

# Resilience in Maltreated Children: Implications for Special Needs Adoption

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*Darla L. Henry*

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Children in the child welfare system face renewed issues of loss as they enter adoptive placements. Every move is a loss and an exercise for the child in establishing the perception of a "safe" environment. Resilient children who have been abused develop coping skills to adapt to their abusing "unsafe" environments. When these children become part of an adoptive family, these coping skills need to be recognized as providing important cues to the child's world, rather than as challenging behaviors. The author deconstructs the words of resilient children into five themes that can help provide access into the children's world, a fresh viewpoint from which to assess the adopted children's reactive behaviors, and a foundation on which an adoptive relationship can be built.

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*Darla L. Henry, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor, School of Social Administration, Temple University, Harrisburg, PA.*

**A**bused children develop a variety of behaviors to cope with and adapt to their abusive environments and to the positive and negative aspects of their relationships with their parents. For many, these coping behaviors are the strengths that enable them to survive in an unsafe environment. When entering new placements (to the children, a new, strange, and "unsafe" environment), children transfer these patterns of relating to their new parenting relationships. Often, the occurrences of these coping behaviors in the new families are viewed not as strengths, but as challenges to parents and placement professionals. Yet these behaviors provide important cues to help parents and professionals access the child's world and begin building new relationships.

Resilient children who have adapted to their abusive environments have gained a sense of control in their lives. When they come into new families, they are asked to give up that control to the new parent-child relationship. Understanding the past allows the integration of the child's survival skills and allows the children to grieve their losses, build attachments, and begin the task of identity formation.

This article deconstructs the words of resilient children into themes that provide cues to the reoccurrence of behaviors once needed to survive in abusive environments, but now challenging parents and professionals. A qualitative research study of resilient maltreated adolescents identified five themes that provide a basis from which to view children's behaviors during their adjustment to new placements, including adoption. These themes are: loyalty to parents, normalizing the abusive environment, invisibility to the abuser, self-value, and future vision. The research is summarized in the context of risk factors and protective factors, methodology, child narratives, and the emerging themes. Implications for the usefulness of these findings are discussed in relation to current and future practice.

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## Literature Review

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The concept of resilience was created to help explain why some children do well under disadvantaged circumstances [Baldwin et al. 1993]. Resilience is attributed to children who grew up under unfavorable circumstances without showing unfavorable consequences [Masten 1989; Okun et al. 1994; Radke-Yarrow & Brown 1993; Werner 1993]. It is defined as the capacity for successful adaptation, positive functioning, or competence despite high risk, chronic stress, or prolonged or severe trauma [Egeland et al. 1993].

Interest has grown in the past two decades in identifying factors associated with resiliency in high-risk children [Arend et al. 1979; Beeghly & Cicchetti 1994; Crittenden 1985; Earls et al. 1987; Farber & Egeland 1987; Kaufman et al. 1994; Masten 1989; Richters & Martinez 1993; Werner 1993]. The research on resilience primarily has identified factors that increase the risk of stress and factors that protect against stress. The risk research has been retrospective, whereas the protective factor research has been progressive [Gero 1992]. No research has been conducted specific to resilience factors for children for whom adoption has been planned.

Werner and Smith [1982] identified protective factors that acted as buffers against the risk factors for stress. They categorized these protective factors as a genetic luck of the draw (e.g., an easygoing disposition) that underscored the nature/nurture connection, self-esteem, a strong sense of identity, intelligence, physical attractiveness, and supportive caregivers. Garmezy and colleagues [1984] identified three protective factors: dispositional attributes of the child, family cohesion and warmth, and availability and use of external support systems by parents and children. Seligman [1992] identified certain personality traits that contributed to resilience: optimism, sense of adventure, courage,

self-understanding, humor, a capacity to work hard, and an ability to endure and find outlets for emotions. According to Luthar and Zigler [1991], resilient children are active, humorous, confident, competent, prepared to take risks, flexible, and, as a result of repeated successful coping experiences, confident of both their inner and outer resources. Resilience may be a function of age because older children have negotiated more of the normative developmental challenges [Anthony 1987]. The adaptational coping processes of older children provide them with a requisite amount of space, safety, and freedom verging on the areas of competence and creativity.

