

# COUNSELING CORNER

Monthly School Newsletter from Lutheran Counseling Services

## Resilience Building

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

## Car Conversations

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



◆ Discuss with your students or children a challenge that is common for their age. Find an example in a book, movie, TV show, song, historical research or personal friends of someone who has gone through that challenge. Identify a positive aspect that came out of that challenge in one of the five areas of Post Traumatic Growth. To further reinforce the idea of thinking of difficulties as challenges, set a challenge to find one potential positive element in each of the five areas.



## Challenges

To continue with our focus on resilience, we tune in to Psychotherapist Richard Reid who uses an analogy of an oyster and pearl to describe psychological resilience. He shares that for a pearl to get a grain of sand in it signifies an irritant and challenge. The process of an oyster growing a pearl demonstrates resilience or building something beautiful out of an irritating or initially challenging situation.

Similarly, as Spring is in the air, we reflect on the life cycle of the butterfly as it transforms from the caterpillar in a cocoon to emerge as a butterfly. The dark and lonely cocoon presents a challenge that the caterpillar must face. Emerging from the cocoon requires great strife to break through and push its entire body through to the outside world. The process itself allows the butterfly to emerge and reach its full potential with fully stretched wings that can help it reach the highest heights.

In fact, if a cocoon is cut open for the butterfly, its wings will not fully form without the necessary pressure and work required to push through the barrier which presses fluids outward to the far edges of the wings. Without this pressure, the butterfly's wingspan (and potential) is greatly limited. It is the **challenge** that fuels the success.

Much like a muscle that is pushed to build its strength and mass, resilience can allow someone to push through a difficult challenge and emerge stronger or having grown in some ways through that challenge. Research (Ogińska-Bulik, N., & Kobylarczyk, M., 2016) shows that how someone conceptualizes a stressful situation can either lead to or detract from resilience. People who think of the stressful situation as a **challenge** demonstrate resilience, while those who view it as a **threat** are less resilient and experience greater



◆ Discuss as a class or family how caterpillars develop strong wings or people build strong muscles. Build a habit of making a pose of strong muscles or flapping your arms as wings before a difficult task (such as a chore, test or presentation). Remind each other that challenges can make us stronger.

◆ This month as a family or class, choose a puzzle that is a challenge to complete and will take a good amount of work and time to complete. After completing the puzzle, discuss how the challenge added to the satisfaction of the final results. Find an easy puzzle and discuss the difference in how it feels to complete it and any differences in growth. Select a very difficult puzzle and talk about what would be needed to make that a challenging puzzle, rather than insurmountable. (Ex: Seek support/help of others, take your time, research puzzle strategies, etc.)



negative impacts from the stress. In fact, those with resilience are less likely to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after a difficult event impacts them because they do not experience it as traumatic to the point that they reorganize their thinking, priorities or perspective.

However those who do experience events they perceive as traumatic can develop what Drs. Tedeschi & Calhoun have called Post Traumatic Growth. This means that they see positives in any of five areas after coming through the traumatic situation:

- 1) Appreciation of life
- 2) Relationships with others
- 3) New possibilities in life
- 4) Personal strength
- 5) Spiritual change

In fact, a recent studies of responses (Gillespie, 2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that 88% of respondents identified positive outcomes from the pandemic. Consider individually, as a family or as a class what positives have come of this past year in each of the five areas listed. In what ways can you find pearls, stretched wings, or stronger muscles that have come about, or which could you work on developing?

Reid R. Psychological Resilience. Med Leg J. 2016;84(4):172-184.

Ogińska-Bulik, N., & Kobylarczyk, M. (2016). Association between resiliency and posttraumatic growth in firefighters: the role of stress appraisal. *International journal of occupational safety and ergonomics : JOSE*, 22(1), 40–48.

Tedeschi, R, & Calhoun, L. (1996). Post Traumatic Growth Inventory, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*.

Gillespie, C. (February 16, 2021) Finding the Bright Side: COVID Lockdowns and Post-Traumatic Growth. Accessed at <https://www.verywellmind.com/covid-lockdowns-and-post-traumatic-personal-growth-5112613>

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