Connecting with Children: A Conceptual Framework for Promoting Psychological Resilience and Prosocial Behavior

by

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Dedication

I dedicate my work to the short life of my sister Diane and all the lonely children in the world who need a caring someone with whom to talk and be heard.

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Abstract

This article offers a psychological resilience conceptual framework as part of a structure-bonding-connecting parenting model. This deductive framework represents a new wave of resilience study by focusing on *prevention* with parents having the mindset of "connecting" with their children's thoughts beginning in early childhood. The definitions presented as part of this framework afford the researcher measurable variables. Defining the term "thought-fears" as being psychological as opposed to emotional permits researchers to study the thoughts that result in emotions. Handling thought-fears that limit a child or cause harm is the key to developing psychological resilience. Positive thought-fears that motivate and protect influence prosocial behavior. The study of psychological resilience is suggested and illustrated by experiential examples of parents taking time one-on-one to connect with their young child's thoughts by listening patiently and without judgment. Researchers discovered that young children have profound intelligence and epidemiologists conclude that a child's predisposition does not necessarily imply predetermination. This creates possibilities for the prevention of social ills such as addiction, anxiety, bullying, and depression by bringing out the best in children with communication based on established trust. The deductive-conceptual framework found in this article lays the foundation—with accompanying research—for a new field of study, the purpose of which is to delve into opportunities for children to "connect" with their parents in order to *prevent* social ills and exhibit prosocial behavior.

Keywords deductive-conceptual framework; parent-child connecting; prevention of social ills; prosocial behavior; psychological resilience; thought-fears

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According to the Child Trends research center (Bartlett & Stratford, 2021), the critical problems society faces concerning children's mental health have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the Family First Act of 2018 uses evidence-based models for intervention programs (McKlindon & Sun, 2020), it does not address *prevention* that is based on the parent-child relationship. This article offers a deductive-conceptual framework that addresses the development of psychological resilience and prosocial behavior beginning in early childhood (children aged 0 to 8), specifically for prevention. The effectiveness of this psychological resilience framework is predicated on the ability of parents to gain a child's deep and lasting trust by first listening to their child's thoughts, letting the child process the thoughts, and then offering the child guidance to handle the thoughts.

Currently, a fourth wave of resilience science exists that attends to multisystemic intervention by integrating knowledge and disciplines from various sectors of society to understand the human capacity to adapt to challenges (Masten, 2021; Ungar, 2021; Wright et al., 2013). The psychological resilience framework removes the prevailing ambiguity associated with the word "resilience" and focuses on family prevention by defining "psychological resilience" using a concept named "thought-fears". The goal of a parent when guiding their child to handle thought-fears is to have the child manage thought-fears that may limit or harm and embrace thought-fears that can motivate and protect. Developing psychological resilience and prosocial behavior in a child is to have the child self-actualize and gain a thought capacity to face and handle negative experiences and thoughts in a positive manner (Podraza & Brackin, 2020).

The psychological resilience framework contains definitions for psychological resilience and supporting concepts for the parent-child connecting process. To allow for well-defined research, the psychological resilience framework defines emotions and thoughts as separate entities, using the concept of thought-fears as being of the mind. Depending on the circumstances at any given time, having a thought-fear may or may not result in an emotion. A successful parent-child connecting process in early childhood allows for possibilities for the prevention of social, emotional, and mental problems such as addiction, anxiety, bullying, and depression. This paper is divided into five sections:

1. **The Need for a Conceptual Framework for Parent-Child Connecting in Early Childhood.** In this section, the need for social change through prevention that begins in early childhood is established. An argument is presented that justifies the need for a deductive-conceptual framework that defines parent-child connecting in terms of thoughts behind emotions, with the goals of developing psychological resilience and prosocial behavior.
2. **The Structure-Bonding-Connecting Parenting Model.** The parent-child "connecting" process is placed in the context of family, where "structure" and "bonding" are defined as separate and necessary categories of parenting.
3. **The Psychological Resilience Framework.** A deductive-conceptual framework for connecting with children is elucidated that defines psychological resilience in terms of handling certain thoughts defined herein as "thought-fears". Handling thought-fears to promote psychological resilience and prosocial behavior is defined as separate from emotions.

4. **Discussion: Use of the Psychological Resilience Framework.** Experiential examples are given to demonstrate the implementation of the psychological resilience framework and the reactions of children.
5. **Discussion: Possibilities for Social Change.** Child-centered research to investigate possibilities for social change is discussed. Short-term qualitative and quantitative research can be implemented to measure parent-child connecting and its effect on psychological resilience and prosocial behavior. Long-term quantitative studies can measure social change.

The Need for a Conceptual Framework for Parent-Child Connecting in Early Childhood

Inspiration for focusing on early parent-child relationships comes from Maté's (2018, 2019) research and work with intervention for addiction and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The concept of early parent-child connecting for prevention is an extension of Maté's conclusions about how young children are profoundly influenced by what happens and what does not happen in early childhood (Maté, 2018, 2019; Neufeld & Maté, 2014). In the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study by Podraza and Brackin (2020), a conclusion derived from interviews with social workers was that there is a need for a framework that includes the thoughts of young children and the relationship with their parents that goes beyond dealing primarily with emotions and behavior. A prevention strategy is necessary in order to enter into a child's thought-world while being prepared to nurture the thoughts that motivate and protect while guiding the child to handle the limiting and harming thoughts. As social ills are prevalent in our society, there is a need to address the parent-child relationship early using a deductive-conceptual framework with precise definitions and a focus on prevention.

The Need for Social Change

Many societal ills have roots in or can be prevented during children's early lives; such issues include addiction, anxiety, bullying, crime, depression, divorce, drug abuse, eating disorders, hate, materialism, obesity, racism, rage, sexual abuse, suicide, unwanted pregnancy, and violence. In addition, there have been school shootings and an increasing suicide rate among teens. Based on 2007-2015 data for teens aged 15 to 19, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that male suicides increased by 31% and female suicides by 50%, with the highest rates occurring in the last year of the study. With growing unfavorable statistics, there has been an ongoing need for intervention that deals with the adverse childhood events (ACEs) that cause trauma (Jones et al., 2020).

For prevention, it is critical to address individual socioemotional needs early (Barrett et al., 2014; Benard, 2004; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Elias, 2014; Gopnik, 2009; Masten, 2014). Diagnosed anxiety disorders are affecting more than 260 million people globally (World Health Organization, 2017). Officials from local high school districts have reported an increase in the incidence of anxiety in students coming from junior high schools (G. Haas, personal communication, October 5, 2016; R. Barbeau, personal communication, October 5, 2016). Edwards et al. (2010) reported that 9.5% of preschool-age children had an anxiety disorder. Ettman et al. (2020) said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of depressive symptoms in the United States more than tripled compared to previous mental health estimates.

