



Option B: Resilient Parenting for Bereaved Families



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Over the past thirty years, Dr. Irwin Sandler and Dr. Sharlene Wolchik, professors of psychology at Arizona State University, have conducted research on sources of resilience for children who have lost a mother or father. [Parental loss](#) is incredibly difficult and stressful, and some children experience long-term problems, such as depression or prolonged grief, after the death. But most children who lose a parent go on to lead healthy, successful lives. Psychologist Ann Masten refers to this resilience as “ordinary magic.”¹



Sandler and Wolchik’s research uncovered resilient parenting strategies that can be used to promote children’s healthy development after such profound loss.² Interventions that foster resilient parenting—like their Family Bereavement Program—can significantly improve outcomes for both bereaved children and a surviving parent.³ The program resulted in:

- more positive relationships between a child and their surviving parent,
- less long-term distressing grief for both child and parent,
- fewer mental health problems for both child and parent, and
- fewer unhealthy physical responses to stress by the child.

If you’re caring for a child who has lost a mother or father, you can practice resilient parenting by focusing on the five building blocks.

1. Take good care of yourself
2. Strengthen family bonds
3. Listen to your children
4. Establish consistent, effective family rules
5. Support your children's coping

Learn more about these building blocks on the [Option B Website](#).

Endnotes

1. A. S. Masten, “Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development,” *American Psychologist* 56 (2001): 227–38, doi:10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227.
2. I. N. Sandler, S. A. Wolchik, T. S. Ayers, et al., “Linking theory and intervention to promote resilience of children following parental bereavement,” in *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping and Care*, ed. M. Stroebe, M. Hansson, W. Stroebe, and H. Schut (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 531–50.
3. I. N. Sandler, S. A. Wolchik, T. S. Ayers, et al., “Family Bereavement Program (FBP) approach to promoting resilience following the death of a parent,” *Family Science* 4 (2013): 87–94, doi:10.1080/19424620.2013.821763.

[Resilient Parenting Building Blocks at Option B](#)