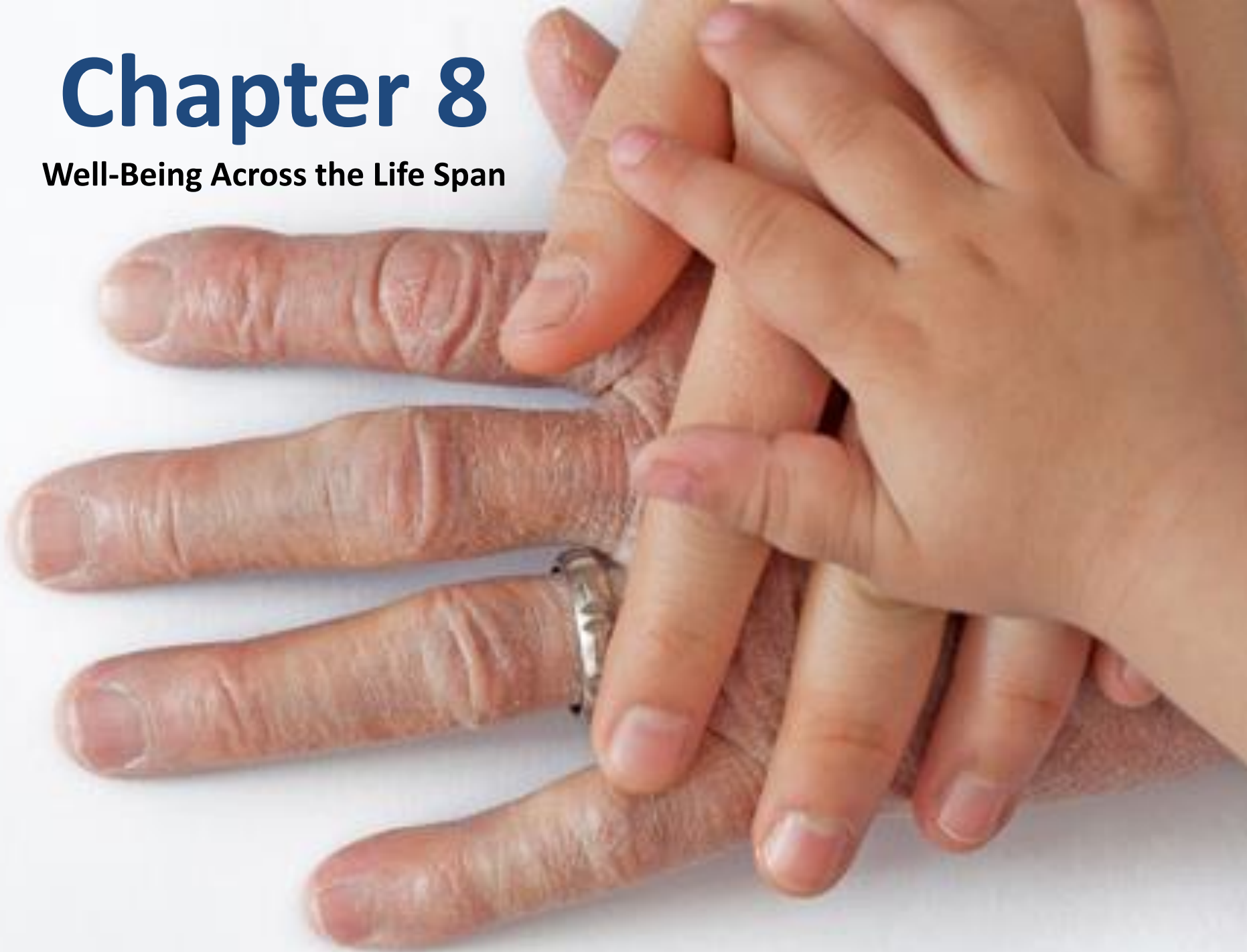


# Chapter 8

## Well-Being Across the Life Span



# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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Adult Development: a continuous process of anticipating the future, appraising and reappraising goals, adjusting to current realities, and regulating expectations to maintain a sense of well-being as circumstances change



Normative change (e.g. start career, get married, become grandparent)  
Non-normative change (e.g., lose job)

Assimilation: keep striving for goals without major changes  
Accommodation: change goals, assumptions, identity

