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# Resilient Children: Who They Are and How They Got There

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# A Tale of Two Brothers

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## Ramon (older brother)

- ❑ By 1st gr., defiant to parents, teachers
- ❑ By 6<sup>th</sup> grade, suspended many times
- ❑ By JHS, shoplifts and steals cars
- ❑ Meets other anti-social peers
- ❑ At 15, removed from mother's custody
- ❑ Never graduates HS

## Rafael

- ❑ By 1<sup>st</sup> grade, defiant and aggressive
  - ❑ Hates school
  - ❑ Befriends an art teacher
  - ❑ Teacher tutors him in Art
  - ❑ Meets other art-friendly peers
  - ❑ Takes more Art classes
  - ❑ Graduates HS
  - ❑ Enrolls in local CC
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Even though the nature – nurture  
interaction is still debated . . .

Why the different outcomes for  
Ramon and Raphael?

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# A Tale of Two Explanations

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## Stefanie and Her Failing Grade

- ❑ "I should have studied more."
- ❑ "Next time I'll ask the teacher for extra help."
- ❑ "That chapter was a real hard one."

## Sam and His Failing Grade

- ❑ "I stink at Math."
  - ❑ "That teacher doesn't know how to teach."
  - ❑ "That test was unfair."
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WHY?

# Benjamin Carson

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- ❑ Mother dropped out of school in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, married at 13
  - ❑ She married a much older man, a minister, whom she left when she learned that he was married with another family
  - ❑ She worked 2-3 jobs to support Ben and his brother
  - ❑ Ben was 8 at the time of the divorce
  - ❑ By 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Ben was at the bottom of his class
  - ❑ Called "Dummy" by classmates and teachers
  - ❑ Developed a violent, uncontrollable temper
  - ❑ Joined what we would consider a street gang
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# What Happened?



# Dr. Benjamin Carson

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- ❑ Youngest ever Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University Medical Center (32 years of age)
  - ❑ First African-American honored with that post
  - ❑ Winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2008)
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# Others Who Thrived After Failure

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- ❑ Michael Jordan cut from his high school's JV team
  - ❑ Abraham Lincoln was defeated in at least 7 elections before becoming president
  - ❑ Albert Einstein told by teachers that he would never amount to much
  - ❑ Steven Spielberg dropped out of HS, but came back in a class for the learning disabled which he hated
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# Or the Sox After Three Games Down



# What Are We Really Talking About?

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“Resilience” . . . From the Latin, “resilere”,  
“to spring back”:

“A set of processes that enables good  
outcomes in spite of serious threats”

i.e.,

“The ability to persist in the face of challenges  
and bounce back from adversity”

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# Three Primary Sets of Circumstances That Require Resilience

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1. Recovering from adversity or trauma (loss of parent, natural disaster, etc.)
  2. Overcoming risk factors (abusive home, etc.)
  3. \*\*\* Steering through the everyday stressors that most students confront (academic, social pressures, etc.)
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# Children Who Are Resilient Are:

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- Less likely to become depressed
  - More likely to reach appropriate milestones
  - Less likely to become helpless
  - More likely to persist in problem-solving
  - More willing to take risks
-

# Snapshots

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"Bridges falling down, killer pumpkin eaters, blind mice with carving knives ... I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!"

SearchID: 11111111

# Components of Resilience

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## Internal Factors

- Strong cognitive abilities
- Good problem-solving abilities
- Self-efficacy
- Positive self-perception
- Easy, adaptable temperament
- Sense of humor
- Self regulation of emotion
- OPTIMISM** and HOPE

## External Factors

- Close family relationships
  - Low parental conflict
  - Authoritative parenting
  - SES advantage
  - Parental involvement in child's education
  - Parental models of these traits
  - BOUNDARIES** and expectations
-

# Risk (Vulnerability) Factors

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- Difficult temperament
  - Chronic poverty
  - Child maltreatment
  - Parental psychopathology
  - Divorce
  - Homelessness
  - Natural disasters
  - Marital conflict in the home
  - Prematurity or other perinatal stress
  - Poor school or community experiences
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# Key Protective Factors

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- Attributes of the individual child
  - Temperament that elicits positive responses from others; intelligence; physical attractiveness; genetics
- Socialization practices of the family
  - Initiative is encouraged; connections with others, particularly with extended family members
- School/community supports that build self-esteem and self-efficacy
  - Especially if child has a skill that is valued
  - Positive social relations with peers

# The Balancing Act is the Answer: Risk versus Protective Factors

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# Think Of It As Juggling



# Some Caveats

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- ❑ Children may be resilient in one domain but not in others and to some stressors but not others
  - ❑ The total number of risk factors is more important than the type of factor
  - ❑ Resilience changes at various life phases
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# The Search Institute Weighs In:

