

# RESILIENT CHILDREN HANDBOOK

A close-up, profile view of a young girl with dark, wavy hair looking upwards towards a bright yellow flower. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

**A Parent's Guide  
to Nurturing  
Children's  
Intellect, Inquiry,  
Imagination, &  
Integrity**

[www.inspiredteaching.org](http://www.inspiredteaching.org)

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**InspiredTeaching**

# Resilient Children

**In *The Book of Delights*, poet and author Ross Gay coins the phrase “cognitive athleticism” which, he explains, is “figuring something out, which is something we all go to school, some of us for years and years, to forget how to do.”**

His words challenge teachers and parents to face the question: ***Could our efforts to help our kids be getting in the way of their learning?***

At a time when mental health issues in young people are high, it can seem counterintuitive to step back when kids are struggling. Yet, the experience of

puzzling through a low-stakes problem and arriving at a solution on your own builds self-confidence and resilience.

If we want to set our sights on building “cognitive athleticism” in young people we need to entrust children to be in charge of their own learning. And that means allowing them to figure things out for themselves and avoiding solving problems kids can solve. The following pages of the Resilient Children Handbook offer ideas for how to do just that.

As the child psychologist Jean Piaget said, “Every time we teach a child something, we keep him from inventing it himself.”

Though it takes time and patience, allowing our children to struggle and learn for themselves will help them build the self-confidence and resilience that will serve them well in school, at home, and in all aspects of life.

This kind of resilience is essential in navigating the unknown, and our children deserve every opportunity to cultivate these problem-solving skills when the stakes are low so they will know how to employ them in the world beyond our care.



## One Way to Bolster Cognitive Athleticism

**Help your children and yourselves to “right-size” problems** and learn to differentiate between those that require parental intervention or support (cleaning up broken glass off the kitchen floor) and those that are ripe for productive struggle (figuring out how to open a snack bag). Is this a problem about safety, or does it involve pushing through frustration into learning? When a problem is challenging due to difficulty and frustration, one strategy that works well with children is to ask them, “If you had to put this problem in a box, show me with your arms how big the box would need to be.” That mental translation of our feelings of frustration into something tangible can offer a useful pause for reflection and help us as adults to adjust our response in equal proportion.

# Children as Teachers

Our children can be our greatest teachers but letting them live into this role requires us to step back and really listen. Here are some ways to do that:

- **Pay attention to how much you hear your own voice when you are around your children, and how much you hear their voices.** This can be particularly useful in shared mealtimes, car, bus, or train rides, or other moments throughout your day when you engage in conversation. Try saying less and encouraging them to say more.
- **Offer your children a concrete place to express what's on their minds, and what they care about.** Then make a point of reading what they have to say. Keeping a parent/child journal is one way of doing this. They write you a note at night and you write a response in the morning. This is also an excellent way to keep literacy skills going!
- **Prioritize your child's ownership of your physical space.** Are there parts of your home that they can be in charge of organizing, decorating, or keeping in order? You may be surprised at how neat they can keep a room when it's a room they care about and giving them ownership over a space boosts its importance in their lives.
- **Put your child in charge of their own supplemental learning.** Discuss something they are intrigued by that has nothing to do with school. It could be worms, it could be family genealogy, it could be how to become a music star. Whatever the topic, help them brainstorm how they can learn more and what they hope to know. Let their curiosity be your guide.



“Young people can really show us what compassion looks like...We have much to learn from them if we can just give ourselves a moment of humility to listen to them.”

- Jason Reynolds

Interview on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*  
December 3, 2021

# Purpose, Persistence, and Action



**“I can see how quickly you solved that problem.” “I can see you’re taking your time with that problem.” “What can I do to help you get started?” “What can I do to help you finish?” These simple, yet powerful, statements and questions come from the toolbox of Judy White. She uses them to offer specific feedback and encouragement for students at different stages of the learning process.**

Judy insists her students find the expert within themselves, instead of looking to her for answers. Being a learner in her care is both challenging and exhilarating. She teaches students how to think, and avoids doing the thinking for them. This practice is at the core of Purpose, Persistence, and Action, one of Inspired Teaching's 5 Core Elements.

Purpose, Persistence, and Action means learners are fully engaged, intellectually, emotionally, and physically, in what they are doing.

They persevere in solving problems, making discoveries along the way. They experience failure as a necessary part of the learning process.

As children deepen their understanding of their own learning process, they not only expand their understanding of content, they also learn about themselves. “Nobody learns quite like you,” Judy says. And when children are allowed to pursue learning in their own unique ways “portals to creativity” open up.

## Learn more about Inspired Teaching's Instructional Model in these posts:

- [Mutual Respect](#)
- [Student As Expert](#)
- [Purpose, Persistence, and Action](#)
- [Joy](#)
- [Wide-Ranging Evidence of Student Learning](#)



# Parenting Toward Sound Self Love

As parents we want our kids to know we love them, and that's as it should be. But trailblazing feminist author and changemaker bell hooks, challenges us to go to a deeper, and perhaps more important place. She wrote, "If we give our children sound self-love they will be able to deal with whatever life puts before them." What does it mean to "give our children sound self-love"? How can we teach our kids to love themselves?