Most recently, resilience has been viewed in terms of a transactional process [Egeland et al. 1993; Shields et al. 1994] that assumes developmental outcomes are determined by the interaction of genetic, biological, psychological, and sociological factors in the context of environmental support. Protective factors may be innate or acquired, internal or transactional, specific or general. Some attributes may promote positive adaptation in one context and negative effects in another, an overlap of vulnerabilities with both resources and protective factors [Masten 1989].

Genetic research by Rende and Plomin [1993] examined resilience as a familial risk factor and concluded that, unless the genetic risk factor can be specifically identified, resilience will remain elusive. They found the inheritable traits of temperament and intelligence to act as protective functions that allow children to avoid negative outcomes. Luthar [1993] identified resilient children as having a greater intellectual maturity. Garnezy [1984], however, found that while intelligence protected against stress, more intelligent children were more sensitive to their environments, and therefore, were more highly susceptible to stressors as compared to less intelligent children.

A range of other factors has been associated with resiliency. Arend et al. [1979] determined that highly curious children were more ego resilient. Earls and associates [1987] speculated that

children's inner sense of self was reflected in dimensions of outward activity toward competence (adaptability, positive response to environmental stress, capacity for work, and self-initiation). Radke-Yarrow and Brown [1993], from a ten-year study of adolescents, found that resilient children had more positive self-perceptions, elicited more positive reactions from teachers, and were more likely to be the favored child in the family. Similarly, Egeland and colleagues [1993] and Baldwin and colleagues [1993] found that resilient children were more assertive and independent (girls), had emotional support outside of the family; had at least one close friend; had an informal network of neighbors, peers, kin, and elders; had a favorite teacher; and took part in extracurricular activities, especially cooperative enterprises. A 32-year longitudinal study by Werner and Smith [1982] found that health and temperament had the greatest developmental impact in infancy and early childhood; problem-solving ability, communication skills, and alternative caregivers played a major role in middle childhood; and intrapersonal factors, internal locus of control, and self-esteem impacted adolescence.

An internal locus of control—the belief that forces shaping one's life are largely within one's own control—is an important aspect of the protective process. When individuals believe they are powerless to control what happens, their coping abilities become passive and restrictive. When individuals believe that events and outcomes are controllable, learned helplessness is avoided and, instead, active attempts are made to overcome aversive situations. Internally oriented children who have weathered several setbacks tend to show strong efforts to master challenging life events [Luthar 1993; Werner 1993]. Resilient children often acquire faith that their lives have meaning and that they have control over their own fates [Egeland et al. 1993; Baldwin et al. 1993].

Wolin and Wolin [1993] have identified clusters of resiliences that typically emerge as survivors battle adversity. These clusters are insight (a mental habit of asking questions and giving

honest answers); independence (the right to safe boundaries between child and parents); relationships (proof that one can love and be loved); initiative (the determination to assert one's self and master one's environment); creativity and humor (safe harbors of the imagination for refuge and rearranging life to one's pleasing); and morality (the activity of a conscience).

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## **Methodology**

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Discovering the processes by which maltreated children develop adaptive personalities despite aversive family experiences has been a central challenge for understanding resilience in child development. The present research explored how adolescents have adapted to adversity in the parent-child relationship and how they coped by having either an external (school, friend, relative) or internal (fantasy and/or creativity) locus of safety. The purpose was to identify those factors that protect children from the stresses associated with maltreatment.

The qualitative grounded theory method [Glasser & Strauss 1967] was chosen for this study because of its focus on the exploration and explanation of maltreated adolescent perspectives of coping methods. This method seeks to understand how individuals interpret their reality by inductively generating theories using everyday behaviors and organizational patterns of participants. The approach is predicated on the assumption that individuals bring order to their environments even though their world may appear disordered or nonsensical to others [Hutchinson 1993].