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- ❑ There are 40 “Developmental Assets” (aka: Protective Factors)
  - ❑ The more of them a child has, the less likely that he/she will engage in high-risk behaviors (alcohol use, violence, school problems)
  - ❑ Boys have 17.2 assets vs 19.9 for girls
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# Developmental Assets

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## External

- Family supports
- Empowerment
- Boundaries and expectations**
- Constructive use of time

## Internal

- Commitment to learning
  - Positive values
  - Social competencies
  - Positive identity
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# Search Institute Data: 12-18 Year Olds – Assets by Problem Behavior

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## Problem alcohol use

- 0-10: 45%; 11-20: 26%; 21-30: 11%;  
31-40: 3%

## School problems

- 0-10: 44%; 11-20: 23%; 21-30: 10%;  
31-40: 4%

## Violence

- 0-10: 62%; 11-20: 38%; 21-30: 18%;  
31-40: 6%
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# Can We Teach Resilience to Those Who Don't Have It?

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"Yes", says Dr. Karen Reivich of the Penn Resiliency Program and [www.fishfulthinking.com](http://www.fishfulthinking.com)

There are seven components of resilience that easily can be taught . . .

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# Seven Ingredients of Resilience

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## 1. Emotional control

- Awareness of emotions and ability to talk about them

## 2. Impulse control

- Teach “stop and think” strategies

## 3. **Realistic** optimism

- Glass is “half-full” thinking
  - Unrealistic optimism is foolish (more on that later)
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# Next Four Ingredients

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## 4. Flexible thinking

- Ability to come up with multiple explanations, see multiple causes of problems

## 5. Self-efficacy (NOT self-esteem, but it results in self-esteem)

- Aka: self-confidence

## 6. Empathy

- Core of enduring social relationships (with friends AND adults)

## 7. Reaching out

- Take risks . . . Don't fear failure

# What Schools Can Do to Foster Resilience

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- Nurture school connectedness/ school bondedness
    - Provide opportunities for teacher-student ongoing interactions
    - Praise more than criticize
    - Praise publicly; criticize privately
    - Promote prosocial behaviors
    - Improve school climate (PBIS)
    - Foster collaborative home-school relationships
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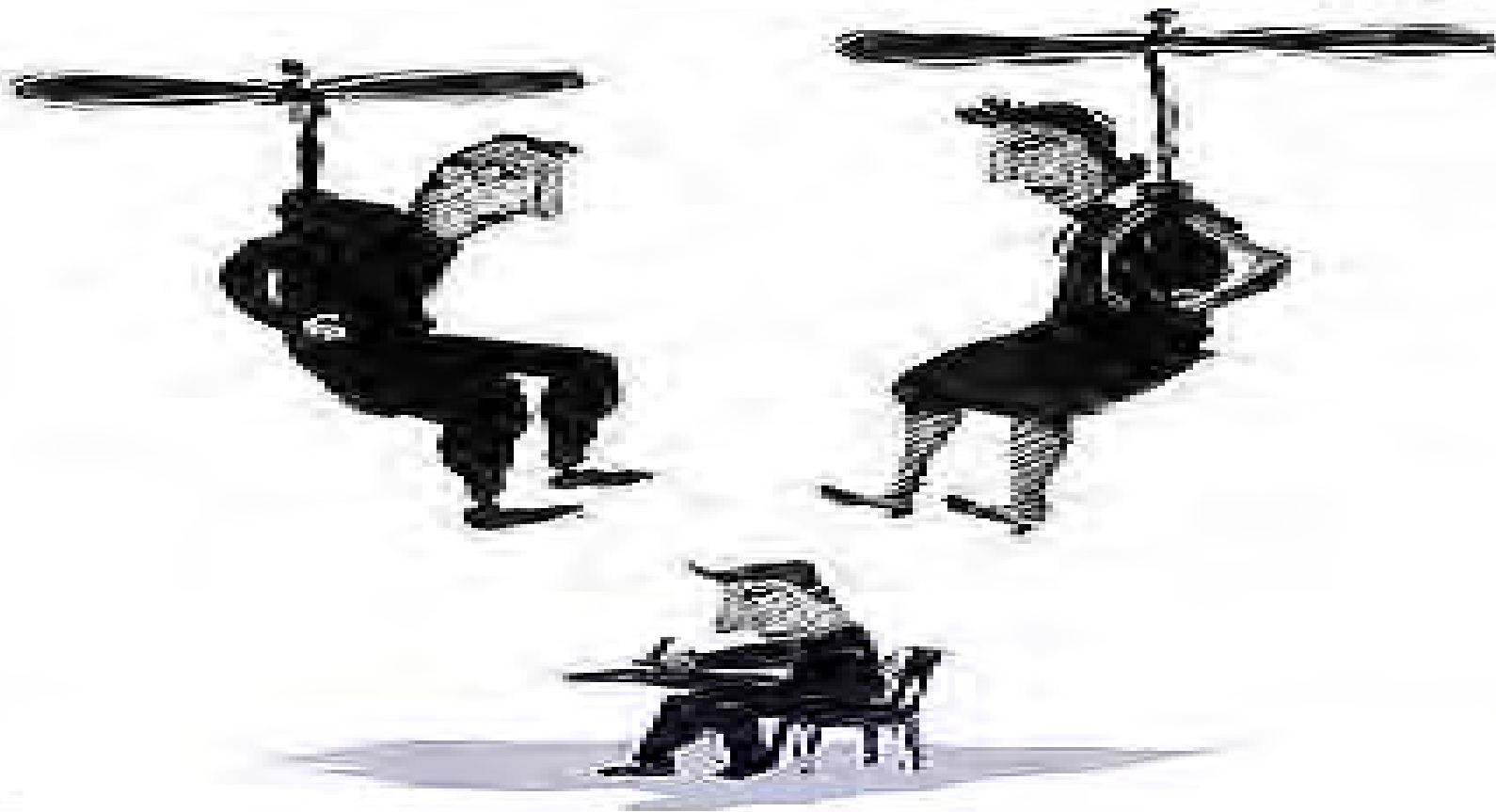
# Schools and Resilience (cont'd)

