



# CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

## Kids need resiliency to cope with life

**By Jane Sutter**

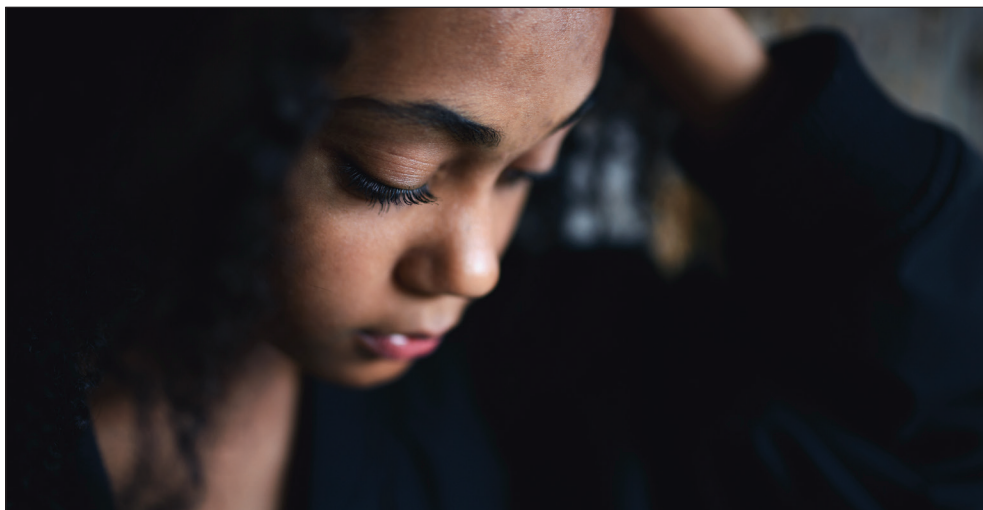
The media is full of reports these days about children and teens suffering from anxiety and depression as the result of the isolation imposed by the pandemic. Or perhaps social media leads to feelings of inadequacy for teens or maybe kids are struggling to deal with the normal pressures of growing up.

What can parents do to help their kids deal with what life throws at them? Teaching young people to be resilient rather than protecting them from hardships can be beneficial, said two educators in Monroe County.

Janine Sanger worked as a school psychologist and coordinator of health and wellness in the Webster school district in Monroe County. She now is executive director of the Webster Health and Education Network Drug Free Community Coalition (WHEN-DFCC).

She defines resiliency as “adapting well to things that are thrown at us in life, whether it be adversity or threats or stress, managing feelings of anxiety.”

Too often in her role at the Webster school district, Sanger saw parents defend their kids in a way that she thought was not helpful, pro-



tecting the kids from the “fallout” of whatever wrongful activity they had engaged in, such as being caught with marijuana in school. Some parents would ask for leniency. Sanger’s response? “No, this is your opportunity that you need to take to stave off worse that’s going to come down the road if you continue to defend your child.”

Sanger isn’t talking about harsh parenting but allowing kids to feel the consequences

of their behavior in a variety of situations. “I think it’s important for parents to allow their kids to fail and understand what it means to go through that and come out on the other side ... Enabling is a deterrent to developing resilience.” She advocates not harsh parenting but “allowing (kids) to feel the consequences, to live out the consequences of their actions, whether it’s not having clean clothes because you didn’t pick them up off your bedroom floor and put them in the laundry bin or getting a little bit hungry because you didn’t bring your lunch” to school.

Colleen Trevisani has more than 20 years of experience in parish ministry and teaching with the majority of that spent in the Diocese of Rochester. She now home schools her two elementary-school age boys and leads non-profit organizations. Both she and Sanger talked about how it’s important for parents to allow their kids to fail so they can learn to build resilience. “We need to let them learn from small failures,” Trevisani said. She recalled that one time when her son was in second grade, he decided he didn’t want to study for his weekly spelling test. “He did very bad on his test, and I let that happen. Second grade is an ok time to let that happen. And we (her hus-

## Resources on Resiliency

### Blogs and books:

Educator and parent Colleen Trevisani recommends the following:

Rick Lawrence’s blog post: *Wimp-Resistant Parenting Strategies*

Bonnie Landry’s parenting book: *Revolution of Mercy: How Kindness Changes Everything*

