



resilience

neuroplasticity

is the brain's ability to adapt to new ways of thinking, feeling, and doing. Over time and with repetition, neural pathways can be forged or refined, and long lasting changes in the brain can occur. In other words, brains aren't "set in stone" as once believed—they can learn and adapt!



so what is resilience?

a **dynamic developmental process** resulting in healthy adaptation despite adversity. Because of neuroplasticity, we know that enhancing resilience is possible when people are provided with support.

"Healthy adaptation" is viewed as positive behaviors (such as academic achievement), the absence of undesirable behaviors (such as remaining clear of criminal activity), and good internal and external adaptation (such as the ability to cope with stress and to develop healthy relationships with peers).



Each time we learn a new dance step, it reflects a change in our physical brains: new "wires" (neural pathways) give instructions to our bodies on how to perform the step. Each time we forget someone's name, it also reflects brain change – "wires" that once connected to the memory have been degraded, or even severed.

– Dr. Michael Merzenich

resilience is NOT...



Social scientists have explored the phenomena of resilience for nearly 50 years and with a variety of populations, including refugees, cancer patients, and even Fortune 500 companies. You can imagine how different resilience might look for Microsoft than it would for a child or youth in foster care. While the term "resilience" has come to mean a lot of things, research clearly shows that **it is not**:

- Dichotomous (have/don't have)
- A single strength, characteristic, or attribute
- An outcome
- Fixed or static across the lifespan
- "Bouncing back" after a traumatic experience or event



what can the child welfare workforce do to enhance resilience?

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to enhancing resilience, there are several general strategies that can be adapted for children, youth, and families who've experienced trauma.



Focus on strengths: Everyone has a unique set of strengths from which to build. Explore opportunities to draw out strengths, like mentoring, educational advancement, community involvement, and recreational activities.

Build assets: Internal assets are individual qualities that guide positive choices and provide a sense of identity, passion, and purpose. Building internal assets may look like increasing self-regulation, developing a positive outlook, and strengthening social skills. External assets are those in an individual's community and environment that support positive experiences. Similarly, external assets are those found in an individual's life, like nurturing schools, cultural and spiritual connections, and social role models.