Social and emotional ills continue to plague our society with "an unprecedented number of children and adolescents now being prescribed medication for depression, anxiety, or a host of other diagnoses" (Neufeld & Maté, 2014, p. 5). With these increasing numbers comes a greater need for intervention research and interventive techniques. However, studies show that

developing resilience early can *prevent* adverse outcomes such as anxiety and depression (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016a). At a meeting of the American Pediatric Surgical Association, Block (2016) stated, "When we are able to understand the power of prevention and the power of early sincere intervention, we will improve the ecology of our nation as new generations of children evolve into our leaders." (p. 27).

Prevention Efforts in Early Childhood

Social ills have roots in early childhood (Bak et al., 2015; Elias, 2014; Goldstein & Brooks, 2013; Hu et al., 2015; Matyas & Pelling, 2014; Shern et al., 2016). According to the World Health Organization (2013), there is an urgency associated with developing resilience in young children, as 50% of psychiatric disorders begin before age 14. In much of the research, there are predictions that successful prevention efforts in early childhood can have profound implications for a child's future (Bak et al., 2015; Barrett et al., 2014; Benard, 2004; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Elias, 2014; Goldstein & Brooks, 2013; Hu et al., 2015; Masten, 2014; Matyas & Pelling, 2014; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2012; Shern et al., 2016). Maté (2018) explained that brain development in early childhood has more to do with influences of the environment, especially parent-child attachment, than genetic predetermination. He referred to early brain development from environmental factors as "the single most important biological factor in determining whether or not a person will be predisposed to substance dependence and to addictive behaviors of any sort, whether drug-related or not" (Maté, 2018, p. 180).

The creation of the deductive-conceptual psychological resilience framework for parent-child connecting that promotes prevention through the development of psychological resilience

beginning in early childhood was inspired by Gopnik's (2009) work regarding the power of thought that infants and young children possess. Gopnik stated that, very early in life,

> Children have extraordinary powers of imagination and creativity; and long before they go to school, they have remarkable learning abilities . . . in some ways, young children are actually smarter, more imaginative, more caring, and even more conscious than adults are. (pp. 4, 5)

In a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) publication, Dombro et al. (2011) stated the importance of listening to children. Acknowledging the thoughts of children, developing psychological resilience, and promoting prosocial behavior are the keys to the prevention of social ills (Martela & Ryan, 2016).

More research is needed that explores the thoughts of infants and young children, specifically those thoughts that have the potential to limit and harm (including those that cause negative emotions such as crying). There is a need to recognize the existence of fears as thoughts at a primordial level after the child is born. Gopnik (2009) and Gopnik et al. (1999) studied the intelligence of babies and concluded that they have the capacity for deductive reasoning at an early age. Parents can begin to recognize the coherent thoughts of their children very early. For example, Giallo (2012) stated that there are noticeable signs from a newborn when a parent attempts to "bond" with the child. Brooker et al. (2013) began studying children at the age of 6 months and recognized that they had a fear of strangers. Eskola et al. (2021) concluded that "fear bias" can exist as early as 1 month.

According to Gopnik (2009), young children have extraordinary powers of thought before they can read or write. Behavioral inhibition (BI) is described as a temperamental style characterized by a "fear" when placed with unfamiliar people or situations (Kagan et al., 1984).

When it occurs in early childhood, BI has proven to be a risk factor for anxiety disorder (Muris et al., 2010) and a predictor of social competence (Chen et al., 2020). The acknowledgment of certain fears as being deductive thoughts in children with BI may encourage research for preventive strategies beginning in early childhood and suggests the need for discussion and analysis of psychological resilience. The concept of "handling thoughts" to promote psychological resilience is introduced in the psychological resilience framework.

Changes in the early environment can result in successful epigenetic modification of gene expression (Maté, 2018; Rutten & Mill, 2009). However, current peer-reviewed literature is deficient in connecting early childhood strategies for *prevention* with possibilities for social change (Podraza & Brackin, 2020). Much of the existing literature is limited to tools for *intervention*. For example, *The Resiliency Workbook* (Henderson, 2012) relies heavily on addressing existing problems in need of intervention, and the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the current focus to be on intervention (Killgore et al., 2020). Ungar's (2021) compilation of over 80 authors who may be considered significant contributors to research on resilience focuses on intervention and omits early childhood parent-child connecting of thoughts for prevention.

The psychological resilience framework can play a role as a catalyst for prevention by promoting deep, long-lasting parent-child connecting beginning in early childhood. It is the parent's responsibility to develop one-on-one non-judgmental active listening strategies and then guide the child toward psychological resilience and prosocial behavior. Further study is needed regarding parents lovingly connecting with their young children as a primal form of prevention. Additionally, educators can extend their listening skills to include drawing out children's thoughts. When talking unemotionally to students one-on-one in school, teachers can routinely question them about fears as thoughts ("thought-fears"). Research is needed to investigate how

helping young children deal with insecurity by handling thought-fears at home and in the classroom may lead to less bullying and more prosocial behavior.

The Need for a Strategy to Obtain Conceptual Clarity with a Focus on Prevention

While much attention is given to resilience in children (Block, 2016; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016b; Masten, 2014; Podraza & Brackin, 2020; Ungar 2021), there exists a gap in the literature in conceptualizing *psychological* resilience related to the thoughts of young children for *prevention*. A new mindset is needed to allow parents and educators to become better connected with young children's inner thought worlds to promote psychological resilience. The importance of the parent-child relationship was emphasized by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016a, 2016b) and Gopnik (2016). Despite this, no deductively constructed blueprint has been offered for connecting with children's thoughts in early childhood for prevention. Current parenting and educational models include having a healthy and enjoyable environment, bonding, promoting positive behavior, controlling emotions, conforming, and performing (Kahraman et al., 2017; Knopf, 2015; Knox et al., 2013). However, current peer-reviewed literature is deficient in connecting early childhood strategies for prevention with possibilities for social change (Podraza & Brackin, 2020).

Much of the current literature suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity (Kapıkıran & Acun-Kapıkıran, 2016; Locke, 2012; Merton, 1958; Podsakoff et al., 2016). The lack of universal definitions is a constant source of misunderstandings and mostly fruitless debates (Mulligan & Scherer, 2012). Ambiguity is a prevalent problem in the topic of psychological resilience. For example, resilience in children is a popular subject in current literature, but conceptual clarity is essential. Vella and Pai (2019) concluded that future research needs to explicitly define resilience. Similarly, Podsakoff et al. (2016) maintained that while resilience

has become a popular concept internationally, it remains an unfamiliar term for some because it is not grounded in solid definitions or adequate conceptual understanding. They stated that obscurity and ambiguity could impede future plans for action.