Roy Petitfils’ book: *Helping Teens with Stress, Anxiety, and Depression*

According to the Ave Maria Press website, Petitfils, a Catholic author, speaker and psychotherapist, offers information and advice on:

- the major causes of stress and anxiety in teens today
- differentiating healthy stress from toxic stress
- simple steps to take after identifying a hurting kid, beginning with how to assess whether and how to step in
- the art of listening

He explores the support and comfort available through the sacraments, Catholic devotions, different forms of prayer, and reading the Bible. Ultimately, Petitfils identifies how to guide gently, yet persuasively, hurting young people to deeper trust in the tender mercies of God.

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band and she) let him learn from that." They talked with their son and suggested that he might do better the following week if he studied; the child did and got a much better score. Lesson learned.

### Cultural norms

Travisani pointed out that in America there's a strong sense of "performance culture," of doing well, being perfect, being excellent at some thing or things. While there's nothing wrong with striving to do your best, "doing your best is not always going to be perfect," Travisani said. "You're not always going to get 100 percent" on a test or in a course. She found that students believed if they didn't get 100 percent, then they had failed.

Travisani noted that the idea of being perfect comes from the Puritan culture that founded our country. "If you worked really hard and you succeeded ... then that was proof that God loved you and was taking you to heaven."

But that's not the Catholic understanding of our relationship with God, Travisani said. We don't have to be sinless for God to love us. "So it's ok for us to fail; it's ok for us to be imperfect." It's not ok to sin but "we don't have to be sinless for God to love us."

Travisani believes this is an important lesson for parents to teach their kids. She recalled that her own parents made this distinction in their relationship with her, teaching her that they loved her regardless of any bad behavior that she exhibited, like talking back or not doing her chores. "At the core we are valued because we are human persons; we are valued because we are people; we are valued because we are children of God and nothing we can do will ever make us more loveable. So having that at our deep core makes us resilient in the face of life's failures, in the face of life's challenges, in the face of any subtext that we face, nothing we do is going to take that away."

Travisani sees how youngsters are seeking answers to big questions. "Our young people today are struggling a lot with understanding their identity and their purpose and sense of belonging...the Christian faith has answers to those questions: What is our identity? What is our purpose?"

One of Travisani's friends, who is a youth minister, told Travisani that she wants young people to have a "touchstone," something to hold onto when life gets challenging, for example, a memorized prayer such as the Hail Mary or the Our Father, "something that goes back to the deep core, one of the core ideas that I was made, God loves me, God understands me, some kind of message, having

## Resources on Resiliency:

### Webster Health and Education Network: A Drug-Free Community Coalition

The coalition's mission is to stave off first use of drugs and alcohol by young people for as long as possible, with the idea being that if the person chooses to use drugs or alcohol later, the less likely they are to develop an addiction.

WHEN-DFCC is focused on increasing the protective factors in the community, including positive interactions within families.

For more information, go to the website <https://www.whendfcc.org/>

Click on the "For Parents" tab at the top to find helpful information on protective factors such as resilience, relationships, self-regulation, coping skills, sleep and hope. Parents can sign up for the group's e-newsletter on the website.

For information on WHEN-DFCC sponsored events, go to <https://www.whendfcc.org/events>. Families can pick up kits for "Planting Positivity" from the WHEN table at events. The idea is for parents and kids to assemble the kits for planting wildflowers.

some kind of scripture that might come back to them," Travisani said.

### Unearned rewards

Too often in our culture today kids get rewarded just for participation in activities, both Travisani and Sanger mentioned. "We are giving kids accolades for achieving tests of daily living ... (they're) expecting that every time they turn a corner they're going to be met with applause," Sanger said. "Kids need to understand that success comes through the feelings of helping others."

Travisani shared a quotation to make her point: "We build self-esteem by doing esteem-able things." She gave the example of praising a child who builds a car that wins the pine-wood derby or gets second place; those are acts worthy of praise. Praising a child simply for doing what's expected doesn't build self-esteem. "The thing we want to praise in the kids is the hard work," Travisani said. "And that's the piece that builds the resilience. We praise the effort; we praise the trying." Giving specific feedback to kids, such as "I like how you used this color" in an art project, also is important, rather than just saying "good job," Travisani noted.

