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BOUNCING BACK
Exploring resilience through a “smashing” experiment.
Bouncing Back

Exploring resilience through a “smashing” experiment.

About the Activity

Sometimes life doesn’t go the way we expect. How we react in certain situations is based on our own resilience. In this lesson, we will explore the concept of resilience and learn how we can better equip ourselves to bounce back when life throws us lemons or unexpected surprises.

Supplies

These simple materials will get you started, although you may need to visit a convenience or craft store for a few items.

Parent supervision is recommended for this activity when using the hammer.

- Hammer
- Plastic glove
- Safety glasses
- Tarp
- A writing utensil
- Paper
- A variety of household items, which could include...
  - Banana
  - Tomato
  - Potato
  - Bag of chips
  - Rubber band
  - Eraser
  - Empty can or bottle
  - Book
  - Pillow
  - Sweatshirt
  - Ball
  - Book
  - Bucket
  - Water balloon
  - Modeling clay/playdough

Grades: 6-12

Topic: Mindfulness, Healthy Living, Creative Arts, and College Readiness

Time: 30-45 minutes
Activity Steps

As we get older, life can become increasingly challenging. With age comes additional responsibilities, and sometimes these changes in our lives can be exciting. But other times life’s changes can lead to stress. Situations that could trigger stress could be peer pressure, rules set by the authority figures, or conflict in friendships.

While there may be times we can’t control our environments or how others treat us, we can learn to bounce back from setbacks through resilience. This exercise will require adult supervision; however, it will demonstrate the concept of resilience and how it applies to our emotional well-being.

1. Before we move on to the fun part of our activity, let’s get organized. Grab your paper and a writing utensil, then follow the instructions below.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Protective factors — such as having a safe adult in your life who cares for you and whom you can turn to for guidance — can help build resilience.

Below is an example of how your chart may look:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Appearance Before</th>
<th>Appearance After</th>
<th>High or Low Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item #2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item #3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Use a writing utensil to create a chart on your piece of paper. Your chart should have four columns across the top with the following labels: object, appearance before, appearance after, high or low resilience. Make a list of all the items you collected in the column labeled, “Object.”
Activity Steps
(continued...)

3 Now comes the fun part! Smashing objects with a hammer to see how they respond! We strongly recommend adult supervision for this part of the activity. Lay each of your objects on the tarp. Examine each item and make notes on your chart of what each item looks like before you hit it with the hammer.

Tip: If you would rather not use the hammer, watch the Bouncing Back Video to see our team do it for you! Some of the objects on that video differ from what is in the list above, so you may need to make some adjustments to your chart.

4 Carefully hit each item with the hammer. As an extra safety precaution, only hit one object at a time. As you smash each item with the hammer, did you notice that some of the objects are less affected by the impact than others? For example, while a tomato or water balloon may explode when you hit it with the hammer, a pillow or modeling clay may have the ability to return to its original shape (with some extra care and attention, of course). In this case, the pillow and clay are more resilient than the tomato or water balloon, because they are better able to recover from their injuries.

5 Make notes on the chart about the appearance after you’ve smashed each item. Then go through each item on your chart and label whether you think it has high resilience or low resilience.

DID YOU KNOW?
Just like the objects we just used for our experiment, individual people also have their own personal levels of resilience. However, resilience isn’t set in stone. According to the American Psychological Association, the following actions can help you to build up your resilience and bounce back from negative experiences: Connecting with others, accepting change, positive self-talk, developing self-care routines, learning more about yourself, defining personal goals, and having a hopeful outlook.

6 Next, let’s explore various traits of resilience and how they can also apply to people.

On the back of the paper, answer these questions:
• What are some characteristics of the items with high resilience?
• What are some of the characteristics of the items with low resilience?
• Can any of these characteristics be applied to humans?

DID YOU KNOW?
If you aren’t sure where to start with building resilience, consider joining a club or finding an activity that interests you. Volunteering, playing sports, or becoming involved in organizations like 4-H can be a great way to foster personal growth. Practicing mindfulness — a practice some people use to reset their perspective each day — is another way to build resilience.
See how much you learned about resilience.

**QUESTION 1**
Resilience is the ability to:
- a. Bounce back
- b. Give up
- c. Be angry
- d. Be happy all the time

**QUESTION 2**
True or False? You can develop resilience.
- a. True: Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop.
- b. False: It’s not possible to control how we react to certain situations.

**QUESTION 3**
What are some ways we can build resilience?
- a. Accepting change
- b. Developing self-care routines
- c. Ignoring situations that bother us
- d. Answers a and b
- e. None of the above

**QUESTION 4**
True or False? You can develop resilience.
- a. True: Everyone experiences difficulties. You are not alone.
- b. False: It all depends on your reaction to it.

**Reflection Questions**

- Do you think you are resilient? What are some places in your life that you can identify that have forced you to “bounce back?”
- How do you make connections with others? Do you allow yourself to share your thoughts and feelings with people you trust?
- List at least one safe adult who you can talk to when you feel stressed.
- What are some goals that you have for today? For this week? For this month? For next year?
- How do you reset when you are stressed? Make a list of things you can do when life feels overwhelming.
Investigate & Explore

Take what you’ve learned to the next level to learn more and explore the possibilities.

Everyone experiences set-backs, stress, and difficult times. You are not alone, and these situations do not have to define you. By learning more about yourself and how you engage with the world, you have the ability to take back control and build upon your resilience.

Some situations will be easier than others, but practicing the tips we previously mentioned can help. Find someone to confide in. Build a personal mantra. Take time each day to say: “I am a very special and worthwhile person, and I deserve the very best.”