

AMCHP 2007 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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Medical Home: The Bridge Across the Quality Chasm

MICHAEL D. RESNICK: Thank you very much. How many of you are the parents of teenage kids or have been the parents of teenage kids? Then you are collectors of stories of adolescents. We could spend the rest of the afternoon talking about stories about our teenage kids and whether you are a parent or whether your work takes you in this direction, we all have stories that show the fundamental primal role of adults in the lives of our kids and the fundamental role of adults in promoting the healthy development of adolescents. Now, these stories compel us, but beyond the stories we are uplifted by knowing that there is now a substantial body of scientific evidence that shows us this fundamental role that adults play in protecting and promoting the healthy development of teenage kids.

So, what do I mean when I talk about healthy youth development? We are talking about an intentional, deliberate process of providing support, relationships, experiences, resources and opportunities that promote positive outcomes for our youth. The kinds of outcomes we're describing here are capacity, confidence, competence and character, the things that we dream of and hope for all of our adolescents. And the good news, folks, is that today there is a solid base of

scientific evidence that shows us that when we use deliberate evidence-based strategies to promote healthy youth development, we can reduce the risky behaviors of our young people and beyond this. By providing opportunities to develop skill and competencies and have positive experiences with caring adults who have high expectations and a positive attitude toward youth, we then increase the likelihood that these young people themselves will grow up to be caring, capable adults. We are talking about nurturing the resilience of our adolescents.

So, I invite you to think with me for a moment about this wonderful concept, this notion of resilience, this ability to bounce back in the face of adversity. And I would guess that each and every one of you in this room can think of a story, can think of at least one person, perhaps yourself, perhaps someone you know and love who fit that profile of overcoming the odds. Somewhere along the way they overcame enormous adversity. And the question is how did they do it? What happened along the way to redirect them away from a downhill path? Why didn't that path turn into a destructive avalanche? What kept that avalanche from then becoming their destiny?

Well, the image that I find most useful for thinking about resilience is to think about a bridge, and it's most appropriate because the concept of resilience actually didn't come from child development or child psychology. It originated in physics and metallurgy. And those who were interested in the idea of resilience

before the 1970s, in fact, were builders and scientists who were focused on the capacity of physical materials to resist stress. So, I invite you to picture a bridge on a cold winter's day. Think about a bridge in my home state of Minnesota that right now has 28 inches of snow on the ground, and that bridge is supporting hundreds of cars and trucks. It is exposed to all kinds of stresses: cold, wind shear, vibration. And we know that that bridge is able to perform its function because of two essential resources, the internal strengths of the building material and the external supports like cables and concrete footings. Internal strengths, external supports. So, of course, you see the analogy. And the evidence is clear today that caring, competent adults are a critical source of that external support that strengthens the resilience of our youth and increases the likelihood that they too will grow up to be caring, competent and engaged adults. So, how do we make the case? How do we go about making the case for investing in the healthy development of our youth?