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- ❑ Foster (and model) positive attitudes
    - Failure as opportunity
  - ❑ Nurture positive emotions
    - Optimism, empathy, emotional intelligence
  - ❑ Foster academic self-efficacy
    - Clear expectations, academic problem-solving
  - ❑ Support volunteerism
  - ❑ Practice prevention
    - Conflict resolution, bully and violence prevention
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# Some Barriers to Resilience?

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"YES, MOTHER, I TOLD YOU, I'M DOING FINE ON MY OWN AT COLLEGE.... HEY, COULD YOU LOG ON AND FIND MY SCHEDULE, ORDER MY BOOKS AND CALL ME WHEN IT'S TIME FOR CLASS?"

IT'S NOT WHETHER YOU WIN  
OR LOSE... IT'S HOW YOUR  
PARENTS BEHAVE AT THE  
GAME.



**FLORIDA**

UNIVERSAL PICTURES  
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# What Do Parents Worry About?

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## Top Five Fears:

Christie Barnes: *The Paranoid Parents Guide*

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# # 1: Kidnapping/Dangerous Strangers



# The Facts Behind Fear # 1: Kidnapping/Dangerous Strangers

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- ❑ Odds of being kidnapped and killed by a stranger are 1 in 1.5 million (i.e., a .00007% chance) (Nat'l Ctr for Missing and Exploited Children)
  - ❑ The equivalent of letting a child remain outside and unattended for 750,000 hours
  - ❑ Parents, relatives, and friends, NOT strangers, are responsible for 80% of child maltreatment
  - ❑ Risk so small, it's impossible to guard against
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## # 2: School Shootings



# The Facts Behind Fear # 2: School Shootings

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- ❑ The odds of a student dying at school were 1 in 2 million during the 1998-99 school year (the year of Columbine)
  - ❑ USDOE (2005) reported a drop in the rate of crime victimization at school from 48 victimizations per 1,000 to 28 per 1,000 (from 1992-2003)
  - ❑ School-related violent deaths decreased 50% since 1992
  - ❑ Children far more likely to die at home in a gun-related incident
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## # 3: Terrorists



# The Facts Behind Fear # 3: Terrorists

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- ❑ Chances of being killed by terrorists: 1 in 80,000, the same odds as being killed by an asteroid (U. of Michigan)
  - ❑ People are 37 times more likely to die in an auto accident than a plane crash; it's more dangerous driving to the airport than flying (Nat'l Safety Council)
  - ❑ If we fly 20% less and drive more, 800 more people will die each year as passengers or pedestrians
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# # 4: Drugs



# The Facts Behind Fear # 4: Drugs

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## Monitoring the Future:

- ❑ Gradual decline in use of illicit drugs among 8th, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders
  - ❑ Decline in use of some drugs considered "substantial"
  - ❑ Cigarette usage down to lowest level since the early 1990s
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## # 5: Vaccinations



# The Facts Behind Fear # 5: Vaccinations

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- ❑ 93% of pediatricians among 750 physicians surveyed said that at least one parent refused to have their child vaccinated
  - ❑ In unvaccinated children, whooping cough cases increased from 1,707 in 1980 to 11,647 cases last year (13 deaths reported)
  - ❑ No proof that thimerosal in vaccinations has lead to an autism epidemic
  - ❑ No proof that the H1N1 vaccine is dangerous
-

# P.S.

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- ❑ There are no reports of a child ever being poisoned by a stranger handing out tainted Halloween candy
  - ❑ There is no evidence that pictures of missing children on milk cartons ever lead to the return of anyone
  - ❑ As play time decreases (down 25% since 1981) and as the number of children who walk/bike to school decreases (from 41% in 1969 to 13% in 2001), obesity increases
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# A Suggestion for Parents:

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Don't Believe Everything You Think !!!

