



Well@Work Podcast

Episode 20: Building Resilience Through Relationships

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky's Center on Trauma and Children, this podcast is brought to you by grant from SAMHSA. On this episode licensed marriage and family therapist Alex Clark discusses how your relationships can build resilience. And now, Alex Clark.

Hello! I'm Alex Clark, a licensed marriage and family therapist and project coordinator at the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. I'm also a husband, a father, and a co-worker. In this Well@Work podcast I'm going to talk with you about how to contribute to and benefit from the relationships in your life to positively adapt to stressors and build resiliency together. To explore relational resilience let's briefly turn our attention to the ideas of spillover and crossover. Spillover is a process where experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can and will be present across domains or roles within the same individual. Why does this matter? Because the more effort I use to meet work demands, the less energy I have to meet family demands, and vice versa. This can create difficulties with participating effectively and sufficiently in our roles as a partner, parent, worker, or friend. Crossover is a process where one individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors cross over to and influence another person. It's important to note that both positivity and negativity can cross over. Our own stress can disrupt others, but our calmness can enrich others. So how can we use spill over and crossover to build relational resilience? Let's take a look at this through the lens of Tina, a therapist who is also married with children. Between safety precautions and clients, Tina absorbs much during her day, this wears her out. When it's time to leave, Tina hurries home only to be met by the needs of her partner, her family, and her home; she's already exhausted from work and Tina is beginning to notice that her exhaustion is also affecting her partner and children. So what can Tina do? Here are some tips that can help Tina, and those of us like her, who are experiencing the negative effects of spillover and crossover. Tip number one: use a shutdown ritual. A shutdown ritual is a boundary marker between work and life that replaces or enhances the commute from work, it reduces your cognitive load, and signifies a clear transition to a new role or domain. How we transition matters, here's how to do it. First set an alarm 15 minutes before the end of the day to remind you to wind down. Use this time to close up shop, tidy your desk, and write down your to-do list for the next day. By noting next day tasks, you free yourself from carrying those in your mind all evening. Then state your termination phrase out loud, something like "schedule shutdown complete." Lastly, if work-related thoughts emerge, just remind yourself "I wouldn't have said the phrase unless everything was captured and I was on top of it all, therefore there's no need to worry." Tip number two: give the gift of being a well-regulated partner. Whether you're Tina or Tina's partner, you can enhance relational resilience by being available, responsive, and engaged, these three qualities promote safe and secure attachment. In couples, an emotionally unavailable partner may be avoidant, which crosses over to and makes the other partner feel unsupported and alone. Conversely, one partner can hold enough hope for both people, enriching their relationship. Verbalizing needs draws partners together. Meeting a partner's needs builds trust and security. Remember that relational repairs are as or more important as getting it right the first time. Tip number three: make space for each other to transition. We all need space to transition and manage work stress that may be spilling over to home, making space can look like a few minutes of alone time, playing with the kids when you first come in the door, or diving right into a conversation. Early evenings after a work day can be volatile when resources are low, stress is high, and relational connections are not felt. Instead of viewing ourselves as depleted and needing time alone, we need to recognize our need for significant shared connections with loved ones. We don't need less of others, we need more, and we need more together. Tip number four: give



the gift of being a well-regulated parent. Did you know that self-regulation in children primarily emerges by first being co-regulated by their caregivers? Coping with the negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or fear is a more developmentally difficult task for children than coping with a positive emotion. Until children have learned how to regulate their negative feelings, it is vital for parents to co-regulate children through these experiences. In our responses to our children's negative emotions, we are providing valuable information to them about appropriate emotional displays and successful coping strategies. Tip number five: structure their world to remove chaos from yours. Parents also regulate their children's behavior through structuring. Structuring refers to parent's organization of children's environments to facilitate children's competence. The negative impact of stressful conditions can be counteracted by environmental influences like a structured home environment. In closing, our own stability will cross over to and affect others, centering them and pulling them towards being regulated themselves, this creates vital space for the type of high-quality connections needed during this time. I hope you have the opportunity to give and receive the gift of a well-regulated loved one. We can always be more resilient together. For more ideas, check out our website in the video description and remember to stay well at work and well at home together. Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast, follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work.