

# EVERYDAY STRONG RESILIENCE HANDBOOK

THE  
ACTIVITY  
GUIDE

A new approach to anxiety and depression



Tools for parents, teachers, neighbors and  
other trusted adults



United Way of Utah County



# YOU CAN START BUILDING EVERYDAY RESILIENCE BY FOSTERING SAFETY, CONNECTION AND CONFIDENCE IN THE CHILDREN AROUND YOU.

We're on a mission to build resilient kids and strong communities.

United Way has collaborated with a group of experts on anxiety, depression and psychological well-being to develop these activities for you.

The EveryDay Strong panel of experts includes medical professionals, educators, social workers, and mental health specialists.

Find more information on our panel of experts at [www.EveryDayStrong.org](http://www.EveryDayStrong.org).

## Try these everyday activities

This guide outlines easy and fun activities, developed by the United Way EveryDay Strong panel of experts, that you can do with your child to build their resilience.

### Featured Experts



Matt Swenson, MD,  
Child Psychiatrist  
Intermountain  
Healthcare



Catherine Johnson,  
LCSW,  
Therapist at Wasatch  
Mental Health



Kyle Reyes, PhD,  
Vice President of  
Student Affairs, Utah  
Valley University

# MORE KIDS ARE EXPERIENCING DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY THAN EVER BEFORE.

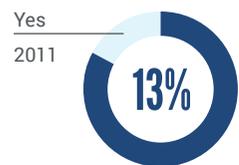
Every year, kids in Utah County schools are asked:

You don't have to be an expert to build resilient kids.

During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?\*

You don't need a degree or specialized training. Parents and other trusted adults in a child's life (including grandparents, teachers, friends, and neighbors) are often uniquely equipped to problem solve because they experience a child intimately over a long period of time. This guide will help you learn how to start building everyday resilience in the kids around you!

More kids than ever before are answering yes.

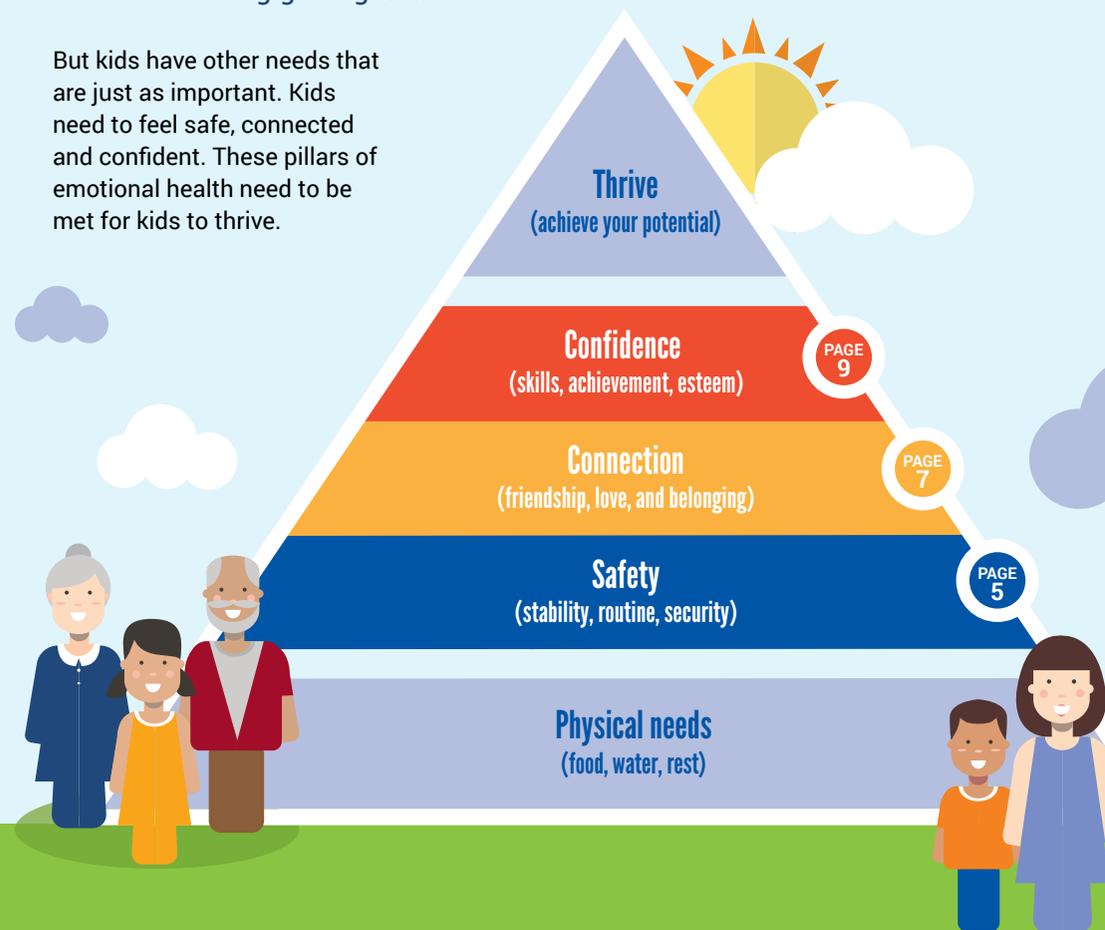


\*This question comes from the Utah County Student Health and Risk Protection (SHARP) survey data. You can learn more at: <https://dsamh.utah.gov/reports/sharp-survey>