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Stage Models and Well-Being

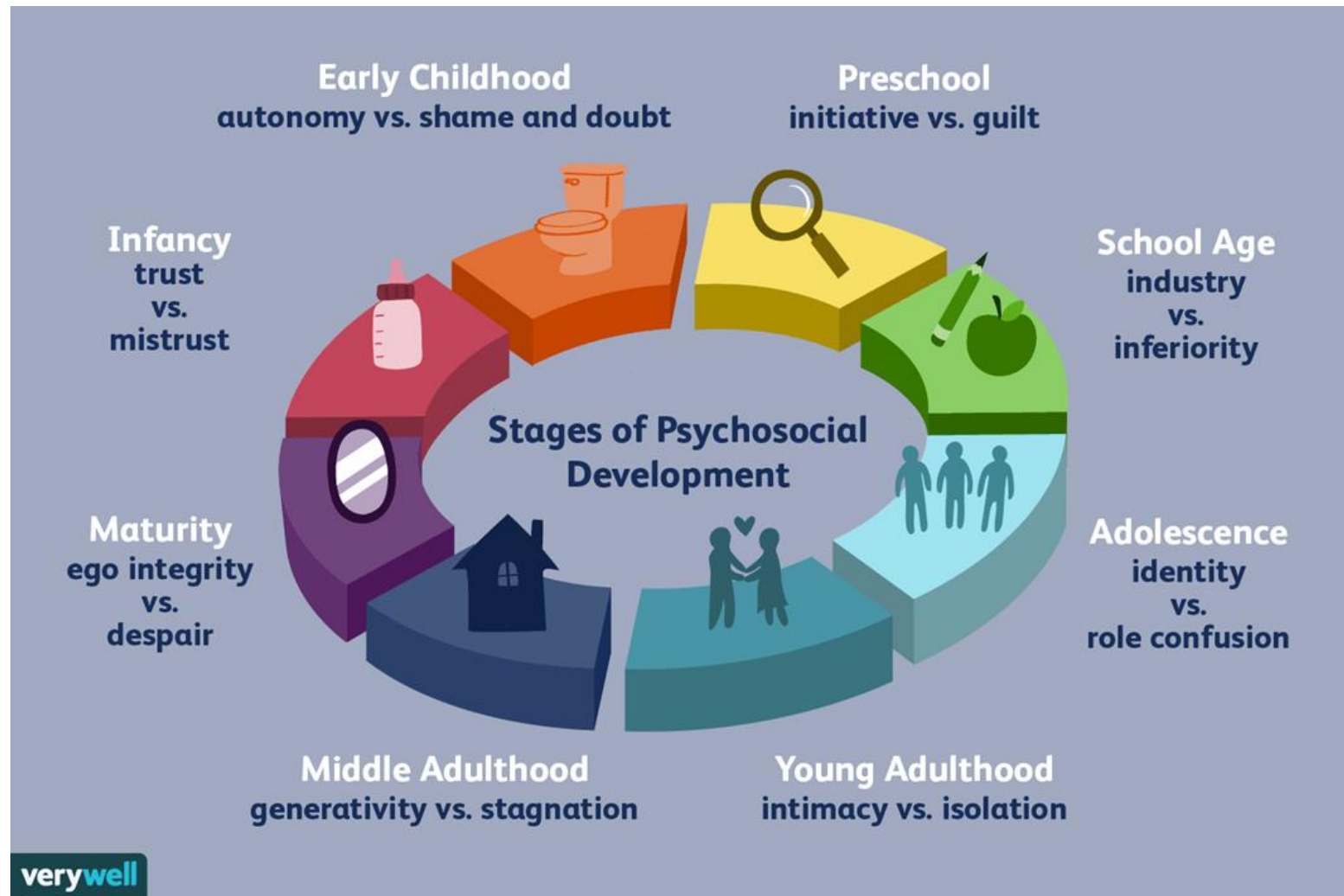
Each life stage has specific crisis

Purpose of each crisis helps to build a specific virtue

Dynamic balance of opposites—Ericson assumed successful resolution when healthy balance was achieved between the 2 poles

Unhealthy consequences if each pole taken to extreme

Healthy personality development



## Eric Ericson's Psychosocial Development Theory

## Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Approximate Age	Psychosocial Crisis/Task	Virtue Developed
Infant - 18 months	Trust vs Mistrust	Hope
18 months - 3 years	Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt	Will
3 - 5 years	Initiative vs Guilt	Purpose
5 -13 years	Industry vs Inferiority	Competency
13 -21 years	Identity vs Confusion	Fidelity
21- 39 years	Intimacy vs Isolation	Love
40 - 65 years	Generativity vs Stagnation	Care
65 and older	Integrity vs Despair	Wisdom

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# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Stage Models and Well-Being: Generativity: Nurturing and Guiding Others