### ***Participant Characteristics***

The study population was drawn from an independent living program for adolescents in York County, Pennsylvania. Program participants had been referred through the courts, juvenile probation, and county child welfare services. Some participants lived

in foster care or on their own, some attended school, and some were employed full or part-time. Program participants were required to attend weekly meetings that included group activities, speakers, workshops, videos, and take-home assignments related to independent living skills, and were required to demonstrate their ability to survive on their own to successfully complete the program.

Study participants were selected on the basis of theoretical sampling. All participation was voluntary. Two groups of participants were created: (1) adolescents who had experienced childhood maltreatment, and (2) child care professionals who were experienced in the field of child abuse. In total, 13 participants (seven adolescents, three child welfare caseworkers, one independent living counselor, and two foster parents) were interviewed. The adult professionals comprised three males and three females (one African American) with from four to 30 years of experience.

The seven adolescents, all Caucasian, ranged in age from 13 to 20; four were female and three were male. The 20-year-old male was living independently and was fully employed. The 16-year-old male was in a residential independent living program, went to a vo-tech school, and held a part-time job. The 13-year-old male was included because he lived with a foster mother who was interviewed in the study and had demonstrated competency behaviors in coping with his earlier abusive experiences.

Three of the adolescent females lived in family foster homes, attended public school (one was a graduating senior and the other two were sophomores), and held part or full-time jobs. The fourth female had left out-of-home care upon turning 18 and was living with a boyfriend. She was employed and continued to participate in the independent living program. All of the adolescents had a history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, documented by a self-report and corroborated by child care professionals and case records.

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected through three interviews with the adolescents and child care professionals, a review of the adolescents' case records, and attendance at a meeting of the independent living program. The first and second interviews consisted of direct and indirect questions, and averaged 45 to 90 minutes. During the first round of in-person interviews, the child care professionals were asked open-ended questions on their opinions of the adaptation and coping skills of the adolescents with whom they have worked. Adolescents were asked open-ended questions related to their experiences of maltreatment, their feelings regarding the abuse and the perpetrator, and their responses to the abuse (e.g., "Describe your feelings now about what happened to you. What does being safe mean to you?").

During the second round of in-person interviews, questions moved from the general to the specific, based on formulated hypotheses from the first round of interviews (e.g., "What did you daydream/have fantasies about? Who/what helped you the most?"). The objective of the second session was to clarify common patterns and similarities emerging from the interviews with both groups. The third round of interviews was conducted by telephone to obtain participant clarification of or challenges to the findings of the first two interviews (e.g., "Where do you think children find safety when living with an abusive caregiver? When you were avoiding the person who hit you, did you feel invisible?").

Deconstruction of the data, that is, determining themes from the words of the participants, was done through content analysis of field notes, interview audiotapes, and case records. Responses were categorized according to adaptation, coping, and competency patterns, and were used in the final analysis to indicate the presence of resilience factors. Finally, the patterns were hypothesized into themes.

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## Findings

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Five major resilience themes emerged from this study. Each theme builds on the others toward an understanding of how children make sense of their abusive experiences. The first three themes, loyalty to parents, normalizing the abusive environment, and invisibility to the abuser, are based on the author's original work. The final two themes, self-value and future vision, confirm the findings of previous research.

### *Theme One: Loyalty to Parents*

Loyalty conveys the child's view of and feelings toward the abusing parent, and his or her perception of parental intentions and behaviors. Both professionals and adolescents identified an ongoing loyalty on the part of the adolescents for their parents. Adolescents expressed a defensiveness of their parents' actions and a belief that their parents still loved them; most continued to express love for their parents. A female adolescent explained that, "I needed a gentle hand to guide me, and I mean, they were just showing their love in a different way I guess. This is all I wanted was to be loved and they just had a different way of showing it." In describing children's loyalty, a professional noted that, "the parent does other things for them besides hitting them. Once in a while, they bring home a new pair of shoes, so they have a loyalty to that kind of person."