## 3 Approaches to Try:

1. **Teach your children to see themselves as contributors and problem solvers.** For example, when a glass tips over and spills, point your child toward the materials they'll need to clean it up and offer guidance but don't do the cleaning for them.
2. **Teach your children to look to themselves first for validation and approval before looking to others - even you as parents.** For example, instead of, "Marta, I love the picture you drew, you're such a good artist" try, "I'm noticing these bold colors, tell me more about how you chose them."
3. **Teach your children how to shape the world, as well as understand it.** For example, if you choose to walk or ride a bike to run an errand rather than drive, talk with your children about those choices and their impact on the environment. Enlist them as collaborators in finding ways to make your everyday actions more environmentally friendly and provide them with developmentally appropriate resources to understand why this matters.



"If we give our children  
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-bell hooks



# HOORAY FOR MONDAY

ANTHEM  
AWARDS  
2022  
WINNER

Hooray For Monday is an award-winning collection of resources for educators that we share at the beginning of each week. Parents are children's first educators so, this is for you! Each issue features questions, ideas, reflections, and actions we can take to remodel the learning experience for students. [Join our mailing list](#) to get a weekly Hooray For Monday publication sent straight to your inbox. No time to read? [Listen to the podcast!](#)

## RECENT ISSUES HAVE INCLUDED...



### Walk At Their Pace

Walking at our students' pace means willing ourselves toward forward momentum.



### Engaging Parents As Allies

Together, we have the power to shape our children's school experience.



### Aspirations and Contributions

Asset framing redefines how we approach challenges with children.



### Inquiry or Inquisition

The way we start a question, the context, and the tone with which we ask it all matter.

# Learning Outside

*These activities engage children intellectually, emotionally, and physically and take place outdoors.*



## Watch it Grow

Close observation of change in the natural world can help children better understand changes in their own lives. In this activity, they choose something to observe and collect data over a period of days or weeks on how it transforms.

1. Ask your child to find a small plant that they will visit, photograph, and write about each day.
2. With your child, choose a time of day to make these observations. This works even better if you choose something to observe as well!
3. Record observations each day and talk with your child about what they notice. What is different today from a few days ago? What is making these changes occur? What can we predict based on what we've seen so far?

Find more ideas for this activity [here](#).



## How Vigorous Is My Heart?

Helping our children connect with the wonder of their own bodies can build self-confidence while piquing curiosity. In this activity learners make a connection between their heart rate and physical activity. Once you have explored this relationship together once, you can refer back to it over and over again in future situations when children are exerting a lot or very little energy.

1. Teach your child how to take their resting heart rate. Have them record their observation. Take your reading too!
2. Do five minutes of vigorous exercise together and take and record your heart rates again. Discuss what you observe.
3. Without resuming exercising, determine your heart rate 1 and 5 minutes after the exercise. Discuss what you observe and what learning this information provides.

# Make Way for the Monarchs

Few lifecycles are as enticing to observe in their entirety as that of monarchs. Interestingly, the end of their life cycle often corresponds with the beginning of the school year and the start of their life cycle (or at least that of the plants they need to survive) begins when school is ending. That makes summer a perfect time to observe these marvelous creatures and play a role in their survival.

## **Butterfly Food and Habitat**

You can create a butterfly sanctuary anywhere you have an outdoor spot large enough to hold a pot of flowers. Planting and caring for flowers helps pollinators like monarchs to survive. Monarch caterpillars feed exclusively on milkweed. If you have a spot where you can plant milkweed, you should!

## **An Interdisciplinary Exploration**

Taking time to learn about butterflies can lead you into all kinds of learning disciplines. Here are a few examples:

**Language Arts:** There are many excellent nonfiction and fiction texts that can be used for learning about butterflies and having children journal about their observations will keep writing skills sharp.

**Mathematics:** Whether charting growth, studying statistics from migratory research, measuring change in weight and size, or considering exponents when calculating the growth or demise of populations, numbers abound in the information surrounding butterflies.

**Social Studies:** What role do butterflies play in different cultures? How does the growth of human populations affect the places where butterflies live? What does migration look like? What laws are or should be put into place to protect endangered species?

**Science:** This is, of course, at the heart of a study of butterflies but can get particularly interesting and far-reaching when you study habitat destruction and its antidote – local activism to reverse that destruction.

**Visual and Performing Arts:** Watching the wonder of a butterfly's life cycle, and that of the plants they depend upon, offers an endless source of inspiration for every art form from dance, to painting, and more.

Find links to lots of resources and more learning ideas [here](#).

# REAL WORLD HISTORY



Real World History is Inspired Teaching's groundbreaking year-long after-school honors course for high school students from the Washington, D.C. area. If you know a student who would benefit from project-based learning, an internship at a cultural institution, and the opportunity to think like a historian, encourage them to learn more about the program. Applications open for the upcoming school year each spring.

