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# Resilience & Frustration Tolerance





## **Building Resilience & Frustration Tolerance**

In early childhood, fostering resilience and frustration tolerance is crucial for children's social-emotional development. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and face challenges with determination, while frustration tolerance is the capacity to manage feelings of disappointment or impatience without becoming overwhelmed. These skills empower children to navigate life's challenges, enhance emotional regulation, and build a strong foundation for future success. Without these skills, children may struggle to cope with setbacks, leading to increased anxiety, lower self-esteem, and difficulty in achieving long-term goals.

**Here, we explore five key benefits of developing frustration tolerance and offer practical strategies for educators and parents to support children in building these essential skills.**

- **Resilience Building**
- **Emotional Regulation**
- **Delayed Gratification & Patience**
- **Self-esteem & Confidence**
- **Persistence & Goal Achievement**

# 1. Resilience Building

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and face challenges with determination. Developing frustration tolerance is a critical component of building resilience in children. When children encounter obstacles or difficulties, their ability to manage frustration allows them to persevere and find alternative solutions. This skill is vital for navigating the ups and downs of life, helping children to view setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers.

## Strategies for Educators and Parents:

- **Avoid swooping in to “save” them from the problem/their feelings:** Allow children to struggle and work through challenges on their own. For example, if a child is trying to balance blocks, refrain from stepping in to show them how to do it. This helps children develop problem-solving skills and confidence in their abilities. A child can only build frustration tolerance from feeling frustration. We do not want to set an unrealistic expectation that when life gets hard, an external solution will always magically appear.
- **Model struggle and persistence:** Modeling is one of the strongest ways our children learn. Demonstrate your own challenges and persistence as much as possible. You can grab some blocks to try and balance, exuding a struggle with evolving frustration - but keep working at it. This models resilience and shows that it's okay to struggle & keep trying.
- **Encourage problem-solving:** Ask open-ended questions and guide children to think of multiple solutions. For instance, if a block tower falls, instead of fixing it or jumping to something else instead, ask, “What do you think we can do to make it stand taller?” This encourages critical thinking and resilience.
- **Praise effort and persistence:** Reinforce the value of perseverance by acknowledging effort rather than just the outcome. For example, saying, “I see how hard you worked” instead of “good job!” emphasizes effort over the end result.
- **Create a supportive environment:** Make sure children feel safe to take risks and make mistakes. This can be done by celebrating mistakes as learning opportunities and providing reassurance that it's okay to try again.



## 2. Emotional Regulation

Encountering frustration provides children with valuable opportunities to practice emotional regulation. By learning to manage feelings of disappointment, anger, or impatience, children develop essential self-regulation skills that contribute to their overall emotional well-being. It is important to note that this skill takes time to develop as the portion of the brain responsible for emotional regulation is still maturing in young children. However, there are tools and techniques that can support this skill as it evolves.



### Strategies for Educators and Parents:

- **We regulate first:** As adults, we can not expect young children to better regulate themselves if we can not do the same during challenges. If your child is demonstrating a tantrum or “big emotions,” remember that your child is not giving you a hard time, they are having a hard time. Take some breaths and remember this will pass. If we match or exceed their emotional outburst, it will only exacerbate their feelings. However, when we meet their “chaos” with our “calm” we help to co-regulate which is the building block for future self-regulation skills.
- **Model appropriate emotional responses:** Demonstrate how to handle frustration in a calm manner and discuss your strategies with the child. For instance, say, “I’m feeling frustrated right now, so I’m going to take a deep breath to calm down.”
- **Provide tools and techniques:** Teach children methods such as deep breathing, counting to ten, or using a calm-down jar to manage their emotions. Practice these techniques regularly and when your child is not in a dysregulated state so they eventually become (more) second nature.
- **Encourage verbal expression:** Help children put their feelings into words and validate their emotions. For example, “I see you’re upset because you can’t find your toy. It’s okay to feel that way. Let’s look for it together.” This does not dismiss the child’s feelings and better helps them understand what they’re feeling and find a solution.
- **Develop consistent routines and rituals:** Establish consistent routines that help children feel secure and know what to expect, which can reduce frustration and help with emotional regulation.
- **Ensure physiological needs are being met:** Young children with rapidly developing brains and bodies are more sensitive when hungry, tired, overwhelmed, etc. We can not expect children to be able to regulate themselves if their physiological needs are not being met, so ensure children are eating whole and nourishing foods, getting adequate time outside in the sun and fresh air, and getting quality rest and sleep.