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# More Reasonable Fears?

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- ❑ Car accidents (leading cause of death; 40 times more likely than child abduction)
  - ❑ Homicide (age 5 and under: usually committed by family members by beatings and suffocation)
  - ❑ Abuse (usually by family member/relative)
  - ❑ Suicide
  - ❑ Drowning (20 times more likely than child abduction)
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# Why Worry About the Wrong Things?

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Risk = Hazard + Outrage

And outrage trumps reality:  
Worry increases while actual risk  
decreases

(Dear Abby Says: A picture a day . . .)

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# The Results of Over-Worrying?

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- ❑ Children who are anxious and unadventurous, less likely to take risks
  - ❑ Vulnerable, self-conscious, not open to new ideas
  - ❑ Never learn to cope with disappointment
  - ❑ Unable to persist with a difficult task
  - ❑ Unable to make mistakes and learn from them
  - ❑ (i.e., Children who are less “resilient”)
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# A Whole New Vocabulary

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- ❑ "Helicopter parents"
  - ❑ "Hyper-parenting"
  - ❑ "Over-parenting"
  - ❑ "Pedestal children" (hard to say "no" to them)
  - ❑ "Trophy children" (reflection of parent effectiveness)
  - ❑ "Bubble-wrapping children"
  - ❑ The "Cult of self-esteem"
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# Other Complicating Factors . . .

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# The Electronic “Kinderkord”

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- Proportion of children with cell phones has doubled since 2005
  - Ages 10-11: 36.1% had cell phones
  - Overall, 22% of all children ages 6-11 have them
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# OFF THE MARK by Mark Parisi

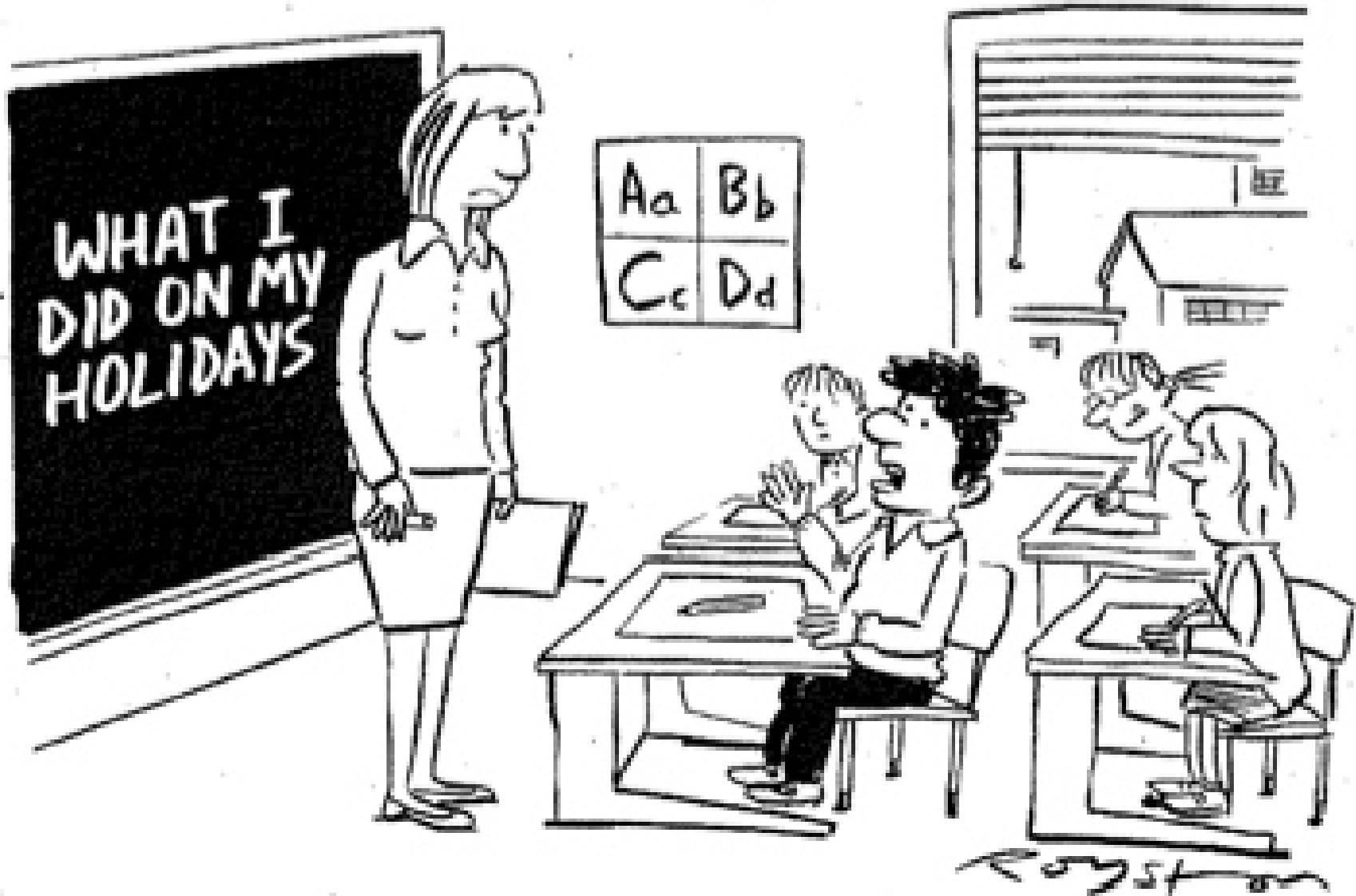
I'M NOT SCARED,  
I'M JUST WORRIED  
I WON'T GET A  
SIGNAL IN  
THERE...