# A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

We know that food, sleep, and shelter are critical to kids' wellbeing. A tired, hungry kid can't focus on making good grades!

But kids have other needs that are just as important. Kids need to feel safe, connected and confident. These pillars of emotional health need to be met for kids to thrive.





# SAFE



Even if a child may be safe, he may not feel safe. He may be afraid of getting in trouble or letting a loved one down. A child who feels safe knows that she can tell the adults in her life the truth about herself, and she will always be loved, no matter what.

## SAFE TO TALK

**What to do:** During an emotionally charged conversation, imagine that you have duct tape over your mouth. Stay engaged and continue to communicate in any way you can without speaking.

**Why:** When children feel they will be listened to and understood, they feel safe to share challenges, true feelings, and ideas. Without that feeling of safety to talk, they may overcompensate by becoming defensive or insistent.

## SAFE TO BE YOU

**What to do:** Praise something unique about your child. Consider even acknowledging how unexpected, different, confusing or quirky this trait or interest is, but how you love or admire it.

**Why:** Everyone needs to recognize and seek fulfillment in their own unique abilities and desires. When they feel safe to be different from others, they can thrive as they feel independently able to make their own choices.

## SAFE TO FEEL

**What to do:** When you see a child overwhelmed with anger, sadness, or anxiety, validate her emotions instead of trying to eliminate or solve her problems. Try statements like: “wow, those are some big emotions,” or “emotions are good and often have something to teach us!”

**Why:** When we inadvertently invalidate children’s feelings, we can make it unsafe to have or express certain emotions. We may say “you’re OK, hop up!” when they fall or “seriously? Stop it!” when they pout. Even if you have to redirect the behavior, acknowledging that feelings are okay is an important lesson.

## SAFE TO EXPLORE

**What to do:** When a child hears or sees a situation where a person made a decision that is not consistent with the family’s values, ask: “How do you think it would affect our relationship if you made those choices?” Try to express reassurance that nothing will come between you and your child.

**Why:** When we quickly condemn actions we don’t approve of—such as swearing, bullying, clothing choices, smoking, lying, not going to church, etc.—our children can feel their relationship is endangered if they ever do any of those things. That reaction creates a feeling of a lack of safety in a relationship that can be harmful to children’s ability to make their own wise choices.

## SAFE TO SEPARATE

**What to do:** Notice and comment on things you observe about your child. The goal isn’t to express approval—instead, emphasize how you feel about your relationship with them. For example, “I saw you today playing with your friends! I love watching you enjoy life!”

**Why:** All people, especially children, carry fears of separation. They wonder, “Do they think about me when I am away?,” “Will I be remembered?,” or “Do others notice the effort I am making while on my own?” Children can feel safe to explore on their own if they are reassured that you are delighted to be a witness to their life, despite normal and necessary separation.

## SAFE TO FAIL

**What to do:** Share a story about a significant failure or mistake you made in your own life. Be detailed and vulnerable about your feelings. Try not to emphasize how you overcame that adversity or learned a valuable lesson. The most important thing to communicate is that you understand failure, embarrassment, or disappointment.

**Why:** Failure is a part of every life. Yet, a child’s early experiences with failure can be scary and feel threatening, even overwhelming. Learning from others’ experience with failure, including their honest feelings of challenge, can help them relate and imagine themselves working through their own failures.



Acknowledge that feelings are okay. Instead of trying to eliminate her problem, say “emotions are good and often have something to teach us!”

# CONNECTED



Connection is when a child feels truly understood. More than just being in the same space as your child or giving extravagant gifts, connection happens in the everyday moments of our lives, such as quiet breaks, casual conversations, and shared experiences.

## CONNECT BY APOLOGIZING

**What to do:** Sincerely apologize for a past offense or hurt, even if it happened long ago and you might imagine the incident has been forgotten.

**Why:** All of us carry emotional wounds from times we were mistreated. Children remember these times too. It is never too late to apologize for something you may have done or said.

## CONNECT THROUGH WRITING

**What to do:** Write a note and leave it to be found. Emphasize your relationship and your feelings about it. Put less emphasis on the specific behaviors, choices or accomplishments of the child.