### 3. Delayed Gratification & Patience

In a world where instant gratification is often emphasized, children who can tolerate frustration are better equipped to work towards long-term goals. Understanding that good things often require time and effort sets children up for success in various aspects of life, including relationships, academics, and personal growth. Learning to wait and persist through challenges fosters patience and a sense of accomplishment.

#### Strategies for Educators and Parents:

- **Allow children to experience discomfort:** Permit children to feel the discomfort of waiting. If they cry for a cookie before dinner, calmly validate their feelings but maintain the boundary. Consistency and follow-through helps children regulate their emotions and understand that they cannot always get what they want immediately.
- **Avoid offering electronic devices:** Do not use electronic devices to occupy children while they wait. This can counteract the development of patience as children are distracted rather than learning to manage their impatience. Consistent and excessive exposure to technology can reduce attention spans and contribute to negative moods due to overstimulation and a lack of engagement in meaningful activities.
- **Stop occupying children (let children be bored):** Refrain from the urge to always occupy, entertain, or set out activities for children. Children desperately need the time to be autonomous and engage in child-directed play. If we are constantly giving children something to do, they will become reliant on these constant prompts and not develop autonomy, decision-making, problem-solving skills, and patience to navigate themselves in their surrounding world.
  - It's important to note that boredom occurs in school-aged children and above as the attention span of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are too short to experience authentic boredom. Younger children may go from one activity to another quickly, but that again is due to interest and attention span, not boredom.
- **Introduce waiting activities:** Engage children in activities that require patience, such as baking or planting seeds, to teach delayed gratification. These activities naturally incorporate waiting periods, making them perfect for practicing patience.
- **Set achievable goals:** Break down larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps and celebrate progress along the way. This helps children see that effort over time leads to success. This can be something simple as chipping away at cleaning up a room, e.g. "first let's work on putting the blocks away! Now that the blocks are away, let's work on putting the books away!" Now the blocks and books are done... "what's next?" Continue this until the entire room is cleaned, demonstrating that different parts were worked on until the entire room was cleaned (ultimate goal).

## 4. Self-esteem & Confidence

Overcoming challenges and accomplishing tasks despite initial setbacks helps children develop a sense of competence and belief in their abilities. This positive self-perception enhances their overall well-being and independence, motivating them to take on new challenges with confidence. Children who believe in their abilities are more likely to approach tasks with a positive mindset and a willingness to learn.

### Strategies for Educators and Parents:

- **Provide age-appropriate challenges:** Give children tasks that are challenging but achievable, and support them through the process. For example, if a child struggles with tying their shoes, provide step-by-step guidance without taking over.
- **Focus on intrinsic motivation:** Keep praise intrinsic and focused on the process rather than the outcome. For example, say, "You must be so proud of yourself for zipping up your coat. You worked hard at it and got it done." This encourages children to take pride in their efforts.
- **Celebrate small successes:** Recognize and celebrate even the smallest achievements to build confidence. A simple, "You did it!" can go a long way in reinforcing a child's sense of accomplishment.
- **Encourage a growth mindset:** Emphasize that skills and abilities can improve with effort and practice. Use phrases like, "You're getting better each time you try," to promote a growth mindset.
- **Involve children in everyday tasks:** Welcoming children to help with everyday tasks like cooking or cleaning makes them feel competent and capable. Although it might be easier for adults to do these tasks alone, involving children helps build their self-esteem and gives them a sense of responsibility.
- **Ask for their perspective:** Involve children in decision-making processes by asking for their advice or perspective on something. This boosts their confidence by showing that their opinions are valued and important.
- **Prioritize connection building:** One of the most important experiences and feelings is for children to feel connected and loved from their caregivers, while being cognizant to not criticize them. The feeling of safety, security, and love boosts confidence and empowers the children to take on and explore the world around them.
- **Taking healthy risks:** It is essential to allow children to engage in risky play. These experiences build a child's skill to be more aware of their environment, while learning how to navigate a problem-solve. The more the adult "protects" and prohibits children from "running too fast" or "climbing too high," the less the child believes in themselves.