Adaptive coping skills were indicated by the children's ability to separate their parents' abusive behaviors from their parents' "good parent" role, and eventually to see the abusing actions of parents as unrelated to the child's own behaviors (i.e., as a result of parental stress or alcohol use, rather than the child's misbehavior). One adolescent stated, "If he had a bad day...was drunk... little things would set him off most of the time." Developmentally, this ability to separate parental behaviors generally occurred when the adolescents began to see themselves as sepa-

rate from their parents. Although their parents abused them, the adolescents were able to balance this behavior with times when they and their parents spent good times together. "If I said something wrong...I would get hit...When I first learned to ride a bike, I didn't like the way he did it...he took the training wheels off and pushed me...One morning, I found a bike on the porch...Since then, that's one thing I really love about him."

### *Theme Two: Normalizing the Abusive Environment*

For abused children, "norming" their abusive home environment provides a means to establish a functional state of equilibrium in an untrustworthy environment. A majority of adolescents agreed that the ability to tolerate an abusive parent was tied to acceptance of the abuse as ordinary family living. Although the professionals generally viewed being abused as a negative life-style, the adolescents viewed it as a common way of life. "Since it happened to me practically every day, and I grew up with it, I thought it was just something normal that happened." "Being hit was normal, a way of life."

Although abuse was by no means accepted, the expectation of being abused and the presence of abuse resulted in a sense of normalcy about the abuse. The adolescent's acceptance of the way things were—his or her adaptiveness—provided the protection of not feeling trapped in a frightening world. Normalizing the environment results in predictability for the children who, expecting possible abuse, can plan ways to avoid situations when their parents may be more inclined to be abusive. The perception that an abusive home environment was not out of the ordinary served as a protective factor and contributed to the youths' resilience.

Insight [Wolin & Wolin 1993]—a sensing or intuition that family life is untrustworthy—provides a context for the abusive events as an ordinary way of life. Because the stressfulness of any life event depends on a child's appraisal of it [Luthar & Zigler 1991],

the abilities of children to adjust to an abusive environment may depend on their ability to distinguish the abusing parent from the good parent.

### *Theme Three: Invisibility to the Abuser*

Resilient children establish perceptions of safety by creating a sense of invisibility, that is, absenting themselves from the view of the abuser. Both professionals and adolescents describe behaviors indicative of the ability of the child to become "invisible" through either externalizing or internalizing actions. Externalizing actions include absenting the house, going to one's room, not talking to the abuser, or just "staying out of their way." "I wouldn't go around them for a couple of days. I kept my distance. I spent the majority of my time in my bedroom, sometimes under the bed. I would go to my closet." "I had to lie to stay out of trouble...when I was older, I ran away." "I like running, jogging, getting out, and walking."

Internalizing actions included daydreaming, playing with a variety of toys, reading, and engaging in artistic activities. "I would draw, play with my sister or just read. I had a make-believe friend named Fred. He talked to me and was somebody to play with, somebody to help me out." "I would play with my toys. I had a bear for a make-believe friend. I would talk to him, that he was the only one that really cared about me, the only one who is there, who understands. He would just listen." "I made little worlds with my Barbie dolls and had hideaway places with them, castles and unicorns and horses and flying horses." "I had this really huge bear...I used to sit on it and laugh and tell it stories when I was little." "I started writing in sixth grade...it helped me because I didn't think that anybody really listened to me and at least, I knew that I got it out of my system somehow."

The ability to avoid being in the presence of the abuser or to create a perception of invisibleness became a means by which these children managed the ongoing possibility of being mal-

treated. From the data, it was apparent that the ability to avoid abuse was a skill. Although the children were not always able to avoid abuse, the behaviors they used were reinforced and became skills that minimized the opportunity to be in harm's way.

