

A Road Map to Resiliency

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Introduction: Stages of Resiliency

- Shock and/or Denial
- Overwhelmed/Panic
- Worry about the future
- Guilt/Blame
- Shame
- Mad at God and/or the World
- Mad at Provider
- Sadness and/or Grief
- Wanting to quit –
- Acceptance
- Advocacy

Shock/Denial

What this stage is like

- Thinking and feeling like this isn't happening
- It can't be as bad as it seems
- Question your own judgments
- Not just you denying, others refuse to see problem
- It's just a stage– it will go away
- They can't be right, my child is fine
- They don't understand
- They are picking on my child
- My child doesn't really need this service (medication, therapy, special ed, etc.)
- My child doesn't really have "that" (whatever "that" diagnosis might be)

Assets of Shock/Denial

- Nature's way of protecting us from difficult experiences
- Sink in gradually instead of overwhelming us

Pitfalls of Shock/Denial

- Delay getting help
- Stigma / fear people will know
- Tensions can develop
- Problem can get worse while you are waiting to get help
- Isolating
- Having to make decisions when you don't have enough information
- Frustration in getting help –lack of awareness for central place to get information
- Lack of correct language to talk about the problem
- Lack of correct exchange of information

Resources Needed

- Time to let the information sink in
- Specific information on why someone thinks there is a problem
- Good friends to listen to you
- Caring people who will gently but persistently nudge you into seeing what is actually happening
- Time
- --Accepting professionals who allow for this stage rather than persist that parents "do" immediately whatever the professionals think is appropriate

Signs you might be getting stuck there

- Not going for help after an extended period of time
- Repeatedly missing appointments with providers to get assessment
- Refusing appropriate help which is offered

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Take off your shoes and relax
- Find someone to confide in
- Get information, do research, reaffirm your gut instincts
- Take care of yourself
- Admit that I'm stuck and don't know how to care for myself
- Go to restaurant and let someone wait on you
- Go to the FFCMH conference
- Read novels—escape is not a bad thing now and then
- Get to the heart of what's bothering me
- Ask for specific reasons for diagnosis
- Find a support group run by parents so that it doesn't become a "therapy" group but is more than that. It serves to support, not treat parents.
- Spend time with others to focus on things outside of SED

Overwhelmed/Panic

What this stage is like

- Thinking or feeling like I can't do this
- It all seems too much
- Reduced capacity to absorb information or make decisions
- Fearful for my child
- Feeling scared – of what diagnosis means, what medications might do, of a new phase of your life together
- Seeing your child deteriorate
- Being afraid of my child

Assets of Panic

- Openness to help
- Can give you energy
 - To seek resources
 - Gather information
 - Communicate with professionals
- Adrenalin Rush
- Determination to fight for services

Pitfalls of Panic

- High anxiety reduces ability to implement recommended treatment
- Problems caused by increased irritability

Resources Needed

- A parent advocate or a *good* case manager
- Someone to talk things through with
- People to be patient with you
- Parents only support group
- Take time to cry, Admit my fears
- Information
- Disorder, medications, treatment options
- Resources, school issues, legal issues
- Reading material and web sites

Signs you might be getting stuck there

- Continuing to feel like this after treatment begins and your child's situation begins to stabilize
- Stubborn refusal to seek information on prescriptions, options, school programs
- Reverting to denial
- Withdrawal, not wanting to get out of bed
- Saying to service provider, "What are YOU going to do now"?
- Abuse of alcohol or prescription drugs

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Getting an assessment for your own anxiety, possibly including medication and therapy
- Physical exercise
- Talk to a friend, work with your advocate

Worry About the Future (a subset of Overwhelmed/Panic)

What this stage is like

Thinking things like:

- Will my child ever finish school?
- Get a job? Will it be meaningful?
- Will my child live independently?
- Will s/he have the financial resources needed for adult life?
- What will happen when I'm gone?
- Wishing my child would die before me.
- What will happen to my other kids when my child commits suicide?
- Will the police have to shoot my child?
- Will I have to give up custody to get my child services?
- Will my child end up in jail?
- What will the quality of life be for my child?
- Will my child get lost in the system?
- Will my child's illness stop him/her from achieving his/her dreams?
- Will I have to raise my child's children?

