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Five to Thrive: Resilience

Resilience receives a lot of attention as a key trait for successful teens. It is the first of five resources that we know Knights need to thrive. Join me to explore each over the next weeks. Let's learn how families and the Newport staff might collaborate in making sure each student has abundant opportunities for all five resources.

As our babies learned to walk, we watched them fall again and again as they developed balance and taught their muscles to swing heavy feet forward. We steered them away from sharp edges, but we knew that falling was essential to growth.

Encouraging resilience in our Knights looks a lot like that—especially the falling. Now, though, it can be our instinct to prevent the bumps and bruises of failure. Resist that intervention; it robs our teens of a priceless chance to grow stronger.

Like the coordination and strength of walking, resilience only develops in a repeated process of risking, failing, getting up, and looking back to learn. We build the capacity to manage stress through exposure to it in positive and manageable doses. We gain confidence in our ability to confront challenge by navigating our way through it. We overcome the fear to dare through the occasional failure and the experience of getting up and getting on.

That sounds simple enough, but how, you ask? I started with this one of our five resources because Newport has rich programs to help your student:

- We have more than 100 different clubs, teams, and activities at Newport that give students safe opportunities to dare a positive risk.
- We pair our freshmen with Link Crew guides from upper grades to help them explore the web of opportunities here.
- We encourage students at every opportunity to find a niche that excites their individual interests. It is there that they will find the kindred spirits that will share their challenges. Among those fellow enthusiasts wait partners and mentors who know the path, who have tripped, and who will extend a hand to the fallen.
- In class discussions, we build toward a culture of respect where we can explore ideas and think openly. We work toward the confidence to dare to expose our ideas in the light of scrutiny, where discussion helps us learn and grow.

Try a New Question

When students come home from these opportunities to challenge themselves, practice asking, "What Went Well?" Encourage daily focus on what they do well and when they succeed.

Then ask them to describe how those moments of success made them feel. Gently persist for detail. Help them pause so that they process and remember how much they know and how competence feels. As they repeat those positive experiences for you, it sets in their memory the feeling of self-efficacy. That robust memory makes it easier to summon confidence when the next challenge occurs.

And remember that you get what you ask for. If you ask how the math test went, you will hear about the math test. If you ask What Went Well, you will hear what they thought was interesting in their day. It may not be what you were expecting.

Not Failure; Trial, Error & Growth

None of our activities and class discussions function without flaw, but it is within those challenges that opportunities to grow emerge. In learning together, teens sometimes act harshly. In competing for opportunities, there can appear to be winners and losers. It is here that you, our collaborators at home, become so critical.

- We encourage independence in our students, but Knights need your guidance to get started. They need varying amounts of help to establish the resources and structure to participate.
- We enjoy getting to know our students, but that takes time. Our youngest Knights, especially, rely on your insights into the balance between a challenging, positive risk from which your student can learn or a reach-too-far misstep that generates anxiety and heartbreak.
- Most importantly, when an opportunity to build resilience comes, resist that instinct to protect or sooth. A situation may seem harsh or unfair. Your child feels the sting of embarrassment, disappointment, or judgment. Seize that priceless moment to shift their perception.
 - Help them build the mindset that challenge is an opportunity to learn. Every single time.
 - Help your Knight to find the lessons within their challenge and within themselves.
 - Make sure that their next step is to plot a course correction and begin again. There is no failure; there is only trial and error and growth.

Shift Their Focus

No detailed road map exists for resilience-building interactions. Every situation is different, every student is different, and every misstep along their journey comes with a new amount of resilience and capacity to learn. When you focus on What Worked Well and what might be learned, not what was lost, your instincts as a parent will guide you.

Assess each interaction, but often your complete focus on the conversation is not necessary or wanted. While you cook or drive, students have time to replay what happened in their mind and tease out the details. Teens can't relive their emotional experiences while you study them. In any case, taking the time to discuss it together will develop their skills for analyzing and processing the next challenge.

Keep this basic structure in mind:

- Listen first, prompting with open questions such as, "Tell me more about..." or "What I heard was..." or "How did you feel when...". Encourage them until they can describe for you the facts of what happened alongside their emotions and interpretations.
- Watch for the opportunity to shift the focus to What Worked Well. Uncover anything positive and the feelings that went with it. Stay with that until your student believes in and feels that level of confidence.
- After they establish what they do know, what they can do, then talk about next steps in their learning. Let your student identify what's next. Coach or prompt, but let them lead.
- Help your teen to develop a specific plan to learn, practice, and master what's next.

Attend Our Tool Box Workshop

Building resilience offers great opportunities for our students to learn, but as guardians of our maturing Knights, we also need to learn. [Join us this winter for a Tool Box Workshop](#) where you can expand your capacity to seize learning opportunities with your Knight. Details will emerge in the coming weeks.

P.S. Encourage your student to keep a few notes on these growth experiences. Many of the best college admissions essays are built around the lessons learned when we are down and we find the capacity to move forward. Colleges want academically capable students, but they want the ones that have faced adversity and persevered. Help your student remember these accomplishments. They are not reflected in official records.