

Nurturing Hope and Resilience in Children with Special Needs

www.drrobertbrooks.com
contact@drrobertbrooks.com
twitter: [@drrobertbrooks](https://twitter.com/drrobertbrooks)

A commencement speech at Stanford University

Highlighting the importance of
connecting the dots backwards: To
appreciate the impact that past
events have had on the direction of
our professional and personal lives

To nurture resilience in children

A main goal of parents, teachers, and other adults is to transform the negative mindset and counterproductive behaviors of many children with special needs into a more hopeful, resilient mindset with positive behaviors. What beliefs and strategies can guide this goal?

To nurture resilience in children

To appreciate the lifelong impact that one person can have on another person: The presence of what Julius Segal called a “charismatic adult” --an adult from whom a child “gathers strength”

To nurture resilience in children

Sometimes we don't even know when we have served as a charismatic adult in the lives of others

“I want to be a charismatic adult. What do I say or do?”

To nurture resilience in children

To identify, honor, and reinforce each child's "islands of competence"—it is difficult to become resilient if we believe that important adults in our lives focus mainly on our "deficits" rather than our strengths

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To provide opportunities for children to engage in “contributory activities” that promotes a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives and fosters empathy, caring, and responsibility

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To help children learn problem-solving and decision-making skills that are essential components of resilience and provide a foundation for self-discipline and a sense of mastery

To nurture resilience in children

To prepare children to cope effectively with mistakes by viewing mistakes as experiences from which to learn rather than feel defeated