Higher level of generativity is related to

- greater well-being
- greater maturity and personal growth
  - Use more principled moral reasoning
  - Balanced individualistic and communal concerns

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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Stage Models and Well-Being: Generativity: Nurturing and Guiding Others

- Generativity associated with more education and middle age (need learning, experience)



# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Stage Models and Well-Being: Generativity: Nurturing and Guiding Others

- Identities of highly generative people are known from their life stories
  - Have a *commitment script*: facing initial challenges in life may lead to greater sensitivity to others' suffering which may lead to positive outcome benefiting others/society



# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Stage Models and Well-Being: Generativity: Nurturing and Guiding Others

- Highly generative people do not experience more positive events or fewer stressors, rather it was *how* they interpreted those events \*\*\*
- Life events perceived as events fostering empathy, compassion, and deeper understanding of others

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Life Span and Life Course Models and Well-Being: Positive Youth Development

PYD posits youth possess resources that can be developed, nurtured, and cultivated

Strengths that help adolescents progress into adulthood:

Hope

Openness to  
Experience

Benefit Finding

Optimism

Curiosity

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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Life Span and Life Course  
Models and Well-Being:  
Positive Youth Development

Lerner: PYD is a process that  
fosters the five Cs (plus a  
6<sup>th</sup>):

Confidence

Competence

Connection

Character

Caring

Contribution

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Life Span and Life Course Models and Well-Being: Positive Youth Development

### Penn Resiliency Program

- ▶ Highly structured life-skills development program
- ▶ Offered for a fee, or part of research
- ▶ 12 sessions in a classroom
- ▶ Focus on thought patterns and attributions
- ▶ Effective in reducing onset and severity of depression, promotes optimism and better health.

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Life Span and Life Course Models and Well-Being: Early and Middle Adulthood

Brandstadter posited dual process model of adaptation and adjustment

- Pursuing goals, hit obstacles, then intensify efforts or later paths towards goals (assimilative...keep goal intact)
- Goals that are impossible or blocked, then accommodative processes to adjust by downgrading importance of goal, switch to new goal, or use other strategies to adapt to loss of an important goal

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Life Span and Life Course Models and Well-Being: Early and Middle Adulthood

Younger groups show:

- more strengths concerned with exploring their worlds
- strength of hope was a predictor of life satisfaction

# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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Life Span and Life Course Models and Well-Being: Early and Middle Adulthood: Is There a Mid-Life Crisis?

Well-being relatively high at younger ages

Well-being decreases in midlife and rises again after 60...U-shaped curve found in

Major factors influencing the dip at midlife

- Gender-specific
- Midcareer evaluations (Midlife creates many “frustrated achievers” ...reevaluate where they are in life, what they have/have not accomplished, and inevitability of aging)



# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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## Life Span and Life Course Models and Well-Being: Early and Middle Adulthood: The Middle-Aged Brain

Some mental functions show a decline

- Reaction times, ability to multitask, remember names

Some functions show improvement with age

- Complex reasoning skills, empathy, inductive reasoning, verbal memory, making financial decisions, ability to see connections/grasp big picture

Middle-aged brain may be less quick, but more shrewd



# Well-Being Over the Life Span

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Life Span and Life Course Models and Well-Being: Successful Aging and Aging Well

Older persons are more satisfied with life

High subjective well-being among older persons (may include optimism and self-efficacy, higher sense of autonomy, more realistic view of future)

Happiness declines in old age...may remain happy if retain good health

Cultural factors influence well-being and older persons...higher life satisfaction for those from Western industrialized countries; Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, or Latin America large progressive decline; sub-Saharan Africa little change in well-being with advancing age

# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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## Mills Study

- Followed women graduates of Mills College 1958 and 1960
- Examined 4 criteria of maturity
  - Competence, wisdom, ego development, generativity
- Women's three distinct paths to positive adult development
  - Achievers
  - Conservers
  - Seekers
  - Depleted (pattern of unresolved emotional difficulties)

<https://millslab.berkeley.edu/research.htm>

# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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## Mills Study

- Achievers
  - Highly achievement motivated
  - Competent
  - Career oriented
  - Ambitious
  - Scored highest on the measure of generativity
  - Had the most integrated sense of self-identity
  - Tied to max pos emotions, min neg feelings

# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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## Mills Study

- **Conservers**
  - Competent but somewhat conventional
  - Emotionally reserved
  - Less open to change
  - Comfortable with identity but accepted identity others and society had expected of them
  - Adopted strategy of dampening emotions so both pos and neg kept in check

# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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## Mills Study

- Seekers
  - Open to new experiences
  - Continued to question and challenge self
  - Valued personal growth over career success
  - Scored highest on wisdom and ego development
  - Had not accepted conventional definitions of who they should be, some were still searching for a stable self-identity in their early 40s
  - Amplified their emotions so both pos and neg feelings experienced more deeply
- Depleted

# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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## Narrative Approaches to the Life Span: Telling Stories to Make Sense of Our Lives

### Creative constructions from the actual events

- Creative: we write our autobiographies and stories help to define our life for us
- Life stories are important to our sense of well-being

### Major functions for our personal stories

- Aid in creation of sense of self
- Help create a sense of meaning

## Reminiscing: reviewing life narratives can lead to improved well-being

# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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## Narrative Approaches to the Life Span: Telling Stories to Make Sense of Our Lives: Themes in Life Stories

### Two types of narrative processing

- Coherent positive resolution
  - narrative about a difficult event that has a positive ending and conveys a sense of emotional resolution and closure
  - These stories support and nurture interpersonal relationships
- Exploratory narrative processing
  - involves a willingness to fully understand a difficult situation and to analyze it with openness and a full recognition of the negative emotional impact the event had on one's life; leads to greater depth and more complexity to understanding life events
  - Tell these stories to help understand life in a more complex, compelling way

# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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Narrative Approaches to the Life Span: Telling Stories to Make Sense of Our Lives: Themes in Life Stories

Transformation processing

- Contain high coherent positive and high exploratory processing: contain both highly positive resolution and high processing of negative emotions
- More consistently associated with greater well-being



# Different Paths to Maturity: Individual Differences in Life Span Development

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Narrative Approaches to the Life Span: Telling Stories to Make Sense of Our Lives: Themes in Life Stories

Positive adaptation to difficult life events

- 1. explore the meaning and emotional impact of the event
- 2. construct a coherent and positive resolution

Cultural aspect of life stories

- Stories reflect values and perspectives of our culture

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Benefit finding

- Positive interpretations of setbacks to see the event in a different light

## Post-traumatic growth

- Positive psychological change resulting from the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances or trauma
- Refers to significant changes in life goals and life commitments that require major alterations in one's sense of identity or life narrative
- Can lead to improved mental health

## Resilience

- A broad array of abilities for constructively and positively adapting to risk, adversity, or some monumental negative event
- A class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk

# Forms of Post Traumatic Growth



# Resilience in Childhood

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“The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. The hilltop hour would not be half so wonderful if there were no dark valleys to traverse.”

- Hellen Keller



# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Children

- Poor childhood environments may not result in psychological problems in adulthood
- Werner 1970s research on resilient children, those who “bounced back” from adversity
  - Studied at-risk children of Kauai
  - Over 80% “bounced back” later in life
  - Attributed to having one supportive adult

# Dave Pelzer

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- ▶ Dave is a living testament of a self-made man, who as an optimist exudes resilience, service to mankind, personal responsibility, and faith in humanity
- ▶ Dave nearly died several times by the hands of his mentally disturbed alcoholic mother.
- ▶ Dave was starved, forced to drink ammonia, sit in bath tub for hours, stabbed and burned
- ▶ Years later it was determined that Dave's case was identified as one of the most gruesome and extreme cases of child abuse in California's then history.
- ▶ Rescued at age 12
- ▶ Placed in a series of foster homes until he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force at age 18.



# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Children

### Core characteristics typical of resilient children

- Able to find a nurturing surrogate parent
- Children had good social and communication skills and at least one close friend
- Creative outlets, activities, or hobbies on which they could focus when life became even more difficult than usual
- Children were relatively optimistic

Actively involved in creating or finding environments and people supporting and reinforcing their competencies

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Children: New Perspectives

Family factors influence children's adjustment

- At least one good relationship with a parent or sibling

Community factors help foster adjustments

- Pos rels with peers, friends, trusted teacher
- Participation in pos social or religious orgs
- Sense of social cohesion or community involvement in neighborhood



# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Children: New Perspectives

### Personality factors take up secondary role

- Werner's research, and:
- Ability to inhibit unwanted behavior and regulate emotions
- High emotional intelligence
- High self-efficacy and persistence
- Insight into complexities of diverse situations and behaviors

Other Factors: see Table 8.2

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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Other Factors: see Table 8.2