The core of the psychological resilience framework is based on a specific definition of "psychological resilience" that can translate into use for practical parent-child connecting. However, there continue to be many definitions of psychological resilience (Kapıkıran & Acun-Kapıkıran, 2016), and using the terms "resilience" and "psychological resilience" interchangeably—suggested by Fletcher and Sarkar (2013)—creates more ambiguity. As a further complication, authors use different terms for resilience, such as "resiliency" and "ego-resiliency" (Block & Kremen, 1996; Dwiwardani et al., 2014), "psychological flexibility" (Cherry et al., 2021), "behavioral resilience" (Flouri et al., 2015), and "emotional resilience" (Turan et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016). "Emotional resilience" is an elusive phrase because of the lack of agreement on the term "emotion" in psychology (see Eckman, 2015). Separating emotions from thoughts is not emphasized in current research. For example, when posing the question "What are Emotions?" Mordka (2016) referred to a cognitive aspect and used emotions as a motivating function. He created a hierarchy of emotions and stated that they are difficult to control. In the psychological resilience framework, the child's thoughts are the focus, and emotions are defined separately as being physical in nature. This concept affords an adult the opportunity to participate in a system designed to encourage a child to handle the thoughts that might trigger an emotion.

The deductive-conceptual psychological resilience framework provides an unambiguous structure for parents, researchers, and educators. As Gerring (2012) stated:

> Concept formation lies at the heart of all social science endeavors. It is impossible to conduct work without using concepts. It is impossible even to conceptualize a topic without putting a label on it. Concepts are integral to every argument, for they address the most basic question of social science research: what are we talking about? (p. 112)

Gerring's statement is consistent with Sartori's (1984) argument that a concept is ''the basic unit of thinking. It can be said that we have a concept of A when we are able to distinguish A from whatever is not-A'' (p. 74). The elementary concept introduced in the psychological resilience framework is the term "thought-fear" as the basic unit of thought related to psychological resilience.

The point of departure from traditional resilience study compared to the deductive psychological resilience framework is the definition of psychological resilience that is to be implemented as part of an operational process for use by parents and supported by educators to connect with children by drawing out and nurturing children's present thoughts. This *intrinsic* approach of connecting with the thoughts of children adds a new dimension to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) model of ecological systems that categorize the external forces that are placed upon children.

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Study

The phenomenological approach chosen for the IPA study of elementary school social workers' perspectives on the development of resilience in early childhood (Podraza & Brackin, 2020) to acknowledge the thoughts of children was inspired by the statement made by Moustakas (1994): "The challenge of the Epoch is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so we may see with new eyes in a naïve and completely open manner" (p. 86). Representing different school districts, five social workers with at least 15

years of experience working at the elementary school level (including early childhood) participated in the IPA study in an open and transparent manner, as suggested by Moustakas. There were two rounds of isolated one-on-one open-ended interviews that delved deeply into the development of psychological resilience in young children.

The first round of interviews examined the social workers' understanding of the term "resilience" and how resilience as prevention was being addressed in the public school system. The social workers disagreed about the use of the word, and they could not relate to using the concept of resilience for prevention in their respective schools. The literature review, which explored the history of resilience research and current resilience practices, exhibited similar ambiguity and lack of practical application concerning resilience for prevention in early childhood. Studies relating to early childhood did not differentiate psychological fear from emotional fear, and they did not examine children's thoughts through adult-child connecting (see Bauer, 1976; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015; Newall et al., 2017; Percy et al., 2016; Trumbull, 1890).

With the absence of current strategies dealing specifically with developing psychological resilience in early childhood, the discussions in the second round of interviews focused on *psychological* resilience and possibilities for parent-child connecting for prevention. There was a need to eliminate the ambiguity associated with psychological resilience. The first challenge was to separate thoughts from emotions. The participating social workers stated that their one-on-one counseling with students mostly focused on dealing with negative emotions with the goal of returning the child productively back to the classroom. And while the concept of emotional intelligence was very useful, they stated that they would like to have spent more time delving into the child's thoughts behind the emotions. The term "thought-fears" became the word of

choice because it qualified thoughts as those that have the potential to limit and harm as well as those that motivate and protect. A thought-fear was a thought in the mind, and an emotional fear was categorized as having a physical component such as crying, anger, or freezing.

Beleslin (2014) stated that observing children should include studying more deeply what is on a child's mind. A child who comes to a social worker crying or angry is acknowledged to be in an emotional state, and the child is often dealt with as having a behavioral problem. In the psychological resilience framework, however, anger and crying are *defined* as emotions because of the physical changes that can be observed. However, when a child has calmed down and the emotions subside, the social worker has an opportunity to ask about the child's fears as thoughts in the mind that are triggering the emotions. Possibly, the child has thoughts of insecurity about what others are thinking about them or a fear concerning the family. At a calm time, the social worker can unwrap the layers of thoughts that are causing the emotions. Listening to bring out the layers of fears in the mind of a child who perceives other children are thinking negatively about them is an example of considering the thoughts behind the emotions.

The social workers agreed that parents are the most effective in finding time to listen to children by creating an unemotional atmosphere with dialog that is mostly from child to parent. In the second round of interviews, the social workers focused on parent-child connecting, including asking the child the question, "What are your fears (thought-fears)?" Possibilities for parent-child connecting and associated research will be discussed in the last part of this article.

The Structure-Bonding-Connecting Parenting Model

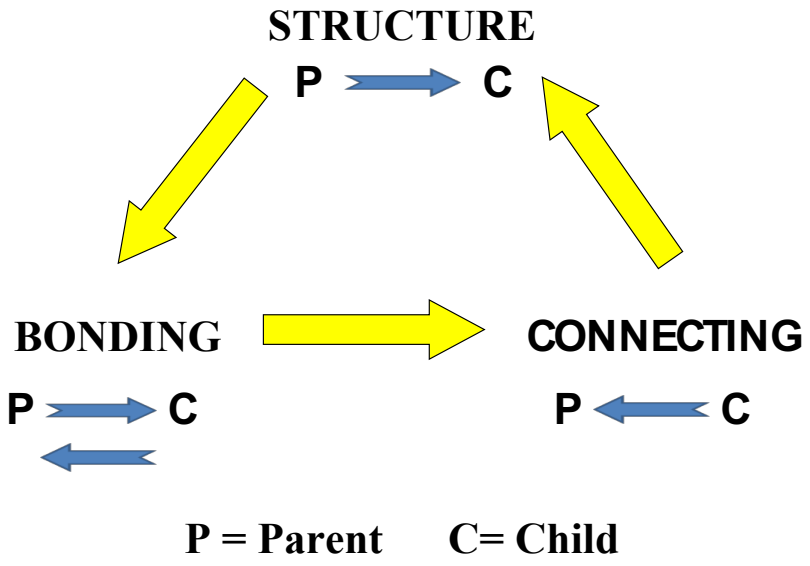
The psychological resilience framework is first positioned as a positive parenting model consisting of structure, bonding, and connecting. The parent must create a loving and consistent structure so that the child has trust that the parent is creating an environment that is for the well-

