

Resilience Development in Children With Adverse Childhood Experiences: An Occupational Therapist's Role



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Project Description

- **Purpose:**
 - 1) To advocate for the occupational therapist's (OT) role in facilitating resilience development in children with adverse childhood experiences (ACE).
 - 2) To provide OTs and community leaders with educational protocols focused on incorporating key principles of resilience development into daily interactions with children.
- **Achieved Through:**
 - 1) Increased personal education on ACEs and resilience through scholarly literature review and continuing education classes.
 - 2) Administered a survey of OTs and members of the interdisciplinary team on experiences with children with ACEs and current intervention practices.
 - 3) Submitted an article to the Student Journal of Occupational Therapy (SJOT) on the results of the survey and advocating for the OT's role in facilitating resilience.
 - 4) Created educational protocols, handouts, and activities focused on facilitating resilience development in childhood and adolescence.

Mission & Vision

- **Mission:**
To provide evidence-based educational resources on resiliency training within the community to parents, educators, and occupational therapy providers.
- **Vision:**
To provide leaders in the greater Fort Wayne area with the tools needed to instill social-emotional health, executive functioning skills, behavioral modification techniques, and general coping skills in children and adolescents throughout the community.

Key Definitions

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):**
ACEs are broadly defined as negative physical and emotional experiences that take place during childhood. According to Gilbert et al. (2015), ACEs include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, witness to domestic abuse, parental divorce, incarcerated parent(s), parent(s) abuse of drugs/alcohol, or parent(s) diagnosed with a mental illness.
- **Resilience:** "...successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands" (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Literature Review

- Studies of individuals living in the U.S. revealed around 60-62% of adults had experienced one or more ACEs before the age of 18 (Gilbert et al., 2015; Merrick et al., 2018).
- ACEs interfere with a child's participation and independence in daily activities. Putamen (2006) found that ACEs interfere with a child's social participation, academic achievement, emotional development, and neurodevelopment.
- The effects of ACEs continue into adulthood. Anda et al (2006) revealed that childhood trauma was correlated with many negative effects in adulthood including increased risk of substance use/abuse, increased memory disturbances, increased stress levels, increased risk of abusing one's partner, increased difficulty with anger management, increased risk of panic attacks, increased risk of depressed affect, increased risk of anxiety, and increased risk of hallucinations.
- Researchers have identified a number of character traits and skills associated with resilience in childhood including the development of pro-social skills, self-regulation skills, problem-solving skills, future orientation, and self-efficacy (Yoon, 2018; Yule, Houston, & Grych, 2019; Masten & Barnes, 2018; Oshri et al., 2018; Cieslak et al., 2008; Hamill, 2003). In addition, Zolkoski & Bullock (2012) revealed that supportive parents and family cohesion were also associated with higher rates of resilience in children. If the child does not have a supportive family, a close relationship with another adult can facilitate resilience development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015; Afifi et al., 2016).

Survey Results

- Around 76% of survey respondents indicated at least 21% of their case load included children with one or more ACEs. According to these results, if a therapist treats ten children a day, two of those children will have at least one ACE.
- The current study supported and expanded previous research of the effects of ACEs by revealing ACEs may affect a child's participation in eating patterns, sleep patterns, relationships with others, school participation, participation in hobbies/sports, toileting, hygiene, motor development, sensory processing skills, and self-regulation skills.
- The survey revealed a number of common interventions used by occupational therapists and members of the interdisciplinary team to assist children with overcoming ACEs: facilitating self-regulation skills, facilitating problem-solving skills, utilizing sensory based interventions, utilizing group therapy, utilizing principles of a trauma-informed approach, and referring the child to other professional services.
- OTs and members of the interdisciplinary team neglected to mention several key protective factors in childhood resilience including prosocial skills, a future oriented mindset, and self-efficacy.

Project Completion and Outcomes

- Completed two continuing education classes:
 - Trauma-Informed Resilient Schools
 - Building Resilience in your Young Client
- Created a comprehensive resource binder containing:
 - The effects of ACEs on a child's development and occupations.
 - Definitions of resilience and protective factors.
 - Six educational protocols on facilitating resilience development.
 - Handouts for OTs and educators on supporting resilience development.
- Filmed four Telehealth OT sessions incorporating key skills associated with resilience.
- Manuscript under review by Student Journal of Occupational Therapy (SJOT).

Resilience isn't a single skill. It's a variety of skills and coping mechanisms. To bounce back from bumps in the road as well as failures, you should focus on emphasizing the positive.

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-Jean Chatzky

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Deliverables

- Completion of two continuing education courses.
- Creation of a resource binder with educational protocols and resources to support resilience development in students with ACEs.
- Documentation of manuscript submission to an OT publication
- Four videos of sample OT instruction; four parent instructional worksheets; four student instructional worksheets

Future Implications for OT

- ACEs interfere with a child's ability to complete daily occupations independently. To ensure a child obtains the highest level of functional independence, OTs have a responsibility to facilitate resilience development.
- The current study revealed OTs frequently work with children with ACEs and are aware of the diverse effects of ACEs. Respondents utilized numerous intervention techniques to assist children in overcoming ACEs. However, respondents neglected to address all the key skills associated with resilience.
- Increased education among OTs and the interdisciplinary team is needed on facilitating resilience development in children and adolescents.

KEY REFERENCES

*Full reference list and image reference list available upon request