This sense of invisibility was also observed through dissociation or dissociative-like behaviors, through which adolescents took themselves elsewhere in thought. Professionals observed that children cope with abuse by engaging in distancing behaviors either physically or mentally. "She would lose parts of conversations. She would shut down and go somewhere else. She wasn't aware of where she went. It was almost like a daydream state." "They tend to be creative. They like to draw. They like to write poetry. They like to play control games where they are the person in charge of the game and make the rules." "They make their own little world...and close off. They seem to channel energy toward a safety zone...reading, drawing, playing sports. They pick a safe place. The real world as they want it to be...like a fantasy island."

Using invisibility (flight, fantasy, and/or dissociative-like actions) as a coping strategy provides a perception of safety for children by putting them in control of their created worlds. They feel empowered to protect themselves from the hurt. When individuals believe events and outcomes can be controlled, learned helplessness is avoided. Although dissociative actions are generally viewed as maladaptive, within an abusive environment, children's use of such behaviors as avoidance, manipulation, withdrawal, and dishonesty can be adaptive ways to cope with their maltreatment. For children left to their own survival instincts or skills, these behaviors become protective factors that support the child's growth.

#### *Theme Four: Self-Value*

From the previous three themes a fourth theme of self-value emerged: children and adolescents successfully established their

own value through their ability to overcome negative thoughts about themselves. "I was five and I wasn't big enough to make decisions. I was just a little girl. When I was 12, I started looking at things differently."

Being valued meant being loved, respected, and belonging. It involved adolescents' perceptions of being cared for, being "someone," and having a positive attitude about themselves. "The abuse experience made me stronger...cause I have had to work for a lot of what I have. I am funny at times. I am loud. I can be obnoxious at times, but I do understand people." All but one adolescent had religious beliefs about a higher power that watched over and protected them. "No matter whatever happens, I know God will always protect me from everything." When valued by another, particularly by one who is perceived as more powerful than the abusing parent, the resilient child acquires a sense of being someone. "I want my parents to know that I am a happy person, and I am going to show my dad that I am somebody."

Professionals saw a "toughness" in children who succeed after experiencing an abusive home. By not showing weaknesses, children actually reinforce strengths within themselves and enhance their self-value. Knowing that they can be strong and withstand the abuse enhances the value they place on themselves.

### *Theme Five: Future Vision*

The final theme predicting resilience was adolescent awareness of and actualization of future capabilities. A good indicator that children have achieved resilience in coping with maltreatment is their ability to visualize how their future might look. Resilient adolescents have positive future expectations, an attitude of hopefulness, dreams, goals, and initiative. "I have been trying to be independent. I have a job." "Yes, I am going to graduate...no matter what." Although cautious, professionals viewed those adolescents who had optimism for the future as having achieved mastery over their past.

Positive future expectations may modify a child's response to ways of adapting to stress. Such expectations may reduce the degree to which a child perceives an event as threatening or aversive. This possibility is consistent with the finding that optimism in adults is associated with active, sustained efforts to resolve problems [Wyman et al. 1993]. Warschaw and Barlow [1995], for example, write that resilience is rooted in hope and the ability to imagine that what is not yet seen can be better than what is known. The imagined future in which there are reciprocal, caring relationships and acceptance may become a reality.

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### **Application**

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Assessing and observing behavior from a resilience perspective is an alternative paradigm to the disease model of viewing behaviors. It is a positive approach that identifies strengths in individuals in relation to their experiences and construction of social realities, and provides a basis for collaborative problem solving and individual empowerment. The resilience perspective also recognizes that despite maltreatment's deleterious impact on development, not all children are equally affected in a negative way by their maltreatment experiences.

The five resilience factors identified above are useful in understanding the behaviors that occur in adoptive placements. They provide a foundation for resolving the dilemmas and challenges of parenting children in adoptive relationships.

In practice, it is vital that prospective adoptive and foster parents have knowledge of these factors. In relation to adoptive parent preparation programs, reframing the behaviors of children/adolescents from a resilience perspective can assist prospective adoptive parents to understand how children who expect abuse learn techniques to stay out of harm's way. It also provides adoptive parents with an understanding that, although these behaviors may present problems and lead to control battles with the

adoptive children as those children struggle to maintain decisionmaking control, the behaviors were vital for the child's survival in an abusive home,

Knowledge of these factors is also valuable in working to further the understanding of children's and adolescents' behaviors and to prepare them for adoption. Assisting children to recognize their behaviors as strengths and skills, as opposed to problems, affirms the creativity and meaning they have given to their life experiences. Children have a greater opportunity to resolve past life experiences and move on to new relationships in this context.

Talking with adoptive parents and adopted children about strengths and skills rather than deficits enhances their understanding of their interactions and behaviors, and serves as a tool to help achieve the goal of forming a new family. The work among professionals, adoptive parents, and adopted children is characterized by problem solving rather than fault finding or blaming. If postadoption crises arise, an understanding of resilience factors can shift the focus to the meaning of the behaviors presented. Intervention approaches can then be geared toward changing the outcomes of behaviors rather than changing the skills demonstrated in the behaviors.

### *Loyalty to Parents*

One of the most difficult behaviors to understand may be the abused child's loyalty to and defensiveness of his or her parents. Most children, whether abused or not, believe or need to believe that their parents still love them. When children are able to experience a balance of the good and bad parent, they can maintain their self-integrity without fear of or actual annihilation. Children unable to achieve this separateness remain closely tied to the problems of their parents, and often believe that the abuse is the result of their own "misbehaviors."

The development of loyalty allows foster and adopted chil-

dren to attach to others, specifically new parents. The belief that one is being loved by a parent allows for the preservation of the self and, therefore, the maintenance of a sense of personal worth and value. The strength of this belief of being loved by the "good" parent provides a positive basis for children's identity development and consequently, children can care about themselves and can attach to others. Because of the importance of feeling loved by the good parent, it is crucial that children in adoptive homes maintain positive connections to their pasts. These connections establish a historical foundation for the integration of the child's identity, a major challenge for adopted children.

Adoptive parents must understand this loyalty by the child to the birth parents if they are to assist the child in the ongoing grieving process. For adopted children, joining a new family represents a loss and leads to a need to talk about past family members. When adoptive parents are unable to discuss children's loyalties to their birth families, they create obstacles to building adoption relationships by closing the child off to grieving and the resolution of loss. Adoptive children may be stymied in further establishing their identity within a new family and their families may miss the opportunity to support the child's grieving, and to ameliorate his or her pain, hurt, and anguished feelings.

Engaging the child in the development of a lifebook encourages a dialogue around loss issues and creates additional opportunities for grieving. Adoptive families can begin, complete, or review a lifebook with their adopted children and, in so doing, learn about the coping behaviors that those children used in prior life situations. This process allows adoptive families to establish their children's place in the biological family and their relationship to their birth parents, and serves as a critical step toward defining the children's new place in the adoptive family.

### *Norming of the Environment*

Norming of the environment reflects how resilient children make sense of their world. When children are able to prepare for abu-

sive incidents, they have the sense of some control over what happens to them within their environment. Without such control, their world is seen as idiosyncratic and arbitrary. To the adoptive family, the child may seem more mature and/or independent, and the adoptive parents may feel that the child is not attaching or is too aloof. Behaviorally, however, the child is maintaining distance as a protective barrier until he or she can further assess the predictability of the new environment.

Because these children are good planners, it is important to bring them into the family decisionmaking processes whenever possible. Giving these children choices provides opportunities for new, age-appropriate areas of control. The process also conveys to the children that their skills at strategizing are valued. Children are likely to gradually forego areas of control that are not age-appropriate when they recognize that the family will not make decisions that will hurt them.

In application, it is important to recognize that resilient children do not see themselves as victims, as they have separated themselves from their abusers. The children should not be given a "victim" mentality, but helped to understand their acceptance that their prior way of life was normal so that they can move on. Encouraging a victimization outlook sends children confusing messages regarding the acceptance of who they are and contradicts their strength-based adaptive skills.