being of the child. Neufeld and Maté (2014) stressed the importance of the parent-child relationship and how a child's trust in the parent can be fragile. Bonding is familiar to most families that communicate, hug, instruct, and have emotional fun with their children. However, parent-child connecting requires a new mindset by the parent using one-on-one active listening skills to acknowledge the thoughts of the child. In current public education and typical parenting, ideas of training children and putting information into a child's brain remain prevalent as an extrinsic approach that conforms to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) work on how external ecological forces affect children. The concept of connecting brings out the best in the child by asking open-ended questions that will allow the child to internally process thoughts; this is an intrinsic departure from typical parenting and the conventional educational system.

For the last 8 years, worldwide attention has been focused on resilience in children while acknowledging the importance of parent-child relationships. Positive parenting produces better results than negative parenting (Pastorelli et al., 2016; Schofield et al., 2012; Waller et al., 2012), and improving parent-child relationships is superior to a one-size-fits-all how-to approach (Gopnik, 2016). However, positive parenting models (Gulliford et al., 2015) often do not include teaching coping skills (resilience) to children. There is a gap in early childhood research studies pertaining to examining the effectiveness of intrinsic parenting practices for prevention. The following structure-bonding-connecting parenting model places "connecting" as being a separate entity from parental structure and bonding. Connecting with a child means drawing thoughts from the child as the communication flows dynamically from child to parent (see Figure 1). The profound possibilities of parent-child connecting for promoting psychological resilience and prosocial behavior in children are represented later, after the presentation of the psychological resilience framework.

Figure 1

Structure-Bonding-Connecting Parenting Model



The Elements of the Parenting Model

The flow of this parenting model is illustrated in Figure 1 by the arrows.

- **Structure.** Setting up a family structure for peace, harmony, health, safety, consistency, and happiness is the responsibility of parents. The rules are made by the parents dynamically and bestowed upon the child in a one-way parent-to-child direction. The two-way parent-child aspect of bonding should not contradict the structure. Children can lose trust in parents when the structure is a) inconsistent, b) not loving, or c) felt by the child to be only in the parents' self-interest. Inevitably, connecting with a child's thoughts will influence the dynamic aspect of setting up the structure.
- **Bonding.** Bonding is the back-and-forth emotional sharing between the parent and child. Bonding with a child means there is something shared with the child through activity, emotions, or conversation. Examples are hugging, playing, eating, educating, laughing, vacationing, engaging activities, general fun, and communicating about past events or

future activities. An example of a potentially traumatic emotional experience occurs when a child reaches out to bond with their parent with a hug and the parent does not notice or respond in a positive manner.

- **Connecting**. The focus of this article is on parent-child connecting and developing psychological resilience. Connecting is the process of entering the child's thought world by listening non-judgmentally one-on-one to the child in an atmosphere with limited emotions. The flow travels from child to parent as the parent attempts to gain the child's trust by being patient, allowing time for the child to process thoughts, and acknowledging the child's thought-fears. Connecting with a child is designed to be deep and lasting. The child can develop psychological resilience and prosocial behavior by learning to handle thought-fears that limit or harm and embracing thought-fears that motivate and protect. The immediate goal is to have the child express deep thoughts with little emotion and without parental judgmental lecturing. The parent should have a mindset of bringing out the best in the child with minimal guidance. Connecting with children can further influence the dynamics of the structure.

Summary of Parenting Model

The structure-bonding-connecting parenting model separates connecting with a child's thoughts from bonding. The structure involves parents influencing children, bonding is shared between parent and child, and connecting with a child's thoughts is meant to flow from child to parent. Connecting requires the trust of the child that the parent will listen patiently and non-judgmentally. Discipline techniques can be derived from structure and bonding.

The Psychological Resilience Framework

The psychological resilience framework provides a deductive-conceptual model for adults to connect with the thoughts of children beginning in early childhood. It is intended for use by parents, but it also has value for educators, researchers, and other adults who have intimate roles in young children's lives. By experiencing a long-term one-on-one connection with a parent beginning at an early age that is founded on truth, the child will have the opportunity to process and categorize thoughts. With the goal of developing psychological resilience and prosocial behavior, this framework is designed to offer parents a foundation for bringing out the best in children. With the ambiguity surrounding the terms "resilience" and "psychological resilience" in terms of prevention, this mathematical-deductive process has been formulated to present the terminology necessary for interpretation, implementation, and research.

A social-constructivist approach is applied, as described by Lodico et al. (2010) in the deductive format used by Euclid's Elements (trans. 1570). The following deductive-conceptual framework is introduced as a process for initiating programs, protocols, and research for the prevention of social ills. The value of this approach is based on the hypothesis that a unique and supportive one-on-one adult-child relationship beginning in early childhood is vital for the optimal development of psychological resilience and prosocial behavior (see Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016a, 2016b).

Postulates

- The parent-child relationship should be the focus for developing psychological resilience and prosocial behavior in a child.
- When interested and capable, children will do well in expressing their thoughts.

Undefined Terms

Undefined terms are characterized by descriptions rather than formal definitions. They are agreed upon as a starting point for creating a deductive system because they provide the basis for initial definitions and postulates.

- **Thoughts.** It is agreed that a thought is an undefined term that contributes to the foundation for this deductive framework. Thoughts can be described as being in the mind and unable to be witnessed by others. They are not physical phenomena. Related to the term thoughts are words such as ideas, reasoning, reasons, likes, dislikes, desires, dreams, induction, deduction, intuition, knowing, understanding, imagining, remembering, opinions, mental process, recall, and thinking. Examples of phenomena that may be derived from thoughts but are not considered thoughts are noticeable responses, behavior, emotions, and various subliminal reactions. Instincts and reflex actions are not considered thoughts.
- **Needs, feelings, and desires (likes and dislikes).** Needs, feelings, and desires are described as an innate part of our physical or mental makeup. Also, they may be a combination of conscious reactions to stimuli, unconscious responses, and thoughts that are derived from inductive or deductive reasoning: children need food, a child may desire candy, a child may logically decide about choosing flavors of ice cream by remembering past experiences, or a child may feel bored.