Students complete a **100-hour internship** at a historic site or museum. Each site provides students with the opportunity to contribute to ongoing projects in meaningful ways while learning about public history, thereby gaining authentic work experience and exposure to a field that is rarely introduced to high school students.

**Internship sites have included:**  
Anacostia Community Museum  
Ford's Theatre  
Library of Congress  
National Portrait Gallery  
The Phillips Collection  
President Lincoln's Cottage  
Smithsonian  
Asian Pacific American Center  
Tudor Place  
White House Historical Association

Learn more here:



# Learning On the Go

*These simple activities fuel social emotional learning and can take place anytime, anywhere.*



## **Zoom Out**

When things feel particularly daunting it can be incredibly helpful to pause and situate the challenges within a larger perspective. This activity is good practice for “zooming out” and can be accessed by children of many ages.

Choose an object and ask your child questions about it from different perspectives. Questions for an apple might look like this: What is this? What is it for? How do you know? How would you describe its size? How would you describe its flavor? Now imagine you are an ant. What would an ant think this is? How would an ant know? How might a horse think about its size? An elephant?

**Explore where to go next in this activity [here](#).**



## **Seeing with Different Eyes**

Using basic observation and listening skills, this activity can serve as a catalyst for understanding how your child thinks, and for them to learn the same about you. Multiple children and adults can participate, building awareness of how we all see things differently, but can learn from each others' perspectives.

1. Choose an image for your child to observe that is complex enough that it will take some time to study. Photos from magazines, advertisements, or pages of a picture book work well.
2. Take two minutes to study the image silently. If your child is old enough to write, both of you can write your observations.
3. Invite your child to share what they noticed, listening without comment. Then share your observations.
4. Discuss the following with your child: Why do you think we saw different things even though we were both looking at the exact same image?

# Seven Bikes

The more you “think outside the box” the better you get at doing so in other contexts. This activity presents a playful structure for doing just that.

Begin by inviting your child to be a detective of the unusual. You might send them outside with a notebook to jot down anything out-of-the-ordinary that they notice. Have them craft a question based on what they’ve observed. What does it make them wonder?

## Questions might look like:

Why was there a sock on the ground under that tree?  
How did that paper cup get up on that ledge?  
Why are there seven bikes in that yard?

## Choose one question to explore together using the following format:

Child: Why do you have seven bikes?

Parent: Because I am building a bike sculpture from the parts. Why do you have seven bikes?

Child: Because I have seven dogs who all like to ride them.

Why do you have seven bikes?

Parent: Because they were on sale at our local bike shop. Why do you have seven bikes?

Child: Because my friends traded me their bikes if I would do their homework. Why do you have seven bikes?

You and your child can trade the question for as long or short as you like. **Invite them to ask clarifying questions along the way to help develop ideas and stories.** Here is an example of what that might look like:

Parent: Why do you have seven bikes?

Child: Because I have seven dogs who all like to ride them.

Parent: Seven dogs who like to ride bikes? How on earth did you train them?

Child: I took them to that place downtown, Paws & Pedals.

Parent: Did you have to redesign the bikes so dogs could ride them?

Child: A little bit, depending on the length of their legs.

The activity is fun to do verbally and can elicit a lot of laughs. But as illustrated above it can also be fodder for storytelling and it stretches the imagination in ways that can then be applied to other questions like:

- What can we do to reduce the amount of time we spend on screens?
- How can we manage the laundry so it doesn't always pile up like this?
- What are some ways we can create more space when we're getting annoyed with each other?

# Challenging Behavior? Try the ABCDE's!

Psychologist **William Glasser** defined five core human needs "which provide motivation for all that we do." We've framed them according to these terms: **Autonomy, Belonging, Competence, Developmental Appropriateness, and Engagement**. And, we've added **Fun**.

Because humans learn and grow best when our needs are met, often when we're not thriving these unmet needs can be at the root of the problem. Identifying these unmet needs can be the first step to addressing them. As we strive to meet our children's academic and socioemotional needs, we're wise to address our own as well. [This website](#) offers a deep dive into each of the ABCDE's but we offer a brief overview here.

Need	When this need is not being your child may feel:	Ways to meet this need:
Autonomy	<i>I do not have a say in what happens to me.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More choices</li><li>• Unstructured time to explore interests</li></ul>
Belonging	<i>I am not connected to or valued by those around me.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Playdates</li><li>• Collaborative activities like cooking, going for walks</li></ul>
Competence	<i>I do not have a sense of worth or accomplishment.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Age-appropriate chores</li><li>• Positive feedback on effort</li></ul>
Developmental Appropriateness	<i>I am either not challenged enough or challenged too much.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trips to the library to find books on areas of interest</li><li>• Opportunities to try new things</li></ul>
Engagement	<i>I am bored. I am not using my mind and body in an active way.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Imaginative play with friends</li><li>• Hands-on activities with purpose (i.e. planting a garden, building a shelf)</li></ul>
Fun	<i>Nothing I am doing makes me feel good.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experiences that elicit laughter</li><li>• Opportunities to be spontaneous</li></ul>

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