

"Raising Resilient Children in the Foreign Service"

by the Foreign Service Institute's Transition Center



How to raise resilient children is a universal concern of parents. Ultimately, we want our children to grow to be independent balanced contributors of society.

COURSE AT FSI

Recently, over thirty Foreign Service parents convened at the Foreign Service Institute to discuss resilience, and specifically how to capitalize on the benefits of overseas life and mitigate the challenges in a course titled *Encouraging Resilience in the Foreign Service Child (MQ500)*. The following shares what was discussed during the course.

FLEXIBILITY & ALTRUISM

Resilience can be a daunting concept, especially today, with the word and concept being thrown around in the media, in classrooms and in pop psychology. Yet, with respect to children, the focus can be whittled down to one principle - **flexibility**. Fostering your child's adaptability skills is a lifelong gift, which by the nature of the Foreign Service lifestyle, is a given. This is where you can relax a bit and realize you are already a step ahead.

The next most valuable attribute is, arguably, a person's level of **altruism**. Getting your kids involved in the community around them with age-appropriate service projects not only models positive world citizenship but it is a proven method to building personal resilience.

Nurturing flexibility and altruism are two significant means to building a child's personal resilience. These, in addition to such things as maintaining traditions and expanding a child's emotional vocabulary, are all ways parents around the world can raise resilient children, and ultimately, resilient adults.

Consider some of the following suggestions for encouraging resilience in your Foreign Service child:

- Initiate discussions with your child about how they are navigating change.
- Help them consciously create closure for relationships and then build new ones.
- Validate their feelings and offer emotional vocabulary so they can more precisely express their feelings.
- Institute familial traditions or rituals. Consider favorite decorations, family recipes, game nights, holiday events and the like. These should be easily repeated and reinforced.
- Consider a consistent R&R locale as an additional tradition.
- Allow kids to identify sacred/special objects that are carried with them from post to post.
- Help your child in an age appropriate manner communicate with extended family and friends.
- Be and seek out positive role models for your child. Consider older third culture kids – Be in touch with FSYP.
- Involve your children in family decisions when appropriate. This will hone their problem-solving skills resulting in increased self-confidence.

These suggestions were selected out of a long list of activities in which parents can engage their children and result in greater personal resilience. **However, remember a fun positive household, which models optimism and provides guidance, supervision and support will most often result in children who believe in themselves.**