# 5. Persistence and Goal Achievement

Frustration tolerance is closely linked to persistence and goal achievement. Children who can tolerate frustration are more likely to stay focused on tasks and persevere in the face of challenges until they achieve their goals. This trait is essential for academic success, skill development, and overall growth. Persistence helps children develop a strong work ethic and the determination to overcome obstacles.

## Strategies for Educators and Parents:

- **Setting clear, achievable goals:** Setting goals help children understand what they need to accomplish and provides a roadmap for success. Breaking down larger tasks into smaller steps makes the overall goal less overwhelming and more manageable. For example, if a child wants to learn to ride a bicycle. Instead of expecting them to ride immediately, start with smaller goals like balancing on a stationary bike, pushing off without falling, and then gradually pedaling with support. Each step achieved builds confidence and motivates them to keep progressing toward the larger goal.
- **Model Persistence:** Children learn behaviors and attitudes by observing adults. Modeling persistence demonstrates that setbacks are part of the learning process and that determination and effort lead to success. Suppose you're working to build something with blocks together, and it doesn't turn out as expected, model positivity and resilience by saying, "It didn't work this time, but let's try a different approach." Show them how to adapt and problem-solve rather than giving up easily. This teaches them that persistence involves trying again and learning from each attempt.
- **Create a Supportive Environment:** A supportive environment nurtures children's curiosity, creativity, and willingness to take on challenges. It provides them with the resources and encouragement they need to explore, learn, and grow. Set up a designated area with age-appropriate books, art supplies, and open-ended materials. Encourage children to explore these materials freely and engage in activities that interest them. Providing a variety of learning opportunities that cater to different interests and learning styles fosters a love for learning and a desire to persist.



# Language Impact on Children's Frustration Tolerance and Resilience

This chart illustrates how language can impact children's frustration tolerance and resilience. It provides examples of phrases that either support or hinder these skills. By using encouraging language that promotes effort and learning from mistakes, adults can help children develop resilience. Conversely, negative or discouraging language may undermine their confidence and discourage persistence. This guide aims to foster a supportive environment where children feel empowered to tackle challenges.

<b>Boost Frustration Tolerance &amp; Resilience</b>	<b>Hinder Frustration Tolerance &amp; Resilience</b>
You're working hard to figure it out!	It's too hard for you; maybe you should try something else.
You're getting better at this step by step.	Why can't you do it like your sibling/friend?
You're learning something new every time you try.	You didn't do it perfectly; try harder next time.
Let's think together how we can solve this problem.	Here, let me show you the right way to do it.
What ideas do you have to try next?	It's too difficult for you to understand right now.
Mistakes help us learn; let's see what we can learn from this.	I give up; it's too hard (modeling negative talk).
It's okay to take your time; we can try again tomorrow.	It's taking you too long. Let me just do it for you.
Every mistake is a chance to learn something new.	Stop it, you're making a mess!
You're showing great determination; that's impressive.	This should be easy for you.
Trying different ways is a great strategy; keep exploring!	I can't believe you're still stuck on this.
Practice makes progress	Practice makes perfect (unachievable goal)
We all make mistakes; let's figure out how to fix it.	I'm disappointed you haven't figured this out yet.
You're working hard! You're so persistent!	Good job! You're so smart! (focuses on outcome)



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