**Why:** A written note often can express things in a different and sometimes more thoughtful way than verbal expression. It shows additional thought and effort and can be saved, re-read, and treasured for a long time to come.



## CONNECT IN PLAYING

**What to do:** Take time to play, especially when you would have previously said no. If she never asks, find a time to invite her to play with you in an activity she would enjoy.

**Why:** Play and laughter are the most powerful tools for connection with young children. Playing with friends or “entertaining himself” are inadequate replacements for play with important adults. Join in with Barbie or Minecraft or dig out an old board game.

## CONNECT THROUGH LAUGHING

**What to do:** Find ways to cultivate humor in your relationships. Watch a silly video, share a joke, and look for a chance to turn an argument into a laugh. Talk in a silly voice or dance around!

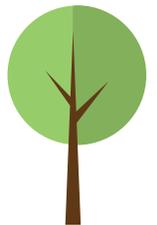
**Why:** Laughter and humor improve health, strengthen shared connections and experiences, and create positive memories. It also reduces stress and anxiety about everyday challenges.

## CONNECT BY ASKING

**What to do:** Ask questions that show that you’re trying to connect; it doesn’t matter whether she has an answer, she just need to hear you express your desire to be close. For example: “What is it like to be you?” Or “Is there anything I could do to help us feel closer?”

**Why:** To really connect with another person, we have to be willing to do so on the other person’s terms. Often a good start is to simply state that you want to connect with or feel close to someone. Make sure that in addition to asking the question, you follow up by listening carefully.

Play time with adults is as important as play time with fellow kids. Join in with Barbie or Minecraft or dig out an old board game.





# CONFIDENT



Confidence is the feeling of being good at something. It's a sense of independence and the feeling that he has the ability to change things for himself. After a child begins to feel safe and connected with those around them, he can start working on becoming confident in his abilities and developing pride in his work.

## BUILD CONFIDENCE BY TRUSTING

**What to do:** When you are concerned about your child's achievement levels in school, sports, or the arts, resist the urge to lecture on the seriousness of the situation or to problem solve for them. Instead, give some calm reassurance and encouragement that the child will "be OK" or "figure it out." Say something like, "I'm sure you can solve this."

**Why:** Kids, and especially adolescents, often hide their worries, which can lead adults to believe that they aren't taking life seriously. Anxious parents pile on added stress by saying, "Remember that your grades now will be on your transcript forever," or "If you don't do this..." Instead, the best way to build confidence is often to express confidence.



## BUILD CONFIDENCE BY NAMING THE PROBLEM

**What to do:** When a child frequently encounters a difficulty in their life, create a name for that challenge and refer to it as something external from them. For example:

- Instead of, "You shouldn't be so scared, it's not a big deal," try, "It looks like the worry bug has pulled the alarm! Is this really an emergency? What do you think?"
- Instead of, "You have a problem being able to turn off the video games!" try, "It looks like the X-bot has taken over again!"
- Instead of: "I know you could do this if you would just try!" try, "I know you are working really hard, but ADHD is still getting in the way. What would be helpful?"

**Why:** Psychologists will often "name it to tame it." This practice of "externalization" helps prevent feeling discouraged or demoralized by problems, and changes the problem-solving dynamic from a "me fixing you" to an "us fixing it."

## BUILD CONFIDENCE BY REMEMBERING

**What to do:** At the end of the day, take some time to reflect and review the positive things you did together and experienced that day.

**Why:** Negative memories are said to be more "sticky" than positive ones, so people often need help remembering their good deeds and successes. For young children, just reviewing the events at the end of a typical day can improve their ability to reflect and reinforce successes. Older kids can use these memories to create important metaphors for hard work or success in life.

## BUILD CONFIDENCE BY PLAYING AND PRACTICING

**What to do:** Playtime can be helpful for practicing skills and building confidence. For example, if you're pretending to be a prince locked in a tower, encourage your child to take a risk, try something new, or solve a problem in the story in a creative way. Praise your child for the skill she exhibits through the imaginative game.

**Why:** In play, kids practice for life and challenges with power and courage, roles and rules, and there are constant opportunities for adults to acknowledge and praise their competence.

Reviewing positive memories reinforces a child's confidence. Fill a photo book with his fun moments, good deeds, and accomplishments.

We're not going to stop until every child in every neighborhood feels safe, connected, and confident. We can't do it without you.

For more help, dial 2-1-1 at any time from any phone and talk directly to a community resource specialist, who can connect you with free or low-cost counseling services, support groups, or crisis services.

For more information and resources on anxiety and depression, visit [www.EveryDayStrong.org](http://www.EveryDayStrong.org).

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*Second edition for visual purposes; content remains unchanged.*