Definitions

Definitions are formed from previous definitions and commonly accepted terms. They are reversible in that the word implies the definition, and the definition implies the word.

- **Conscious thoughts.** A person engaged in thought recall, rational thinking, or knows what thoughts are creating specific reactions is considered to have conscious thoughts.

For example, when a child is upset because the parents are arguing, the child may have conscious thoughts that the parents' arguing has bad consequences for the child.

- **Unconscious thoughts.** A person reacting to a stimulus from a thought that cannot be immediately identified or to a stimulus whose source is unknown is considered to have an unconscious thought motivating the reaction. For example, a child may store unconscious thoughts as an adverse reaction to early childhood toxic stress or internal trauma.
- **Thought-fears.** Thought-fears are conscious or unconscious *thoughts of the mind* that have the potential to limit, harm, motivate, or protect. Although they can produce positive and negative effects, they may lie dormant when they are not stimulated by a triggering catalyst. They are *not* in themselves a physical entities, but they can *cause* physiological changes such as emotions, and they can influence behavior. They can cause emotions, but they are not emotions.
- **Emotions**. Emotions are identified by *physiological changes* that occur in the body as a result of thoughts, stimuli, or instincts. A positive or negative physiological change in the body is required to occur for a phenomenon to be considered an emotion. Emotions are separate from thoughts. Examples of changes that may take place with emotions include the onset of energy, increased heart rate, sweating, increased stomach acid, hyperactivity, tearing, facial expression, hormonal change, laughing, crying, and other visually apparent or internal chemical changes. A child may have a thought-fear of snakes without emotions. It is the sight of a snake along with the thought-fear that can cause the emotion of fear that can manifest in many ways, such as crying. Behavior resulting from emotional fear can be flight, fight, or freeze. Emotions can be a result of thought-fears and/or physical stimuli.

- **Behavior.** Behavior is an action, inaction, or emotion.
- **Handling thought-fears.** Handling thought-fears means mitigating or eliminating the effects of thought-fears that can limit or harm and developing positive behavior from thought-fears that motivate and protect. However, it is possible that a limiting or harming thought-fear can be transformed into a motivating or protecting thought-fear. An example of handling a thought-fear is a child entering a new classroom and having limiting thought-fears that would cause the child to isolate; then the child calls on motivating thought-fears that would cause the child to be kind to others and establish friendships.
- **Psychological resilience.** Psychological resilience is the intrinsic ability to handle thought-fears.
- **Prosocial behavior (altruism).** Prosocial behavior consists of acting for the benefit of others. Prosocial behavior can originate from teachings, instinct, or protecting thought - fears.
- **Structure (parent to child).** A structure is a dynamic set of rules and discipline set up by parents for the well-being of the child.
- **Bonding (parent and child).** Bonding is a mutual sharing between parent and child of activities or conversation about activities and memories. Examples of things that are examples of bonding with someone are hugging, learning, playing games, laughing, having a meal, conversing, reading together, exercising, shopping, participating in religious events, dancing, reminiscing, vacationing, and having fun.
- **Active listening (parents).** Active listening by a parent is child-centered, with as much communication as possible coming from the child. The question that may elicit the most profound response from the child is, “What are your fears (thought-fears)?” And it is the

handling of thought-fears that develops psychological resilience. To be an active listener, the parent must gain a child's trust by acknowledging the child's thoughts patiently and non-judgmentally. The mindset of the parent must be to listen to the child's answers and let the child process and self-actualize. Actively listening to a child requires that the responses by the parent to the child's questions are reassuring, open-ended, non-judgmental, and truthful at the child's level. Active listening requires staying with a child's in-the-moment thoughts and does not include interrogation or psychoanalysis. While it is advised that parent and child emotions are kept to a minimum, the parent must be prepared to actively listen to a young child's in-the-moment answers that may be based on previous emotional experiences. Direct guidance from parent to child is used only as a last resort to solve problems for the child when the child is unable to do it on their own.

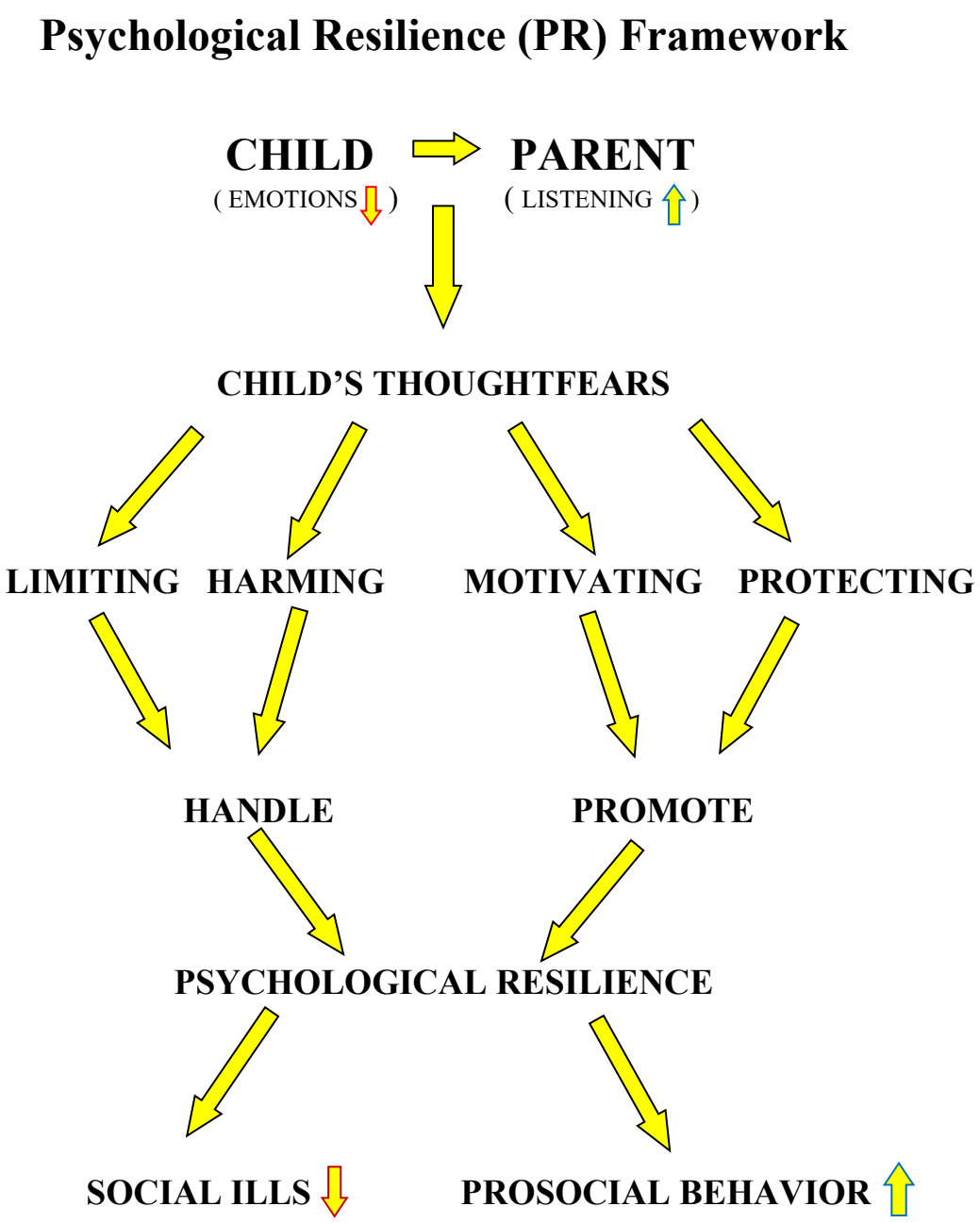
- **Connecting (child to parent).** Connecting in this context is the process of a parent forming a deep, lasting, and transparent relationship with the child that is based on trust and active listening by the parent. The conversation mostly flows from child to parent, with a minimal number of emotions surfacing. If emotions do surface, then the process of connecting may give way to bonding or discussing structure. The goal of connecting is to bring out psychological resilience and prosocial behavior in the child. As an example, a child may express thought-fears that a rule (structure) is unfair. The parent may attempt to gain a child's trust by connecting with the child's thoughts by explaining the *parent's* thought-fears in order to justify why the rule was created for developing a structure that benefits the child and the family. Prosocial behavior by the child may develop if the child responds with positive thought-fears concerning the family.