Helping kids or teens to process failures or challenges also is necessary for parents to do, Sanger said. "I think it's important that we as parents, as caregivers process those failures with kids so they can have a wider perspective of what it really means and that it's not necessarily the end of the world." Parents can help kids find the positive in what they just experienced and talk with them about how they can apply that knowledge to future events. "We learn most in life from things that offer us difficulties, from failures so that you can access those thoughts and feelings next time something comes your way." This can help the young person maintain perspective

and a hopeful outlook.

Sanger taught her children a quotation from Benjamin Franklin: "Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen; keep in the sunlight." This helped in a discussion of what things are under one's control and what isn't, Sanger said.

In her former role as a school psychologist, Sanger would talk with parents of students who were struggling or had issues and ask them if they had talked to their child's pediatrician for guidance. A pediatrician can determine if there is something going on medically; the doctor may recommend counseling and not necessarily medication.

The mission of the coalition that Sanger heads up is to stave off first use of drugs and alcohol by young people for as long as possible, with the idea being that if the person chooses to use drugs or alcohol later, the less likely he or she is to develop an addiction.

WHEN-DFCC is focused on increasing the protective factors in the community, including positive interactions within families. "The more protective factors a child has, the less likely it is that they will make unhealthy or risky decisions," Sanger said. "Protective factors help buffer young people, so it really does have a lot to do with resilience."

Pointing to saints such as St. Marianne Cope and St. Kateri Tekakwitha as role models, noting the hardships they faced but how they never gave up, can be comforting and motivating to young people, Travisani noted. Finally, as a way to counter the media's message that life should be carefree and without challenges, parents can teach their children that Jesus didn't promise his followers an easy life. "Take up your cross and follow me," Travisani quoted from the Gospels.

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*Jane Sutter is a freelance writer based in Rochester.*

# Watch for These Warning Signs of Abuse in Minors

No longer wants to see a **particular person** they had been close to

Declining **academic** performance

Tries to hide use of **technology**

No longer interested in **activities** they used to enjoy

Changes in **personality**

Demonstrates **aggressive behavior** or constantly angry

Tries to get minors **alone**



Commits physical and emotional **boundary violations**

**Withdraws** from family or friends

Keeps **secrets** with minors

Gives lavish **gifts** to minors

Allows or encourages minors to **break laws** or rules

Is overly interested in **spending time** with minors

Has **inappropriate** or suggestive conversations with minors

Does not believe the **rules** apply to them (or, does not follow rules or protocols)

Takes **photos** without approval, or asks minors to send them photos

## ... and These Warning Signs of Perpetrators





ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

## Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:  
Tammy Sylvester,  
Diocesan Coordinator  
of Safe Environment Education  
and Compliance,  
585-328-3228,  
or [Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org](mailto:Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org).

*Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.*

*To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:*

Deborah Housel  
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;  
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,  
ext. 1555  
[victimsassistance@dor.org](mailto:victimsassistance@dor.org).

*All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.*

# ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

## ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

### CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

#### Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>  
*PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.*

#### NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>  
*A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.*

## FOR PARENTS:

#### Common Sense Media

<https://www.common sense media.org/parent-concerns>  
*A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education*

#### Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

#### iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeep safe.org/>  
*Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies*

#### Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>  
*Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America*

## LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

**Bivona Child Advocacy Center**  
(Monroe, Wayne counties):  
[www.BivonaCAC.org](http://www.BivonaCAC.org)  
585-935-7800

**Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:**  
607-737-8449  
[www.chemungcounty.com](http://www.chemungcounty.com)

**Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:**  
315-253-9795  
[www.cacofcayugacounty.org](http://www.cacofcayugacounty.org)

**Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program**  
(Ontario County):  
[www.cacfingerlakes.org](http://www.cacfingerlakes.org)  
315-548-3232

**Darkness to Light organization:**  
[www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org)

**STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:**  
[www.sthcs.org](http://www.sthcs.org)  
716-372-8532

**NYS State Central Registry**  
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):  
1-800-342-3720

**NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)**  
866-313-3013

**Tompkins County Advocacy Center:**  
[www.theadvocacycenter.org](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org)  
607-277-3203

**Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:**  
585-786-8846

**Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:**  
315-531-3417, Ext. 6