, has a lot to teach us about resilience. But his research started with a very different focus: helplessness. In his now famous (arguably unethical) study, he demonstrated that a portion of dogs given a mild shock without the option to avoid it, developed a condition called learned helplessness. They believed they were helpless to change their circumstances and stopped trying, even when they could enact some change or avoid difficulty.

However, Dr. Seligman's study provides an interesting plot twist. In his research he noticed a peculiar pattern. About a third of the dogs (with comparable results in similar studies on people) **never** developed learned helplessness. They continued to persist and believe that they could exert an impact on their circumstances. Even after being put in situations where they couldn't. Essentially, they didn't give up.

Seligman and other researchers and supporters took this research to create programs that builds resilience. The programs target six resilience competencies: self-awareness, strengths of character, self-regulation, connection, mental agility, and optimism. In this, **optimism** is defined as

The ability to notice and expect the positive, to focus on what you can control, and to take purposeful action.

With clients from preschools to the U.S. Army, this led the way to implement programs that address the qualities that help someone move through stressful, challenging, and traumatic experiences. They helped soldiers deal with post traumatic stress disorder, prevent it, or even experience what has been called post traumatic **growth!**

◆ With Middle and High School students, watch this [TEDxYouth talk](#) by 9th grader Caroline Allen, who describes what optimism is, how to build it and what the benefits are. Discuss how you each relate to her story. Anything you disagree with? Any ways you can build an optimistic perspective this next week?

◆ Have a young child select a toy and tell a story of a bad thing that happened to the toy. Then tell a story about how the bad thing:

- Would not last long
- Only relates to that bad thing

My dinosaur fell into a pit, but he knew he would get out, and it was just his bad luck.

Tell another story about a good thing that:

- Benefits would last
- Would relate to other good things happening

My dinosaur played tag at school and was happy all day, and then played hide-n-seek because he knew he was fast. Talk about how optimism helps maximize good things by expecting the best possible outcomes and minimize negative outcomes by knowing things can be different next time.

All images courtesy of [Pexels.com](#)



Optimism is a big key to how this can be accomplished. Believing that you can continue to exert some control over situations, focusing on positive outcome possibilities, and continuing to take action makes a difference. The key to understanding optimistic perspectives is to understand explanatory style, or how a person explains events that happen.

An optimistic outlook explains negative outcomes as due to:

Temporary, Specific, and External causes

Essentially, optimistic people minimize the effects of negative things that happen by seeing them as specific to this instance, notice what was outside of their control, and see the results as temporary and that things could be different in the future.

An optimist outlook explains positive outcomes as due to:

Permanent, Pervasive, and Personal causes

The optimist sees positive things as lasting a long time, the benefits extended far and wide, and they see their own efforts as contributing to the positive outcome.

As a family or as a class, tune into how each member explains things that happen throughout the day. Note that many benefits exist from having an optimistic outlook. If someone believes they can have an influence on outcomes and expects positive things to happen, they are more likely to do the things that will help those outcomes occur. While we can learn to be helpless, we can also learn to be optimistic and hopeful! How can you focus on boosting optimism this month?

Want to learn more? Join a webinar addressing Optimism 3/12/21 @ 12 pm [Register Here](#)

Seligman, M. E. P. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York: Vintage Books.

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schools@lcsfl.com