- **Prevention (of societal ills).** Prevention contrasted with intervention is connecting with a child to avoid or mitigate future societal ills by fostering psychological resilience and prosocial behavior.

The psychological resilience framework (see Figure 2) is a *deductive foundation* for deep and lasting parent-child connecting in the context of the structure-bonding-connecting parenting model (see Figure 1). The parent-child relationship is nurtured as an *inductive process*, and it is the parent's responsibility to bring out the best in the child by determining the direction of the parent-child process of connecting. The unique dynamics between a parent and child are developed to create the best strategy for handling thought-fears (psychological resilience) and bringing out the best in the child (prosocial behavior).

Figure 2

Psychological Resilience Framework



Discussion: Use of the Psychological Resilience Framework

The best use of the psychological resilience framework to connect with a child begins in early childhood with a family model that consists of consistent structure and meaningful bonding. As a child gains verbal skills, the parent becomes a patient, non-judgmental listener with a mindset of bringing out the best in the child by letting the child process thoughts. Connecting is about listening to thought-fears that are present at that moment while offering minimal judgment-free guidance that allows the child to handle their own thought-fears. The goal is for the child to handle thought-fears that can limit and harm and implement thought-fears that instead motivate and protect. A deep and lasting parent-child relationship can develop with the goal of developing psychological resilience and prosocial behavior for prevention (see Appendix for flow charts of the parenting model and the psychological resilience framework).

It is possible for social change to take place when a majority of a generation has the ability to handle thought-fears that have the potential to limit or harm and are motivated by protecting thought-fears for the benefit of not only themselves but also others. Creating psychological resilience by learning to handle thought-fears at an early age creates the possibility of preventing social ills such as addiction, anxiety, bullying, and depression. According to the National Fatherhood Initiative, fathers are important in making a connection with their children, with the support of mothers. The question (or an equivalent form of the question) to be asked of the child during the parent-child connecting process is: “What are your thought-fears?” The success of the connecting process according to the psychological resilience framework is dependent upon the child trusting the parent with their thoughts and the ability of the parent to listen to the child one-on-one, non-judgmentally, and patiently at a quiet time when the child is willing and able to do so. Once a connecting process is established, then parents can offer

guidance based on the parents' motivating and protecting thought-fears while not allowing harming and limiting thought-fears from their childhood to interfere.

I first discovered the possibilities of connecting with children after witnessing how trained adult volunteers connected with teenage inmates at a youth prison where the motto for the adults was "listen, listen, love, love". By listening without judgment, the adults quickly gained the trust of the youth after a few one-on-one sessions. The youths' overwhelming responses were fears concerning their families and friends with whom they had bonded and connected, and the adult volunteers were trained to provide alternatives to the inmates to handle their fears. My subsequent experiences with public schools, private schools, alternative schools, domestic violence centers, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) situations, individual families, and being a grandfather of ten children have given rise to the conclusion that it is possible for a parent to connect with their child's thoughts by allowing time for one-on-one, patient, and non-judgmental listening.

Given the right time and circumstances with a listening adult, children exhibit positive responses when asked about their thought-fears. The challenges of parent-child connecting have come from the parents' inability to listen and from the existing fear of change by the traditional educational and medical systems. Discounting excuses such as parents not having enough time to take 10 minutes to listen to their child, parents often must confront thought-fears from their own childhood before accepting their child's thought-fears. If a child states in a connecting session with a father, "I hate mommy", then it is up to the father to non-emotionally and non-judgmentally question the child's in-the-moment thought-fears behind that statement. Parents must learn how to let their children process thoughts and then guide their children to handle their own thought-fears. This mindset of drawing from the child is a departure from the decades-old

Bronfenbrenner (1977) model of studying the forces upon the child. There is a need for original research to reflect the psychological resilience framework by drawing out thought-fears from children and analyzing how children handle their thought-fears.

Using the psychological resilience framework in the context of the structure-bonding-connecting model, I offer possibilities at different stages of a child's life for deep, lasting adult/parent-child connecting that would bring out psychological resilience and prosocial behavior in the child. The "Do No Harm" motto has been comfortable to follow by staying in the present moment with the thought-fears on a child's mind. The last 9 years of my own grandfather-grandchild sleepover record has consisted of one or two grandchildren sleeping over at a time, with a session of what is called "emptying their brains" (of thought-fears) before they went to sleep at night. After the connecting process, the children were always encouraged to think about how great their family is before falling asleep. The record has been perfect concerning the children waking up the next morning happy and usually sleeping at least 8 ½ (and sometimes over 10) hours. Two of my grandsons did not find the need for the 15-pound weighted security blankets that they used at home, my young granddaughter never woke up crying as she so often did at home, and two other grandsons with divorcing parents talked about handling their thought-fears and slept well. As parents begin the connecting process, it is my experience that there is potential for high rewards with minimal risk to the child. The benefit to the mental health of children was expressed by social workers in my peer-reviewed IPA study (2020).

