



### **The Middle Years: Caring Connections**

*Resilience* is defined as the ability to face, overcome, and be strengthened by adversity.

It has been well documented that one *protective factor* for resilient children is a multigenerational network of friends, teachers, and relatives. If a resilient child is in trouble, he or she has a broad network of friends to turn to for help and support.

The SEARCH Institute is a nonprofit organization that supports the healthy development of youth and families. SEARCH researchers have spent a number of years identifying protective factors and critical assets that help children avoid risky behavior such as smoking, alcohol abuse, and poor school performance.

SEARCH has also identified deficits in children's lives that may promote risky behavior. When a child has many more assets than deficits, he or she is less likely to get into serious trouble and more likely to be resilient during difficult experiences. The SEARCH Institute's work also consistently shows how important it is for youth to connect with other friends and adults in their community and to develop lasting relationships. As parents, you can encourage your child's connection to the community and support lasting relationships with friends his own age and with adults in a variety of ways. For example, you can help by:

- *Supporting your child's extracurricular school activities.* Taking part in music programs, sports, the arts, and clubs (such as scouting and 4-H) can help children meet others with the same interests and build friendships.
- *Supporting your child's participation in community activities.* Local recreation districts, the faith community, and nonprofit organizations offer activities for children. These activities can help your child meet others with the same interests and adults who can serve as positive role models.

You may want to volunteer your own time to support activities for youth. When parents organize or support youth activities, they set a positive example for their child. They become connected to their child's friends and to other families. Your community can be a unique network of support with shared relationships and resources. During the inevitable difficult times, both you and your children will have more friends and resources available to sustain you.

For more information about the work of the SEARCH Institute, visit their Web site at <http://www.search-institute.org>.

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