Assets

- Motivation to seek information
- Plan ahead
- Take needed action, like applying for long term assistance for my child
- Being too stubborn to die
- Gives me energy to accomplish what is needed

Pitfalls

- Negative impact of anxiety on your own life and your family
- Burden on other children as they grow up
- Fear of dying
- Exhaustion

Resources Needed

- School transition plans
- Information about Social Security, Vocational Rehabilitation programs, applying for services
- Information about disability programs at colleges
- Vocational courses

Signs you might be getting stuck here

- Continued anxiety without action (flare-ups can be expected, especially at difficult moments)
- Not moving forward with grief

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Getting the above information
- Developing a new plan as the situation changes

Guilt/Blame

What this stage is like

- Thinking or feeling "What did I do to cause this?"
- Thinking or feeling "It must be his/her/their fault"
- Hearing people blame your parenting skills enough that you begin to internalize it and magnify your own guilt
- Misguided support

Assets of Guilt/Blame

- Motivation to take responsibility
- Energy to try new techniques
- Courage to examine your mistakes and learn from them
- Developing or rekindling spiritual support
- Recognition that illness has a positive influence in your own and family growth

Pitfalls of Guilt/Blame

- Can tear down your self esteem and self confidence as a parent
- Can contribute to depression and anxiety
- Can leave you vulnerable to manipulation by people who want to do things their way (as if it is the only choice)

Resources needed

- Information about the cause of your child's problem to the extent that it can be found
- Reassurance that it is not your fault, that you did the best you could
- Friendly encouragement
- Spiritual life
- Belief in healing however it may come and to whom (either you, your child, your family)

Signs you might be getting stuck here

- Slipping into clinical depression
- Paralysis – being unable to do anything to get out of this

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Attending a good support group
- Seeing a good therapist
- Using spiritual support
- Recognizing that what other people think doesn't matter, though it can still hurt
- Having the courage to educate those who judge
- Being able to detach from those who judge
- Teaching others about mental illness with children –telling my story

Shame

What this stage is like

- Thinking or feeling like hiding yourself or your child
- Withdrawal from public activities
- Because your child might make a scene
- People might notice that something is wrong
- To avoid further having experienced looks, criticism, etc.

Assets of Shame

- Sparing yourself and your child further pain
- Sparing others from the ugliest moments
- Sparing your child from a sense of failure from humiliating experiences

Pitfalls of Shame

- Isolation, withdrawal from important and needed support
- Community activities, friends, church, etc.
- Missing out on important and positive aspects of life
- Inner pain of the shame

Resources needed

- Education on the causes of mental illness, and the causes of your child's behavior
- Reassurance that it isn't shameful to have an illness
- Meeting others who are working to challenge and reduce the stigma
- Telling your story
- Read [My Son, My Son](#).

Signs that you may be getting stuck here

- Continued avoidance of public situations that you would really like to go to

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Acceptance of your child's illness
- Attending a parents support group
- Identification of coping strategies for public events for you and your child
- Giving up trying to please everyone
- Courage to detach

Mad at God/the World

What this stage is like

- Thinking or feeling things like "This isn't fair", "Why me Lord?"
- Mad at everyone and everything in general
- Mad at parents of "normal" kids
- Anger for no reason that you can identify

Assets of Anger with God/the world

- Energy to fight the battle
- Possibility of deeper, more mature faith after working it through
- Motivation to research your child's issues

Pitfalls of Anger with God/the world

- Danger of slipping into depression
- Depletion of personal energy
- Falling into self-pity

Resources needed

- Physical exercise – an outlet for excess energy
- An understanding friend or therapist to vent with

Signs you might be getting stuck here

- Continuing to be angry all the time despite progress in your actual situation

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Acknowledging your feelings
- Acknowledging that it isn't fair
- Finding constructive ways to channel the anger

- Energy to work on solution
- Energy to change systems of care

- Losing faith or relationships with faith community
- Failure to recognize need for resilience for parents

- Sharing with others who are in the same situation, realizing that you aren't the only one
- Remembering—a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down –using humor

- Feeling like your anger is getting out of control, or is coming out in ways that is destructive to you and your family

- Write out your feelings
- Attending a parent support group

Mad at Provider

What this stage is like

- A specific incident or series of incidents triggers anger
- Lack of services
- Inappropriate comments

Assets of Anger with Provider

- Energy to confront the problem
- Opportunity to reevaluate provider services

Pitfalls of Anger with Provider

- Getting so angry you say or do something to make the problem worse
- Deteriorating relationship between you and provider negatively impacting your child