offthemark.com

MARK

NI  
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"Can't I just email you a link to my blog, miss?"

# The Texting of America



# Nielsen Says:

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## Ages 12 and Under:

137 cell phone calls  
per month

428 text messages  
per month

## Ages 13-17

231 cell phone calls  
per month

1,742 text messages  
per month

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# The Results?

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- ❑ “Topless” meetings?
  - ❑ Loss of the “silent language”
  - ❑ “Continuous partial attention”
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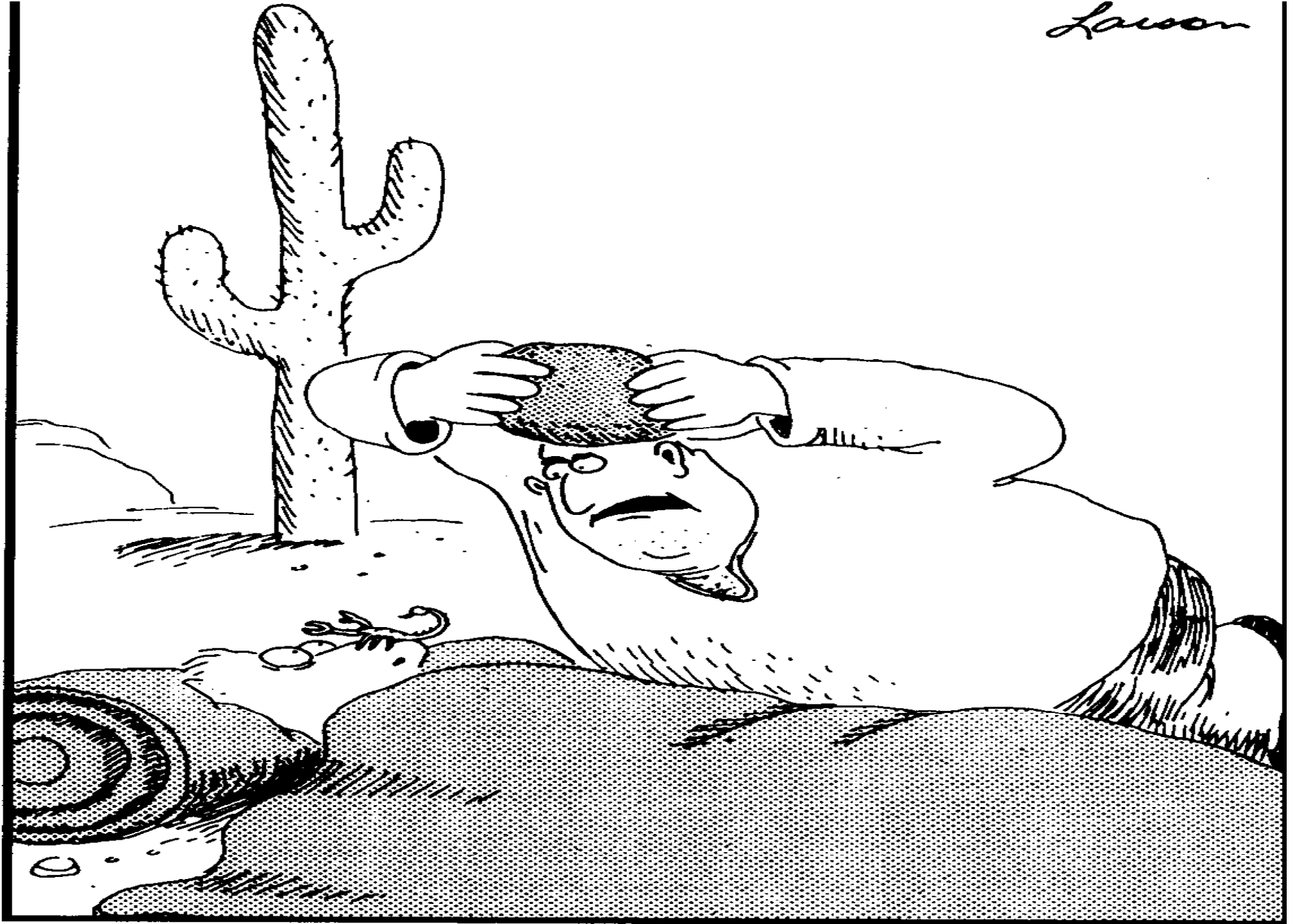
# And the Possible Result?

