

## Handout 1

### Highlights of Research on Resiliency

The concepts of resilience and protective factors are the positive counterparts to the constructs of vulnerability and risk factors (Werner & Smith, 1992). Resilient children, called “keepers of the dream” by Germezy, Masten, and Tellegan (1984), are children who remain competent despite exposure to misfortune or to stressful events (Rutter, 1985). Characteristics of resilient children include (Demos, 1989):

- A sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, which allows the child to cope successfully with challenges
- An active stance toward an obstacle or difficulty
- The ability to see a difficulty as a problem that can be worked on, overcome, changed, endured, or resolved in some way
- Reasonable persistence, with an ability to know when “enough is enough”
- A capacity to develop a range of strategies and skills to bear on the problem, which can be used in a flexible way.

No children, however, are invulnerable to the stress of adversity (Rutter, 1985):

- The resistance to stress is relative.
- The basis of the resistance is both environmental and constitutional.
- The degree of resistance is not a fixed quantity; it varies over time and according to circumstances.
- Risk increases substantially when children experience two risk factors and continues to increase as the number of risk factors increases (Rutter, 1985). The more risk factors are present, the greater the damaging impact of each.
- Poverty is usually not one risk factor; rather, it is a constellation of interacting risk factors (Schorr, 1987).

In a longitudinal study of a multiracial cohort of 698 infants on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, Werner and Smith (1992) identified children who despite multiple risk factors were able to lead productive lives, exhibiting competence, confidence, and caring. One of the key protective factors for these children was the availability of persons who provided them with a secure base for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative. Among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of the children of Kauai, outside of the family circle, was a favorite teacher. For the resilient youngsters, a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification.