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Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength. Every Monday, I introduce you to a mentally strong person whose story and mental strength tips can inspire you to think, feel, and do your best in life. And the fun part is, we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys! Don't forget to subscribe to the show on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week. Now let's dive into today's episode!

Do you worry that your kids don't have the emotional skills they're going to need to succeed in life? Do you struggle to know how to help them be more resilient? Do you worry about the impact that the events over the past couple of years have had on your kids? If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, today's episode is for you. My guest is actress Cobie Smulders. You might know her from the show, How I Met Your Mother or from the Avengers movies. She also happens to be a parent who's passionate about helping kids develop resilience during tough times. Some of the things she talks about today are parenting strategies for uncertain times, why it's important to instill hope in kids, and the steps she's taking to help her own kids build resilience.

Make sure to stick around until the end of the episode for The Therapist’s Take. It's the part of the show where I'll break down Cobie's mental strength-building strategies and share how you can apply them to your own life. So here's Cobie Smulders on how you can raise resilient kids!

Cobie Smulders, welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I'm so excited to be able to talk to you. I was a huge fan of How I Met Your Mother for years. I've seen you on the big screen, and then, of course, you were in the Avengers, and you've appeared on Broadway. But I'd love to know what are you up to right now!

Cobie Smulders:
Besides I'm actually currently single momming it because my husband is in Europe shooting a film. So that's the immediate focus. But I just finished
doing two series at the beginning this summer. And one of them was a new Marvel series called Secret Invasion. And the other series is a series called High School, which is going to be on freebie. And it's about Tegan and Sara who were a band, a fantastic band. They wrote a memoir called High School. So it's about their time in Calgary growing up and discovering music and discovering their sexuality. And it's a really beautiful project. So I just finished both of those things. Just dove into children. I was like, I went and I worked and I abandoned my family and now I'm just deep in it. I'm just, children are up to here now, which is amazing and I love it.

Summer vaca, baby. I need to get on the sleep away camp track. We're just sort of starting to dip our toes into that, which is at one time, just kind of terrifying, but also just wonderful. I was a big summer camp kid. So one of my girls is getting into that world. But a lot of home time. We've been doing a lot of traveling this summer. So it's been a lot of just sort of packing and unpacking of bags and seeing a lot of family, which has been lovely. I have a 13 year old and a seven year old. Interesting times ahead, man. Yeah. Do you have children?

Amy Morin:
I was actually a foster mom for a bunch of years and I thought that the kids that would live with me would be younger, but most of the kids ended up actually being teenage girls, because teenage girls get this really bad rap in the foster care system. But I actually enjoyed it. That's not to say it wasn't hard work because it was, but a lot of times I found teenage girls were easier than the younger kids.

Cobie Smulders:
Oh, great. Amazing. Yeah. What a wonderful thing and what a wonderful time for you to step in for them too. That's awesome.

Amy Morin:
Thank you. Obviously, you know a thing or two about kids and resilience, because I've heard that you teamed up with Colgate to talk about raising resilient kids. How did that idea come about?
Cobie Smulders:
Yeah, sure. Colgate approached me to be one of their ambassadors and first of all, dental care and dental hygiene has always been in my world. My father was a dentist. He's now retired, but he was a dentist for about 40 years. So, oh, you don't have to floss all your teeth, just the ones you want to keep. Heard that a lot in my household growing up. And yeah, so it was always my awareness, always on top of it, brushing and flossing every night. I have no cavities. I definitely had braces. So teeth are sort of the first thing that I notice because my dad was so obsessed with them. So yeah, Colgate came to me and asked me to be an investor for their company. And it's a brand that I've used my whole life so I was very excited to actually be talking about something that I used.

But on top of that, they have this amazing fund called the Colgate Smile Fund. And Colgate does a lot of outreach. They do a lot of care, free dental care and provide services for families and children. But specifically they are giving a grant to an organization called City Year and they go out to schools and they provide mentoring programs that typically deal with bolstering, socioeconomic... Sorry, socio emotional programs. I find that's sort of the missing piece in a lot of schools. I think you send your kid to school and you go, okay, you learn math, you learn humanities, history, all of these programs. And it's wonderful that they are trying to incorporate programs that help teach kids empathy and self-awareness and resilience, which is something that not only kids need after the time and the time we're still experiencing the pandemic seems to just keep rolling on in different versions. So they're going to help assist kids to look inward and sort of give extra support to schools that need it.

Amy Morin:
I am so glad that you're talking about this. It's been a really tough couple of years for everyone. And sometimes I think we're just looking at the adult challenges that we've faced and we forget that the kids have endured a lot of painful times for them too. I hear adults say things like, well, kids are resilient, but kids aren't born resilient. We have to teach them those skills.
Cobie Smulders:

Yeah. 100%. I mean, what human doesn't need it right now, but I think kids, especially. I think every adult human has had challenges in their life that they've had to overcome, but this was just kind of hit kids in a new and different... It was a new found challenge and maybe the first challenge in a lot of kids' lives. So yeah, just sort helping bridge that gap between being at home and being isolated and then going back into relationship situations, dealing with new friendships or trying to nurture old friendships with kids in their class or families or whatever it is. I think as a parent, that's really important to me to be like, "How are you feeling? How is this going?" Because, I mean, it's all new. And it's exciting to have trained professionals going into the classroom to provide that safe space for communication.

Amy Morin:

All the things that you said about kids in resilience is super, super important. I'd love to know how have you tried to help your kids stay resilient during all the stuff that's been going on?

Cobie Smulders:

Well, you know what, it's like every day is a new day. And I think one of the many takeaways from the time we've spent and during this pandemic is I have this ability to pivot, which I had before, but certainly I've learned to pivot a lot better now and to deal with disappointments and not to feel them as deeply. But I think the thing that has helped me and I try to... Who knows what these kids are absorbing. And I think I try to listen to all of it because I don't really know a lot of the time what they're actually absorbing or how they're actually doing. And it's certainly age, it has to do with what age they're at speaking specifically to what they've been going through with the pandemic. The younger kids seem to be just rolling with it a little bit better. And then I think that the older kids whose friendships had to be sacrificed, it was a lot harder.

Amy Morin:
There's a statistic that really stuck out to me. Some of the research Colgate did was that seven out of 10 parents say it's hard for their kids to be positive about the future. And on our show, I've done episodes about hope because it's so important to have hope for the future for us adults, but to think of a kid not being able to be positive about the future is just heartbreaking. And that's so important because during the pandemic, parents were trying to tell their kids, no things are going to be okay or we're going to get back to normal soon.

And then there's this roller coaster where the truth was, we didn't really know what was going to happen anymore than anybody else did. But in an attempt to make our kids have hope we would tell them it's going to be over soon. I think sometimes we just have to give them the idea that life's going to be great. And again, we're still hearing from people that COVID is on the rise and we might have to change things around or we won't be able to go do that fun thing after all. And it's tough to know, how do you help kids deal with uncertainty and disappointment when we're feeling it ourselves?

Cobie Smulders:
What's helped me and I hope what's helped them is just to be present. Like today, in this moment, we are going to make breakfast and we are going to sit down and we're going to enjoy breakfast. And we've had a lot of quality time together, quality and maybe not so quality time together. But I've just really tried to enjoy that and just really take in these moments as they come. And then when they're bad moments kind of analyze them. And I find myself, the relationship I have with my kids is very honest. So I find myself apologizing a lot or saying I could do better in this moment or I'm sorry, I reacted that way. And I think that's very different generationally because I don't remember ever having that kind of a conversation with one of my parents where it was like I was wrong because I don't think that I was allowed to see them make mistakes. So yeah. All of that to say, I think that the way that we've been building resilience is just to be present in every moment, whether it is a hard one or a good one.

Amy Morin:
It's tough though, when you don't know what's going to happen next. It's easier to help kids when they don't get the part in the play or when they're struggling with the same issues that we went through when we were kids. But when kids are dealing with these issues in today's world that we didn't have to deal with, I find a lot of parents just don't know what to say or how to help because it's so hard.

Cobie Smulders:
It really is. And I'm glad you're putting out shows about hope, because I think it's a hard time in the world to hold on to hope. And I don't know if this is helpful or if it works for everybody, but any time that it's a bummer moment, I'm like, "Let's go for a hike. Let's get outside." And I always find that going into nature really just grounds me and in a weird way, makes me hopeful or at least makes me grateful for the world that is all around us, that we tend to forget about the environment certainly. But yeah, I think that statistic also just, I was like, "That is so horrible."

