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Resiliency training helps youths avoid risky actions



Your Turn
Shelby Pedersen
Guest columnist

Over the past couple of years, ICAN has greatly expanded our life-skills training into schools.

We reach 200 youths each day here at the ICAN building after school, but we realized that we could reach so many more if we take some of our curriculum into the schools.

One of those programs is our resiliency training.

Resiliency skills are a critical component of our life skills training that we focus on at ICAN. The youths who attend ICAN predominantly live in poverty and require strong resiliency skills to avoid the risky behaviors that are so prevalent in the community they live in — behaviors like gang violence, juvenile delinquency and drug/alcohol abuse.

As you can imagine, these skills are critical for any youth growing up in today's society.

Our Community Programs team presented these skills to over 7,500 high school students last year. I recently sat in on one of these resiliency trainings, and, as a parent, I learned a lot of great techniques that I know will someday become valuable to my family.

Ted Huntington, our Community Programs manager, has a great way with the kids. He's very interactive and involved everyone in the room. I was amazed to watch him command a room of 50 preteens and not only keep their attention but effortlessly receive their participation.

They talked about resiliency skills and what that means, developing these skills now, long before they are needed (hopefully). It's so easy for a 13-year-old to say that they'll never vape or do drugs — not so much in a year or two.

Instilling these ideas and skills now will prepare these youths when the real temptations come. Ted talked through five techniques of resiliency:

- » **Say It:** Say no, refuse to participate, say it with confidence.
- » **Show It:** Don't just say it, show it with body language and reinforce that

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confidence.

» **Change it:** Give a valid reason why you can't participate in order to quickly get out of the situation — "My mom expects me home for dinner," "I'm meeting another friend"; white lies are fine to get out of a dangerous situation.

» **Build it:** This is about the relationship of the friendship. Don't put that person down or say they are terrible for their behavior. Be respectful, voice your opinion — not only about why you don't want to participate, but give them reasons why it's a bad idea for them to participate. If this technique doesn't work, it might be time to end this relationship.

» **Take action:** Get out of the situation as quickly as you can. Make your decision, use the "change it" technique, and then LEAVE.

Ted had all of the kids give examples of ways they could use these techniques. They were all raising their hands with ideas, especially for the "change it" process. They loved coming up with excuses!

It would have been easy for these kids to have a negative attitude for this kind of program, but they were great and I could see, firsthand, their energy and interest in the topics being discussed. These are real-world situations — situations they have either been in already or soon will be.

How incredible that they are now armed with skills to help them make positive decisions as they get older.

Academics are incredibly important, but as our youth enter the critical pre-teen phase, life skills, coping mechanisms and resiliency skills can truly lead them on a better path to their future.

Shelby Pedersen is CEO of ICAN: Positive Programs for Youth in Chandler. For more resources on resiliency training: www.childtrends.org/publications/positive-mental-health-resilience.