## Protective Factors for Resilience

- In the Family/Close Relationships
  - Positive attachment, authoritative parenting, organized home environment, socioeconomic advantage
- In the Community
  - Effective schools, ties to prosocial orgs, neighborhoods with high collective efficacy, good public health
- In the Child
  - Good problem-solving skills, self-regulation, self-efficacy, positive outlook on life, faith and sense of meaning in life

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

## Emerging Adulthood

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### Five features to emerging adulthood

- Identity explorations
  - Trying out different possibilities in work, love, ideology
- Instability
  - Upheavals in work and love common
- Self-focus
  - Relates to absorption with oneself rather than others
- Feeling in-between
  - In-between adolescence and adulthood
- Possibilities or optimism (Arnett)
  - Most emerging adult are optimistic about future

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Emerging Adulthood

Experiencing identity confusion had lower psychosocial well-being

*Fixed mind-set* makes it difficult to handle challenges in the future (e.g, being told “you are so smart” rather than “you worked so hard”)

Growth mind-sets help in overcoming challenges

- Growth mind set: attitude toward learning and challenges...can develop talent and ability through persistence, dedication, and passionate commitment

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Adulthood

Higher levels of resilience are associated with moderate adversity

Adversity in life helps us adjust and thrive

Lower resilience is associated with either a life of no adversity or high adversity

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Adulthood: Cultivating Resilience in Adults

Positive emotionality helps increase in resilience

Several factors that enhance resilience

- Task/problem focused coping, commitment to goals, humor, patience, optimism, faith, altruism, mindfulness and self-compassion, mature coping mechanisms

Requires finding delicate balance between too much and too little emotional control

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Cultivating Resilience in Adults

### APA: Factors for the cultivation of resilience

1. Make connections with family, friends, or community.
2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.
3. Accept that change is part of living.
4. Move toward your goals.
5. Take decisive action, use problem- and task-focused coping.
6. Look for opportunities for self-discovery.
7. Nurture a positive view of yourself.
8. Keep events in perspective.
9. Maintain a hopeful outlook.
10. Take care of yourself, attend to your needs and feelings.

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Adulthood: Post-Traumatic Growth

Involves changes in self-understanding and one's worldview, or meaning-making

Moving one toward important new goals...must disengage with old activities, strivings, core projects and create new goals that are intrinsically motivating and personally meaningful...authenticity involves *action*

Provides a renewed sense of meaning and purpose

Social support and acceptance are important factors in promoting post-traumatic growth



# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Adulthood: Sense of Coherence

Sense of Coherence Model: unique set of personality traits that helps people to interpret life stressors in a positive and adaptive way...coherent and understandable despite adversity

### Sense of Coherence Model:

- Meaningfulness
- Comprehensibility
  - Extent to which life events appear ordered, consistent, structured and clear
- Manageability
  - Sense of control derived from confidence in one's coping skills

Higher sense of coherence associated with higher psychological well-being

Quite stable trait over the middle years of adulthood

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Resilience in Adulthood: Master Resilience Training

US Army Training: Teaches skills to inoculate against post-traumatic stress disorder

### Set the seeds for future post-traumatic growth

- Building mental toughness (learned optimism; gratitude journal)
- Building character strengths (VIA)
- Building strong relationships (module teaches about growth mind-set, constructive communication, and assertiveness training)

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Healthy and Adaptive Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms describe one way we choose to deal with stress...choice has consequences for well-being

Mature Defense Mechanisms to conflicts, difficulties

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Mature Defense Mechanisms

Type of defense mechanisms used by a young person predicts well-being over 20 years later

Defense mechanisms based on the degree of unconsciousness and involuntariness

- Psychotic (unhealthy, distorted to avoid anxiety)
- Immature (often used by adolescents, those with severe depression)
- Neurotic (“normal” such as repression, intellectualization, reaction formation, denial)
- Mature and adaptive styles (altruism, anticipation, humor, sublimation, suppression; differs: attempting to maximize gratification while allowing awareness of underlying feelings, impulses, ideas, and consequences of behavior)

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Mature Defense Mechanisms: Outcomes

- Had high incomes
- Better psychological adjustment
- More social supports
- More joy in living
- Better marital satisfaction
- Higher self-rated health
- Had jobs that fit their ambitions, were more active in public service, had gratifying friendships, enjoyed happier marriages, and were more engaged in competitive sports in midlife

# Adjusting to Difficult Life Events

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## Healthy and Adaptive Defense Mechanisms: Predictors of Thriving from the Harvard Study

Most important factor in aging well physically is  
to never smoke cigarettes

Good relationships help cognitive functioning in  
later life

Quality of relationship provides the key to  
greater well-being