Resilience Scale

A metaphor for social determinants of wellbeing, and resilience as outcome

The story you’re telling:
A positive child outcome is like a scale that is tipped toward one side. It can be influenced by counterbalancing weights and by adjusting the balance point.

Strategic way to redirect thinking away from patterns such as:
Black Box of Development; Determinism; Family Bubble; Most Kids Turn Out Fine No Matter What; What Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Stronger; Willpower

Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

• Child outcomes – whether children turn out well or not – can be likened to a scale that is tipped toward one side or another: Sets up mechanistic/process thinking about outcomes.

• The weight placed on a scale or teeter-totter affects the direction it tips: Establishes the role of external, environmental factors, and frames resilient outcomes as a dynamic process. Focuses attention on environmental and contextual influences, away from individual choices.

• Positive experiences and influences that help health and development get placed on one side: Communicates the role of factors that promote development – be sure to enumerate.

• Negative experiences or influences that aren’t good for development get placed on the other: Communicates the role of risk factors and adverse experiences; give examples here.

• Weights can be added to or taken from either side at any time: Helps to establish that outcomes are open to influence and intervention, and development is an ongoing process.

• Not all objects placed on the scale are the same weight: Opens up a way to communicate about strong predictors vs. relatively minor influences, whether negative or positive.

• The goal of every community is to have as many kids as possible experience positive

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outcomes – which we can accomplish by stacking positive factors, and offloading negative factors, so that scales tip toward the positive: Orients attention toward development as a process that can be influenced by the community, through widespread supports and interventions.

• When the scale tips positive even though it’s stacked with negative weight, that’s resilience: Defines resilience as an unexpected outcome influenced by multiple factors – not just any good outcome, and not the result of individuals overcoming circumstances through sheer force of will.

• What about individual differences? Well, there’s another part of a scale – the fulcrum, or balance point: Acknowledges, but limits, the role of individual-level influences (genes, biology, temperament, etc.).

• Children start out with their fulcnums in different places. If the fulcrum is way over to this side, that makes the scale more likely to tip that way: Communicates the scientific view of the role of individual differences in sensitivity to influences.

• It’s not just the weight on one side, or the other, or the fulcrum that determines the direction of the tip – it’s all of these: Helps to communicate that multiple, interacting influences affect outcomes; offers a way to establish distinct but interacting roles for external (environments, experiences) as well as internal (genetic, biological, personal) factors.

• The fulcrum isn’t fixed – it can shift based on experiences. We can build children’s abilities to withstand negative experiences. Helps to establish a rationale for targeted interventions for children and populations at risk for negative outcomes, to build skills and abilities that support resilient outcomes.

Read the original research behind this recommendation at FrameWorksInstitute.org