

## *"You are a Good Parent!": Areas of Mastery Must be Recognized and Enhanced*

This article is taken, with permission, from [Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma](#). This is [Deborah Gray's](#) second book and it won the Benjamin Franklin silver medal in 2008. You can visit Deborah's website to learn about her clinical services at Nurturing Attachments, see her speaking schedule or read her article, Ten Tips for the First Year of Placement.

In Chapter 12, Creating Resilience in Children and Their Families, Deborah writes,



Families who have mastery issues tend to be resilient families. As families begin to master new areas critical to their family, they feel a sense of competence. Sometimes, however, families don't recognize their own successes. Professionals should point them out.

*A parent said to me, "When you told me that I was a good parent, I began to believe it! I looked at some materials on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and I realized that I was hitting all of the areas. The things that we were working on in therapy did not change anything at first. You did not blame me like I thought you would. You told me that progress would require some different approaches. You changed your approach and gave me different instructions. Now my daughter has improved. I feel confident and my husband and I are working as a unit instead of arguing."*

Resilient families do not always look successful along the way. They struggle. But as they master challenges ahead, these families develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Professionals should normalize this struggle as part of the mastery process. Things often stop working for us before we decide that we have to change.

Families who begin parenting later in life can tap into earlier areas of accomplishments for lessons. Professionals can help point out areas of competencies useful for the new challenge.

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*An older parent confided, “This parenting is much harder than my Ph.D., but I can use the lessons from that process. Focus, hard work, keep researching, don’t give up.”*

Another parent in his 50’s said,

*When you suggested that I might be best-suited to this school IEP process, I was shocked. I have never done the school issues for my older children. But I’ve spent my career working with complex institutional problems. That was my training for our harder problem of working with the kids’ school system. I handle school meetings with the same preparation. And, I’ve learned that when I step on toes in the school district, I never spoil the shine. That way I have friends in the district. I’m glad that I can use my experiences to help my children.*

Professionals should diligently point out how life skills can generalize. After all, they have seen the minute bites that go into success many, many times. The families may be unfamiliar with the specific skills. In the vignette above, the parent understood how to approach institutional problems, a quality that the professional immediately recognized as crucial.

*In working with an attorney, I noted that she was a great explainer. She could communicate complex ideas aptly. She used her skills to explain life to her daughter and son. She helped her children move from quick response, impulsive girls to ones who could understand the “big picture,” or the context and meaning of information.*

*A parent who was an experienced teacher took over the problematic homework—and then moved on to the music lessons and chores. He had an organized and matter-of-fact manner. He was unflappable. Previously, this man had been doing laundry and driving to after school events. By looking at the needs of the family, he plugged in his skills where the family was bogged down.*

These discussions are part of professional objectivity used on behalf of the family. The professional should never be telling the family how to run their family, but should notice family strengths and how best to use them to meet the current challenges.