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□ Worries/fears + instant access =

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Lawson



“Hold still, Carl! ... Don’t ... move ... an ... inch!”

# When Parents Swoop In:

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- ❑ We keep children from experiencing failure and disappointment
  - ❑ We send the message that failure is intolerable
  - ❑ We don't provide limits (those Boundaries and Expectations)
  - ❑ We ride "shotgun" for our children with teachers, coaches, etc.
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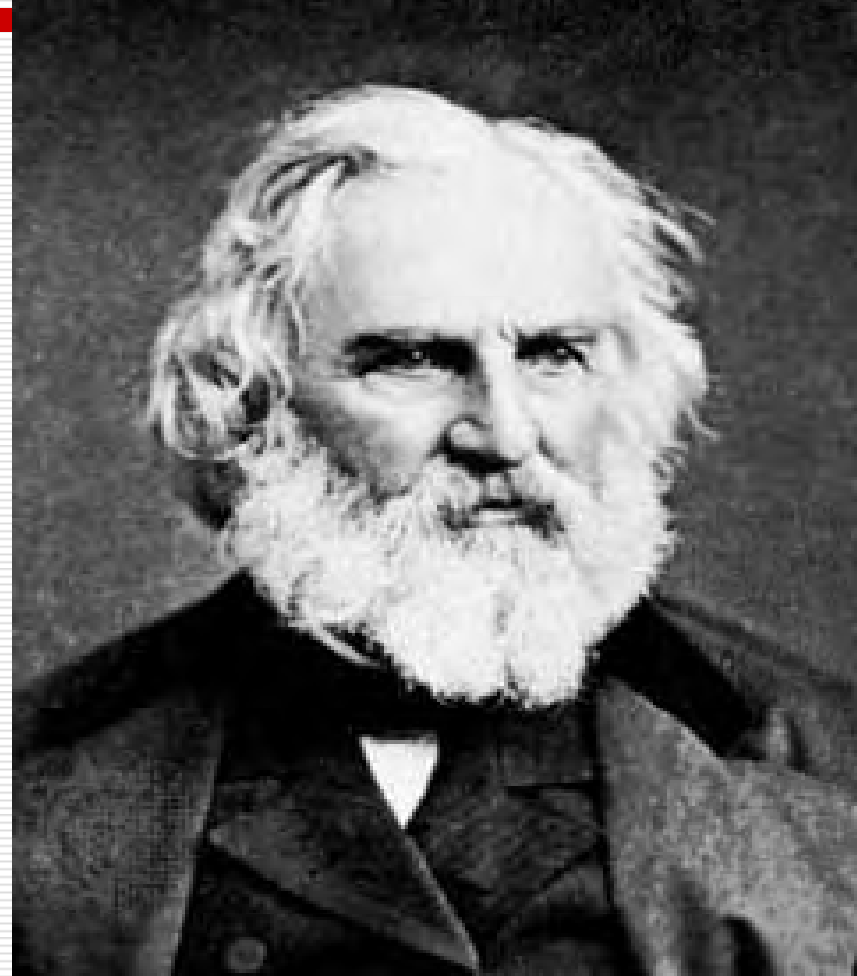
But what's wrong with a little  
bit of failure or disappointment  
now and again?

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# Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