The following scenarios are a compilation of possibilities for use of the psychological resilience framework with an invitation for researchers to test these hypotheses:

Fathers and Infants

A father can begin to bond with his child at birth. And while mothers may have a natural "attachment" to their children, fathers can make an immediate effort to begin a process of bonding and connecting. The bonding can begin with simple hugging, and the connecting can begin with an awareness that the infant may cry due to thought-fears. By consoling a crying infant, for example, the father can continue to gain the trust of the child and further bond and connect with the child as the child grows.

Young Children Beginning to Speak

For a very young child, introducing protective thought-fears is a productive way to begin basic communication. This also begins the process of the child handling thought-fears. For example, the fear of a flame can be introduced as a protecting thought-fear: "Hot, ouchy! What do you do?" Subsequently, motivating thought-fears can be introduced, such as saying to the child, "Mom is sad. What can you do?" As challenges arise for the young child, such as the arrival of a new sibling, the parent can listen to the child's thought-fears and talk about how the child can handle them.

Preparing to Connect with a Young Child by Establishing Trust

A child's trust is fragile. There may be defined ACES that interfere with connecting, but there are also cases of internal trauma that go unrecognized by the parent. Parents arguing, being inconsistent with structure, or using time-outs that make the child feel abandoned and insecure may cause trauma. A single missed hug at a critical time may lose a young child's trust. Also, a child may be given too much overwhelming power by "spoiling" the child. More research is needed to measure the trust of the child needed to support the parent-child connecting process.

The Best Time to Discuss Thought-Fears

A child may be overwhelmed by a thought-fear at any time, and the child should be given the chance to express that thought-fear as needed. However, the quiet time close to when the child falls asleep for the night has been consistently shown to be the most productive time to engage in parent-child connecting. Specifically, children are usually less emotional and can be calmly expressive directly before bedtime. They want to "empty their brains". If a nightly routine is established and the parent has become a non-judgmental and patient listener, then the child will often look forward to the one-on-one quiet time with having one parent's full attention.

The Basic Approach by the Parent

Possibilities exist for developing psychological resilience as parents assess thought-fears that can limit or harm and guide the *child* to handle them. Social ills such as addiction, anxiety, depression, and bullying can be prevented because, according to Maté (2018), the trauma that is the basis for social ills is not what happens to us but what happens inside us because of what happened to us, and it is up to the parent to have the child's thoughts surface, with guidance to handle those thoughts. It is also significant that the parent can promote prosocial behavior by recognizing the child's motivating and protecting thought-fears that can create action for the benefit of others.

An Example of an Experience with a Child

After talking with my 5-year-old grandchild for the first time about "good and bad" thought-fears, the question was posed to him, "What is your greatest fear?" The reply was, "When my mom and dad argue, I don't know what side to take." A week later the child stated that he handled his thought-fear: "My brother and I hug my mom and dad when they start to argue." Since that epiphany that children have the ability to handle thought-fears at a young age,

I have had success in asking about thought-fears in various settings, including with inmates and developmentally challenged students.

Parent-Child Connecting: The Peer Group

Not being accepted by one's peers is the biggest thought-fear for many young children and adolescents. If a child is about to enter a new class of students, it is understandable that the child has a series of emotions coming from limiting and harming thought-fears. If the child has developed psychological resilience by connecting with the parent, then the child will confide in the parent in times of stress or possible trauma. The parent's responsibility is to listen to the child patiently and without judgment so that the child can process their thoughts. The parent can then offer guidance in ways to handle the thought-fears, such as examining ways to make friends. Psychological resilience can be promoted as the child finds ways to handle the thought-fears by changing them from limiting and harming to motivating and protecting. To handle a limiting thought-fear of shyness, for example, the parent can guide the child in ways to participate more in class. The thought-fear can also be used as motivation for the child to create protection by asking to sit near the teacher.

Parent-Child Connecting: Body Image

In the case of an insecure child, connecting with the child can bring out serious thought-fears, such as a deep concern for one's appearance. These limiting and harming thought-fears can result in anorexia, bulimia, body dysmorphia, or self-harm. A healthy and open parent-child relationship can have a profound effect on handling fears associated with body image (Rodgers et al., 2019). If the parent can keep a connection with the child's thoughts to promote psychological resilience, then there is a greater possibility of preventing these types of social ills.

Parent-Child Connecting: Peer Pressure

Thought-fears that result from peer pressure and newfound sexuality present threats to the mental health of teenagers and young adults. Parties with drugs and alcohol, inappropriate use of the Internet, and dangerous sexual activity present an immediate risk and can result in thought-fears that may not be handled appropriately. However, if a deep connection of trust has been established with a parent by allowing time to process thoughts, there is an opportunity for the teenager to express thought-fears freely and they may trust the parent for preventive guidance.

Parent-Child Connecting: Bullying

Children who bully may have thought-fears of insecurity that they are not living up to their own expectations or are under pressure to live up to their parent's expectations. Discussions with groups of children who have demonstrated bullying behavior have shown that these children may talk openly about the harming thought-fears of others who bully while not recognizing bullying behavior in themselves. However, when children are allowed to express thoughts freely, they are able to process thoughts, and they can overcome insecurity and apply self-guidance for their own behavior. Parents connecting with a child's thoughts early with guidance to bring out psychological resilience in the child can result in bullying prevention. Moreover, prosocial behavior can be promoted by the connecting parent when thought-fears for the protection of others who are being bullied are discussed.

Possibilities for Children on the Autism Spectrum.

Children on the autistic spectrum and developmentally delayed children may have thoughts that are often not acknowledged by adults. When an adult is able to connect with a challenged child using the psychological resilience framework, the adult can recognize children's thoughts that are different from what is expected of others in their peer group. For example, an adult may respect a child's thoughts when the child puts puzzle pieces on a board in their own

pattern instead of putting them in the appropriate slots. After a continuing process of acknowledging a child's personal thoughts, the child will begin to trust the adult. The adult can ask, "What scares you?" The child may not answer verbally, however, instead the child may begin to process thoughts which may present an opportunity to influence the child's life trajectory concerning how the child trusts adults. For special needs children who are often urged to conform to the traditional educational program, thought-fears of not keeping up with the peer group often surface as negative emotions that can be potentially dangerous to the child or others. The connecting process can take place when the emotions of the child are under control, perhaps using the Emotional Intelligence model. Some challenged and emotional children respond better to adults after engaging in strenuous physical activity followed by a time of peace.

