Project AWARE: A Spotlight on the 'R'
Key Concepts and Terms
August 10, 2016

Presented by: Meagan O'Malley, PhD, NCSP
NITT TA Center

NOTE: The following terms and concepts are ordered to follow along with the presentation slides. They are not in alphabetical order.

Resilience: Capacity of a person to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten development; positive adaptation or development in the face of significant adversity exposure.

Resiliency: The property of an individual to demonstrate resilience. This term has questionable validity, as there is little evidence that individuals "have" or "do not have" resiliency, like a personality trait. It is generally advisable to use the term resilience instead.

Risk Factors: Variables that have proven or presumed effects that can directly increase the likelihood of a maladaptive outcome.

Cumulative risk: Cumulative adversity is more likely to undermine competence than is any one threat alone.

Commonly reported risk factors:
- Poverty
- Maltreatment
- Birth to very young, single parent
- Maternal mental illness
- Malnutrition
- Exposure to lead
- Low birth weight
- Low maternal education
- Family violence
- Natural disasters
- Family displacement
- Homelessness

Vulnerability: Individual susceptibility to harmful consequences from threats. Individuals may be more or less vulnerable at different times in their lives depending on the number and intensity of life stressors they are coping with.

Promotive Factors: Variables that predict positive outcomes in both low and high-risk environments. Promotive factors are good for everyone, regardless of risk.

Protective Factors: Variables that temper predictions of psychopathology based upon an individual's at-risk status. As risk increases, the protective impact of these factors is greater.

Commonly Reported Factors Associated with Resilience in Young People

- Effective caregiving and parenting quality
- Close relationships with capable adults

- Close friends and romantic partners
- Intelligence and problem-solving skills
- Self-control; emotion regulation; planfulness
- Motivation to succeed
- Self-efficacy
- Faith, hope, belief life has meaning
- Effective schools
- Effective neighborhoods; collective efficacy

Commonly Reported Adaptive Systems that support Resilience in Young People
- Attachment; family
- Attachment; social networks
- Attachment; peer and family systems
- Learning and thinking systems in central nervous system
- Self-regulation systems in central nervous system
- Mastery motivation and related reward systems
- Spiritual and cultural belief systems
- Education systems
- Communities

Cascade Effects: Spreading effects that cumulatively alter the course of development. Another way to think about this is that functioning in one domain can influence functioning in another domain. This can be good, as competence in one domain can beget competence in another domain. This can also be bad, as problems in one area of functioning can impact functioning in other areas (e.g., externalizing behavior can impact academic achievement).

Individual pathways to resilience: These are many pathways to resilience. Over time, some young people will dip into maladaptive behavior and return to adaptive functioning.

Decentrality: A shift from focusing on what a young person has or does not have internal to him/her to a focus on improving the environment.

Complexity: Acknowledging that human development is complex and, unless we can hold ecological systems constant, we must avoid general statements about individuals. Environments are neither extraneous nor perfectly predictive.

Atypicality: Consider how a young person's environments protect him/her when resources are sparse and resilience may manifest in ways that we do not necessarily want to promote, but that are necessary to survive in the social ecologies that children are being raised in.

Cultural Relativity: Explains why certain types of human development occur in a particular family context, and why that that type of family occurs in a particular type of socioeconomic and sociocultural context.

Sources:
- Masten, A. (2015). Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development. New York: Guilford.
- Ungar, M. (2015). Working with children and youth with complex needs: 20 skills to build resilience. New York: Routledge.