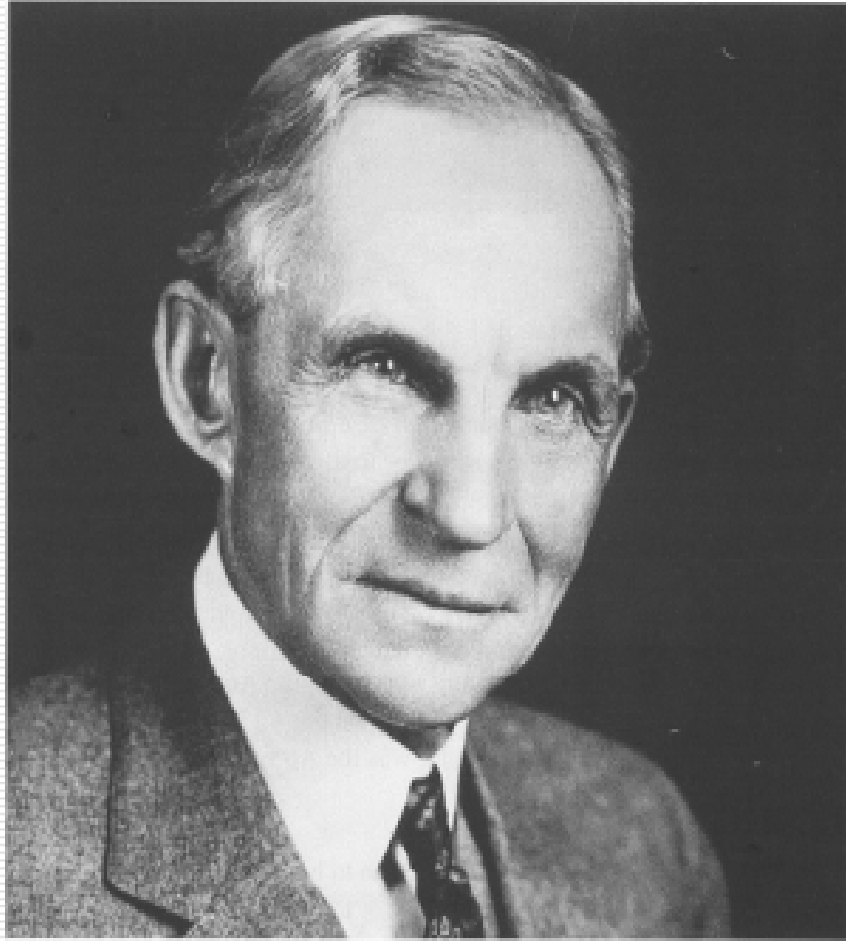
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"Into every life, some  
rain must fall."



# Henry Ford

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“Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently.”

# Rolling Stones

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"You can't always get  
what you want."



# Even the Word "Crisis" Is Not So Devastating

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## In Chinese:

"Crisis" means:

"Danger" and

"opportunity"

## In Greek:

"Crisis" means:

"to decide"



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And the Answer Is Actually  
Quite Simple . . .

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"You mean I do the Hokie Pokie and I turn myself around, and that's what it's all about?"

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Don't rescue them from  
disappointment . . .

Let them be disappointed

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# Top Five Disappointment Commandments:

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1. The ability to feel disappointment, bear it, and move on is a critical ingredient of mental health.
  2. It's the little disappointments that provide the greatest opportunity to build up this muscle.
  3. Teaching children to bounce back will help them become more independent.
  4. If you're never disappointed, you never learn.
  5. If you resist the urge to rescue children from disappointment and let them feel the letdown, they will discover that they can handle it.
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# Key to Resilience: Optimism

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## Definition of Optimism:

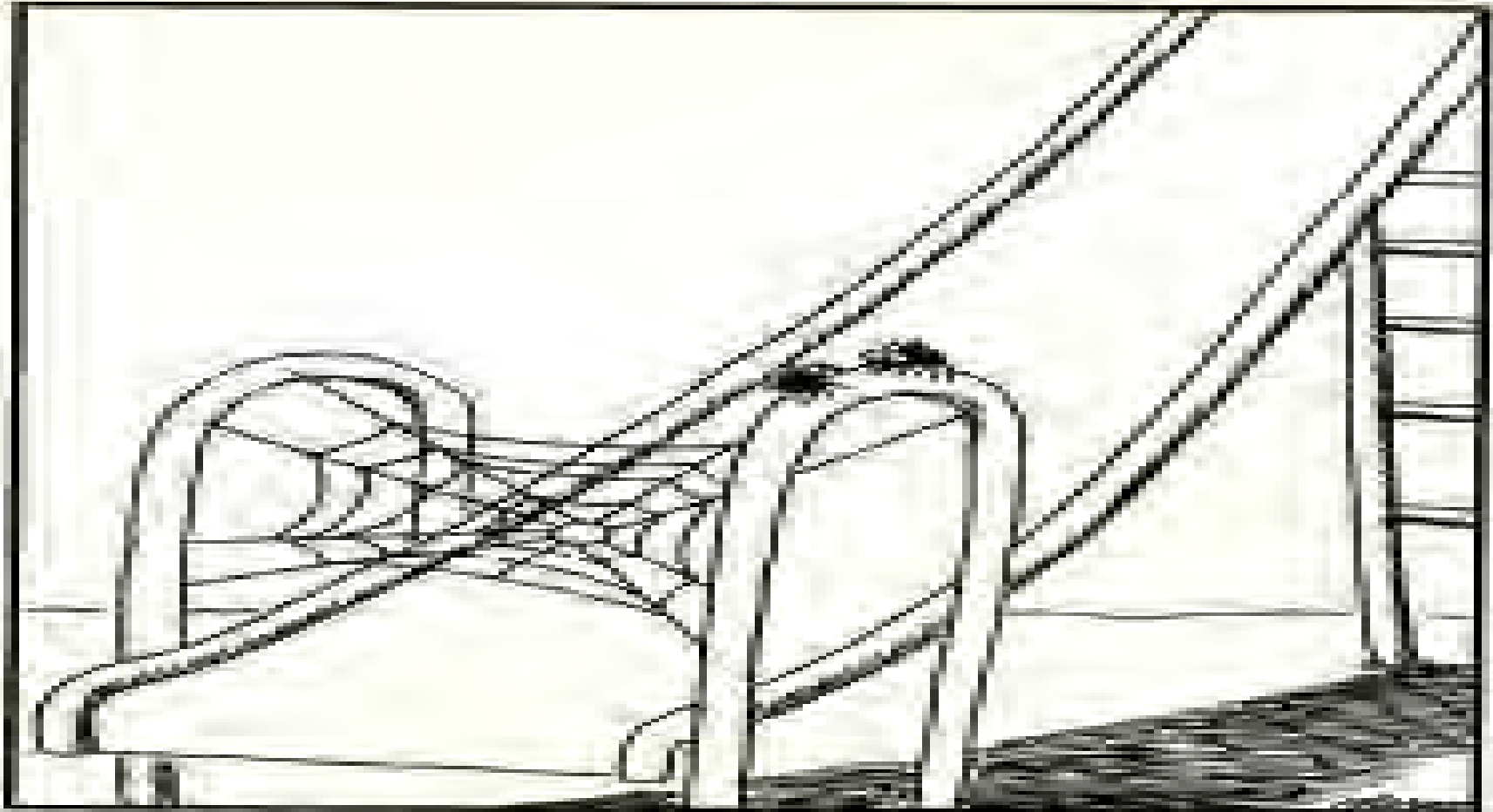
- Seeing glass as half full?
  - Always seeing the silver lining?
  - Expecting a silver lining?
  - Pollyanna approach to the world?
-