### *Invisibility to the Abuser*

Invisibility to the abuser often involves children using internal processes to create perceptual worlds of safety for themselves. Clues to the presence of these processes include activities involving play, games, music and art; role playing; a child with a "spacey" look; and "toughness." These coping behaviors are the means by which resilient children remain unavailable to their abusers. When they reoccur in the adoptive family, they may appear as efforts by the children to distance or isolate themselves, or as a refusal to join in family activities. Although professionals

and families may view such behaviors as maladaptive, the avoidance, manipulation, withdrawal, and dishonesty that children use to cope with abuse have been adaptive in the past. In the new family, they are clues that the child has gone to his or her own world of safety, because the child does not feel safe with these "strangers."

The challenge for adopted children is when and if to give up their self-created worlds of safety. If the child does not perceive safety in the adopted family, he or she may never "join" as a family member. The child who is able to establish a perception of safety in the new home environment will have a gradually lessened need to return to his or her "world of safety." The child's adjustment to the "new world" of the adoptive family is key to understanding his or her feelings of safety.

For the adoptive family, the challenge is to respect the need of the adopted child to be in a created world of safety while he or she tests the "safety" of the new family world. The adoptive parent-child relationship is likely to be enhanced when adoptive parents understand and are capable of first joining the child in the "child's world." Behaviorally, there will be an "on again, off again" style of relationship building until the child feels safe in the new environment.

Entry into the child's world can be facilitated by play therapy and the development of an understanding of the meanings that children give to their transitional objects, such as stuffed animals and toys. Listening to their child's favorite story can clue parents into issues with which the child may be struggling—issues often inherent in the tale. For example, children who identify with Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz often have abandonment and loss issues.

### *Self-Value*

Resilient children whose parents have failed to provide them with a sense of being valued often attain that sense of value by per-

ceiving that others value them, whether real or imagined. Through reading, children can escape into worlds that adults may see as doomed childhood fantasy but that provide assurance, methodical thinking, and optimism for the child [Wolin & Wolin 1993]. Through their own created worlds, children can be in control and be loved and valued by those with whom they choose to identify until there is opportunity to receive a sense of value from an outside source.

Behavioral indicators of self-value are confidence, outward actions, independence, risk taking, an ability to care for others, and taking care of oneself and one's possessions. When children behave from this perspective, there is opportunity for give and take in the relationship-building process. One useful technique for enhancing self-value in the adoptive relationship building process is the concept of the positive interaction cycle developed by Fahlberg [1991]. When children are able to repeatedly respond positively to positive interactions initiated by parents, self-worth and self-esteem are enhanced.

### *Future View of Life*

A good indicator that children have achieved resilience in coping with maltreatment is their perception of the future and their ability to visualize how a future might be. Abused children need to have some resolution of the past and must be able to make plans and take actions to actualize those plans for future events. Resilient children are optimistic that they will achieve positive outcomes in the goals they set, are able to accept that they are members of at least two families (biological and adoptive), and can integrate the two families as they establish their own identities. They can accept the support and caring of their adopted families and are actively engaged in family activities within normative adolescent development. They can now talk about the past with acceptance and remain hopeful about a positive future.

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## Conclusion

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Although the five resiliency themes presented here are by no means exhaustive, they provide a way of thinking about the development of the parent-child relationship. Children's behaviors must be explored as skills resulting from coping with their abusive histories rather than as negative attributes. What appears to adults to be maladaptive defense mechanisms may, in reality, be quite adaptive for children attempting to cope with abuse. For professionals and new parents, a "new" view of "old" behaviors as strengths and creative problem-solving techniques supports the parent-child relationship building process.

Children are forgiving and willing to give parents numerous opportunities to "get it right." Through their behaviors, activities, and interests, children provide clues as to how they cope with life events. Observing and engaging them in their play and activities provides the opportunity for asking for, listening to, and acknowledging their thoughts and feelings. Through the experience of talking with caring adults, children and adolescents can find their pain and joys validated and, over time, can find an affirmation of their value. They then can become active participants in developing new relationships. ♦

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