Possibilities for ADHD and Preventing Addiction

When schools are pressured by being evaluated according to test scores, there is an emphasis on children to conform and perform. Children diagnosed with ADHD may be prescribed medication beginning in early childhood. Maté (2019) stated that the parent-child relationship is far more important than focusing on a child's behavior and giving children medication for ADHD. He declared that the challenges of children labeled with ADHD result from a list of personality factors of human development, and they should not be diagnosed as having a medical ailment. Similar to possible ADHD tendencies, a predisposition for depression does not imply predetermination, and parents should seize an opportunity for early prevention. An adult recovering from addiction said,

> If someone would have instilled in me early the protective fear of the dangerous, addictive properties of prescription medications, then my life would have been different. Instead, my fear now is that I will not be able to function without the medications.

Moreover, parents should retain their own thought-fear that giving children mind-altering medications early may eventually interfere with the parent-child connecting process.

Discussion: Possibilities for Social Change

The psychological resilience framework defines parent-child connecting as the parent implementing active listening techniques to bring out psychological resilience and prosocial behavior from the child.

Asking the question, "What are your fears (thought-fears)?" has been the key to opening meaningful dialogue with the child. Specifically, the child is guided to handle thought-fears that limit or harm and encouraged to engage in the thought-fears that motivate and protect. With guidance, the child will engage in prosocial behavior when motivated by thought-fears for self-protection or the protection of others. It remains for the individual parent to have the mindset of bringing out psychological resilience and prosocial behavior from the child. Teaching a child to hide their fears could promote internal trauma. Teaching a child to handle their fears is creating psychological resilience for optimal mental health. (See Appendix for the structure-bonding-connecting parent model and the psychological resilience framework).

A child may look to their father with trust at a time at night when the father can actively listen one-on-one to the child non-judgmentally, patiently, and without heightened emotion. When a child is able to handle thought-fears, then social ills may be avoided; and if prosocial behavior is cultivated, then social change may occur. The following are examples of the use of the psychological resilience framework within the parent model of structure-bonding-connecting:

- When parents are aware that the youngest children can accumulate thought-fears, then parents will develop a mindset to be aware and listen.

- Parents can become more sensitive to early childhood trauma that can occur from an inadvertence such as missing a hug with a child who has open arms.
- Parents will instill the thought-fear of the hot flame on the stove and not fear of the parent.
- Parents will guide their children to be in control of their own thought-fears.
- An awareness can occur that when a parent is observing bad behavior in a child, the child may fear some lack of attention. The parent can first try to pull the child to the parent instead of immediately isolating the child with a time-out, for example.
- Parents can cultivate protecting thought-fears in children that motivate them to exhibit positive behavior toward a younger sibling.
- When a child can handle thought-fears from peer-group pressure and acceptance, then resulting social ills such as anxiety and depression can be avoided.
- The psychologically resilient child may act for the benefit of others (prosocial behavior) by intervening when a peer is being bullied.
- Social change can occur when psychologically resilient adult leaders focus on acting for the well-being of the people they serve.
- When protecting thought-fears have been instilled in children about the dangers of drugs or alcohol and they have motivating thought-fears about having a purposeful life, then addiction *prevention* can take place.
- Handling the thought-fears associated with body image can eliminate the possibilities of eating disorders and body dysmorphia.

- Children learning to handle limiting and harming thought-fears resulting from low self-worth can prevent withdrawal from society, bullying, or committing school shootings.
- Rage, hate, and racism that are often accompanied by emotions often have roots in thought-fears that have not been handled from childhood.
- Having proper protective thought-fears about sex can have positive outcomes such as avoiding unwanted pregnancy and bad relationships.
- When a child does not have the parent-child connection necessary for psychological resilience, the child can accumulate limiting harming and thought-fears. The child may continue to experience emotions that are difficult to control and become estranged from the parent. Likewise, the parent may have uncontrollable emotions preventing a relationship with an adult child.
- Motivational thought-fears can influence children to be productive, and not have the children succumb to the overuse of social media and video games.
- With parent-child connecting, children are sharing deep thoughts with a parent. This can eliminate the threat of a child developing a negative, private thought world.
- A parent can relate their own thought-fears to their child in an attempt to explain the reason for structure. This can strengthen the parent-child connection.

Researchers can lay the groundwork for social change by creating a new field of study that offers opportunities for children to "connect" with their parents to *prevent* social ills and exhibit prosocial behavior. There is an abundance of research explaining the importance of the mother and father in a child's life beginning in early childhood. Much has been written about children conforming, performing, and exhibiting proper behavior with emotional restraint. When

problems occur, the medical profession is often summoned. Researchers can create a new field of study that focuses on parents connecting with their children, as defined in this article's psychological resilience framework for prevention.

The major challenges for this new field come with parents and not young children. "Structure" and child trust are in question when, according to the U. S. Census Bureau (2020), one in four children is not living with a father figure. And despite the risk of hostile fathers or fathers of bad influence, fathers having a relationship with their children is essential for child development according to Neufeld and Maté (2014). A new field of research must focus on the possibilities for positive social change by studying various family arrangements that utilize guidance toward psychological resilience and prosocial behavior to bring out the best in children. Further long-term research is necessary to document how parents can connect with their children using the concept of handling thought-fears. It is possible to end family cycles of domestic violence, neglect, and abuse by parents bringing out the best in children. Our children are our future leaders. Parents connecting with their children according to the psychological resilience framework will enable these future leaders to develop the psychological resilience needed to confront the world's problems based on truth, and they will be capable of prosocial behavior that will bring peace to the world.

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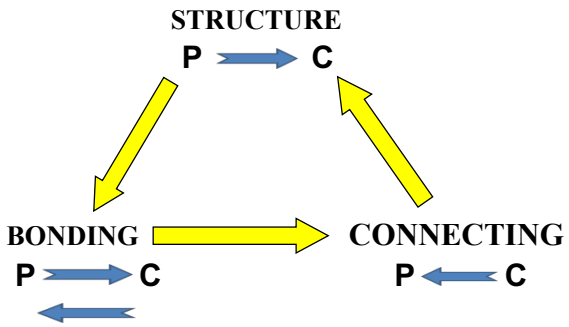
Appendix: Parenting Model and Psychological Resilience Framework

Structure-Bonding-Connecting Parenting Model



P is parent. **C** is child.

Parent-Child Connecting for Psychological Resilience