Remember Her?



# But Eternal Optimism Is Foolish

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"If we pull this off, we'll eat like kings."

# But Optimism Really Is:

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The way we think about the causes of  
our successes and failures . . .

i.e., Our own explanatory/attributional  
style

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# Typical Explanation/ Attributions:

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- Ability – smart vs not so smart
  - Effort – worked hard for it vs didn't bother
  - Luck – neither predictable nor controllable
  - Task difficulty – beyond one's control
-

# The Origins of Pessimism

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- ❑ Genetics (25% - 50%)
  - ❑ Parental pessimism
  - ❑ Pessimistic-oriented criticism from parents, teachers, coaches, etc. (ability vs effort)
  - ❑ Helplessness experiences
-

# One Model of Attributions

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## Martin Seligman

- Personal (Am I responsible for this outcome? Or someone/something else?)
    - internal vs external
  - Permanence (Does this outcome always happen?)
    - permanent vs temporary
  - Pervasiveness (Does this outcome happen in all areas?)
    - specific vs global
-

# How Do Students Think About a Good Grade on a Math Mid-Term?

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## Optimist:

- I'm a good student
  - Internal/perm/global
  
- I studied hard for this test
  - Internal/temp/specific
  
- I usually do well on Math tests
  - Internal/perm/specific

## Pessimist

- I made a lot of lucky guesses
    - External/temp/specific
  
  - The teacher was nice to me; it was an easy test
    - External/temp/specific
  
  - She asked the info that I already knew
    - External/temp/specific
-

# How Do Students Think About a Bad Grade on a Math Mid-Term?

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## Optimist

- I didn't study hard enough
  - internal/temp/specific
  
- I have to work extra hard in math
  - internal/perm/specific
  
- This test was very tricky
  - external/temp/specific

## Pessimist

- I'm really dumb
    - internal/perm/global
  
  - Teachers are so unfair
    - external/perm/global
  
  - This teacher doesn't like me
    - external/temp/specific
  
  - Like usual, nothing I studied was on the test
    - external/perm/global
-

# "I Stink!"

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- ❑ Internal, permanent, global explanation changed to . . .
  - ❑ Internal, temporary, specific explanation ("Today I made some errors in fielding grounders.")
-

# How to Help the Pessimists Among Us After Disappointment

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- ❑ Accept and empathize
  - ❑ Identify and learn from the disappointment
    - What went wrong? One thing, everything?
  - ❑ Reframe the attributions
    - Effort vs ability; specific vs global; temp vs perm
  - ❑ Investigate their thinking re: what this disappointment means
    - I'm a loser vs I screwed up this time
  - ❑ Contain the spill
    - A temporary setback does not a life define
-

# More Ways to Help

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- Understand expectations
    - Reward process, not outcome
  - Give them some level of control
    - Anticipate the next time
  - Explore their role in the disappointment
    - What could have been done differently?
-



# Other Resources

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- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
    - [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)
  - Penn Resiliency Project
    - [www.pennproject.org](http://www.pennproject.org)
  - Fishful Thinking: A Resource for Parenting Positive Kids
    - [www.fishfulthinking.com](http://www.fishfulthinking.com)
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