

# RESILIENCE

Opportunity Saint Paul Learning Community Event #4

March 13, 2018

Progressive Baptist Church



**INTERFAITH**  
**ACTION** OF GREATER  
SAINT PAUL  
OPPORTUNITY SAINT PAUL

## Resilience and Child Development

### THE PRESENTATION

Ann S. Masten, a PhD and Regents Professor of Child Development at the University of Minnesota's [Institute of Child Development](#), walked volunteers from Opportunity Saint Paul through an edifying [slideshow](#) about how ordinary citizens can play a role in helping children living in poverty overcome adversity. Based around her 2014 book, *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development*, the talk was equal parts empirical data and call to action. "You are all in the business of improving resilience," she said by way of introducing the importance of creating adaptive systems (educational, familial, and spiritual) that promote healthy physical, intellectual, and emotional growth. "And I want you to think about how this connects to the work you're all doing together."

Referencing decades of research, Professor Masten emphasized that resilience is not a trait, and that even children who have suffered through extreme situations, including war and emotional abuse, can recover and adapt if exposed to the right resources and opportunities. "You represent role models of how adults handle things," she concluded. "Even if you spend just one hour a week with a child, it can have a very powerful effect on [his or her] resilience."

### THE LESSONS

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as poverty or economic disadvantage, maltreatment or neglect, inequality or injustice, and toxic stress can embed themselves in the mind and body into adulthood.
- The most valuable research for those who study resilience involves kids who do well in the wake of trauma and hardship. By learning how people overcome adversity, we can help others do the same.
- It is important to understand why certain systems (institutional, familial, and interpersonal) have the capacity to adapt successfully to challenges, and then practically apply those lessons. It is also valuable to understand how we interact with certain systems and how that interaction shapes our capacity to deal with challenges and trauma.
- Personality characteristics, such as stubbornness and hopefulness, are useful in certain situations. For most people, however, the capacity to bounce back from adversity is embedded in the people and institutions around them. As a result, a child's connection to positive influences at home, well-funded schools, and a consistent group of positive peers and caring mentors is essential to resilience.

- Caregiving matters most when we're very young. As we age, social supports become increasingly consequential.
- Executive function skills, which are essential for learning and include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control, are malleable, especially in early childhood; so early childhood programs of quality are crucial.
- Effective schools have many of the same attributes of positive families. They are a powerful symbol that life is stable and has meaning.
- Along with mentoring, it's important to encourage leaders to create sustainable policies that make sure families get the help they need to build resilience in children.
- Religion and other cultural systems can support individuals' resilience by providing stable beliefs and practices, which in turn build capacity for hope and strength. These foundational tools include practices such as worship, prayer, meditation, and mindfulness training.

## Interfaith Dialogue

Rev. David Ostendorf told a story about his realization that to the young people and families he was working with in his volunteering, he was but a stranger. Rev. Ostendorf asked everyone to consider what it means for us to enter our volunteer roles as strangers. For instance, we may think we are coming to our various volunteer assignments as equals, but we may not be as conscious as we should be about the power dynamics at play. Or we may not be considering subtle cultural differences. Or, whether we mean to or not, we may come off less as a resource and more as someone who thinks they can "fix" something or someone. Everyone gathered agreed that it is necessary to understand our roles as strangers if we hope to develop effective approaches and expectations in our volunteer work.

## Discussion Questions

- What do you think Ann Masten means when she says, "resilience is distributed across systems?" How might the "systems" around a person affect their ability to respond to challenging circumstances?
- What has helped you overcome challenges in your past?
- Resilience is the capacity of a system (including a person) to adapt successfully to challenges that threaten its function, life, or development. How might poverty impact a person and the systems around them?
- What resources does our community need in order to foster resilience? Which resources do we have, and what is missing? What is our role in securing those resources?
- In what ways can volunteers and volunteer programs help strengthen resilience for those in poverty?
- What are the benefits to fostering resilience within our communities, and within ourselves?
- Did the presentation change the way you think about a person's "resilience"?

## QUESTIONS FOR FAITH GROUPS

- Did anything in the video or in our discussion thus far resonate with you as it relates to your faith tradition?
- What is built into your faith tradition that fosters resilience?
- What does the information presented here call us to do? How can we strengthen our faith community's resilience?

## Extra Resources

### Articles:

- User friendly succinct article on resilience for educators:  
Masten, A. S. (2009). [Ordinary Magic: Lessons from research on resilience in human development](https://na35.salesforce.com/sfc/p/#41000001Ojal/a/410000014S1q/SOgCAtPJXk1BgvMdmE77MSzcwMLStgxroL8Ns6JuVBI). *Education Canada*, 49(3), 28-32.  
(<https://na35.salesforce.com/sfc/p/#41000001Ojal/a/410000014S1q/SOgCAtPJXk1BgvMdmE77MSzcwMLStgxroL8Ns6JuVBI>)
- [Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/resilience/introduction) section on resilience (edited by Masten). There is a summary and also articles by leading researchers. (free to download complete topic)  
(<http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/resilience/introduction>)
- A nice summary of the case for investing in young children globally:  
Huebner, G., et al. (2016). [Beyond survival: The case for investing in young children globally](https://nam.edu/beyond-survival-the-case-for-investing-in-young-children-globally/). *NAM Perspectives*. National Academy of Medicine. [free to download]  
(<https://nam.edu/beyond-survival-the-case-for-investing-in-young-children-globally/>)
- Risk and resilience in homeless families:  
Masten, A. S., Fiat, A. E., & Labella, M. H., & R. Strack (2015). Educating homeless and highly mobile students: Implications of research on risk and resilience. *School Psychology Review*, 44, 315-330.
- Children in war and disaster:  
Masten, A. S., & Narayan, A. J. (2012). [Child development in the context of disaster, war and terrorism: Pathways of risk and resilience](http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100356). *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 227-257.  
(<http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100356>)
- A more detailed recent review:  
Masten, A. S., Narayan, A. J., Silverman, W. K., & Osofsky, J. D. (2015). Children in war and disaster. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), M. H. Bornstein and T. Leventhal (vol. Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science. Vol. 4. Ecological settings and processes in developmental systems* (7th ed.) (pp. 704-745). New York: Wiley.

### Books:

- Ann Masten's book about resilience--a summary of what she's learned over the last four decades:  
Masten, A. S. (2014, paperback ed. 2015). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*. New York: Guilford Press.

**Videos:**

- [PopTech talk on resilience](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBMet8oIvXQ) (18 min.)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBMet8oIvXQ>)
- [EDtalk on resilience in students experiencing homelessness](https://www.achievements.org/edtals) (given in Minneapolis Sep 25, 2017)  
(<https://www.achievements.org/edtals>)

**Other:**

- [MOOC \(Massive Open Online Course\) on resilience](https://www.coursera.org/learn/resilience-in-children) by Ann Masten (free or paid certificate). New sessions start every 8 weeks. Can join anytime. Thousands of participants have taken this MOOC from over 170 countries. Active discussion forums. Six modules on topics such as resilience in disaster, in homeless families, or in war. Guides to intervention. Interviews with other resilience scholars and links to many resources. ([Video preview of the MOOC](https://www.coursera.org/learn/resilience-in-children))  
(<https://www.coursera.org/learn/resilience-in-children>)  
(<https://www.class-central.com/mooc/1768/coursera-resilience-in-children-exposed-to-trauma-disaster-and-war-global-perspectives>)