Resources needed

- Legal information and sometimes counsel
- Information on treatment alternatives, educational alternatives, etc.
- A good advocate

- Failure to follow through on IEP, treatment plan, promised help, etc.
- Using the legal system seeking help and finding it making things worse

- Motivation to do research and work for solution
- Opportunity to develop your assertiveness

- Anger spilling over into the rest of your life
- Internalized anger leading to depression

- Patient and understanding family, friends, co-workers, employers
- Playing—having fun, taking a break

Signs you might be getting stuck here

- Still feeling angry after the problem is resolved

Ways to try to get unstuck

- A good support group
- A provider who acknowledges anger without personalizing it and becoming defensive
- Knowledge of other options
- Involvement in church or other enjoyable activities
- Working out better relationship with provider
- Celebrating progress
- Playing

Sadness/Grief

What this stage is like

- Feeling sad, thinking that my child will never be able to ...
- Seeing “typical” kids in “normal” activities that aren’t an option for your child and regretting that they aren’t part of your life
- Knowing that your woundedness needs to heal from the inside out
- Revisit all the feelings each time I have to go through a new stage (IEP, Diagnosis change)
- Grief each time a child graduates and not yours
- Anger/Sadness at the reality of other children who remind us of the loss we experience, the loss of dreams, missed milestones
- Frustration that our children’s accomplishments are not recognized

Assets of Sadness/Grief

- It is a part of the healing process even though it doesn’t feel like it
- Openness to accepting help
- Prioritizing activities
- Appreciating happiness and joy more
- Recognition of many famous people who both had a mental illness and who have given the world great accomplishments
- Seeing that my/our kids have great potential

Pitfalls of Grief

- Possibility of destructive behaviors
- If it isn’t resolved it can lead to depression
- Grief that as my child succeeds, services are dropped
- Fear that if I do something wrong I’ll mess up my kid more

Resources needed

- Understanding that sadness and sense of loss is real – loss of dreams and a planned future
- Being kind to yourself – doing healthy comforting things
- Taking bubble baths
- Walk through a garden or forest
- Listen to music, journal
- Go out to eat—be waited on
- Seeking a balance between quiet time and being with supportive others – not isolating but not over doing
- Recognizing that my/our child may reach milestones later in life
- Not giving up when my/our child achieves milestones late
- Choosing a ***safe community***
- Willingness to educate others

Signs you might be getting stuck here

- Developing symptoms of clinical depression that last over two weeks
- Difficulties with eating
- Difficulties with sleeping (over or under)
- Excessive crying

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Taking time to mourn
- Taking time to celebrate the good things about your child

- Getting an evaluation of your depression and accepting help
- Explaining to groups –from the staff of grocery store to Congress– about diagnosis

I Want to Quit

What this stage is like

- Thinking or feeling things like:
 - I want to give up
 - I want to run away from home
 - I quit
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or like you just can't do it any more

Assets

- Openness to accepting help
- Motivation to ask family, friends and providers for help
- Can lead to prioritizing your activities

Pitfalls

- Possibility of destructive behaviors
- Excessive drinking
- Substance abuse
- Spending
- Gambling
- Impulsive relationships
- Can lead to depression

Resources Needed

- A healthy way to take a break
- Exercise, respite care, a vacation
- More support from providers, family, and friends

Signs you might be getting stuck here

- Destructive behavior
- Knowing you need help and not seeking it
- Feeling like this for an extended length of time

Ways to try to get unstuck

- Acknowledging where you are and using the resources
- Come to a conference
- Be thankful for problems you have
- Have a vacation (motel room) read, shop,
- Go to work
- Day of pampering
- LAUGHTER

Acceptance

Acceptance may take different forms with different people, and look different at different times for the same person.

Examples of Acceptance

- Accepting limitations and offers of help
- Learning to ask for help
- Identifying what you're best at
- Believing you will survive and your child will too

Advocacy

- I can't fix my child, what can I do to fix the system?
- Using some of your energy to become involved in a parent advocacy or support group to help others as well as helping yourself
- Becoming involved in your school, your community, state issues, etc.
- Focusing on issues other than mental health

The Cycle of Resiliency

Conclusion

For many of us this cycle ends in advocacy for ourselves and others, becoming a strength and a celebration of our experiences and guiding us to make the experiences of others less painful.