And it's also as a parent, you're trying to be like, we're go see grandma and grandpa, that's going to be fun. We're going to do this thing. You're going to do that thing. And then in this time of things being canceled and disappointments that keep happening, I can imagine that it is hard to bolster that. So it sort of has to be something that is internalized. And I'm sure how to speak to that better than I do. But you kind of have to find it inside yourself. You can't really rely on plans or people to curate that feeling for you. You have to bring it to yourself. So how do we do that? And this organization City Year that's their specialty is going into these schools and meeting with these kids and engaging them in that way.

Amy Morin:
Yeah. I like that, that you've looked for something positive. Despite the fact that something's been really tough you can always ask yourself, well, what did I learn from it? So one last question would be, what would be your piece of advice for a parent who's listening. And who's saying, "Okay, well, how do I make sure that my kids have some more hope or that they have better resilience for the future? I want to help them, but I don't know what to
do." Do you have a tidbit or one last piece of wisdom that you would leave them with?

Cobie Smulders:
I know. I know. In those moments, I go, I'm hoping... I know for me, certainly, like I said, at the beginning, it's enabled me to be better at change. I think that as an adult, I tend to be a little controlling. So it was certainly like, "I don't have any control in this situation." So it gave me something to work on. And I hope that the takeaway for kids is being a bit more flexible and being more resilient. It's hard for me to give advice to other parents because I think the parenting is so subjective. But I think that enjoy the little things. Enjoy the small things. Take your kids for walks. Take them to the beach.

Amy Morin:
Cobie Smulders, thank you so much for being on The Verywell Mind Podcast and for sharing your strategies for building resilient kids!

Welcome to The Therapist's Take. This is a part of the show where I'll break down Cobie's mental strength-building strategies and share how you can apply them to your own life. Here are three of my favorite tips Cobie shared for helping kids build resilience.

**Number one: apologize to your kids when it's warranted.** Cobie says she apologizes to her kids whenever she messes up. I know it's tough. For some parents that comes as second nature, but for others, it doesn't. Some parents are afraid that an apology will make them look weak in front of their kids. Other parents don't want to apologize because they think they have to follow through with a threat that they made even if it's a bit outrageous, like when they say they're going to ground their kids for a week over something small.

But apologizing to your kids is really healthy. You won't damage them by showing them that you make mistakes. Instead, you'll be modeling how to repair a relationship after messing up. Sincere apologies are part of healthy communication, and that's exactly what you want to teach your kids. So when you lose your temper or you fail to follow through with a
promise or you say something that hurts their feelings, say, “I'm sorry.” They'll feel safer knowing that you value their feelings enough to acknowledge your mistakes.

**Number two: stay hopeful.** We've talked about hope on the show before. It's really important to have, but telling your kids things like, “Just think positive,” or telling them, “Hopefully, everything will work out,” isn't necessarily helpful to them. In fact, you might accidentally be minimizing their feelings. If your child is worried about something, validate how they feel. Say something like, "I know you're really worried about this." Once they feel heard and understood, they actually might become more hopeful on their own.

But when you say something like, "I'm sure everything is going to work out just fine," they won't necessarily feel better. Instead, they might just start thinking about all the reasons why they know things aren't going to work out. So a better option might be to ask them, what would you say to a friend who had this problem? They'll likely say something like, "Oh, I told my friend that they would do a great job and everything's going to be fine." Then ask them. Well, what if you said that to yourself? The point is you want them to start thinking about the positive side on their own without relying on you to tell them everything's going to be fine. You can also instill hope just by staying hopeful in your own life. Talk about how you hope things will work out in your life in regard to a problem or a specific issue. Your positive attitude can be contagious, and hope is a big piece of resilience. In fact, that's one of the reasons why Colgate (a toothpaste company) partnered with Cobie. They talk about the power of a smile and how that can be contagious.

**And number three: enjoy the little things together.** I like that Cobie talked about the importance of enjoying the little things with your kids. Those little things like walking around the block, reading a story before bed, and eating dinner together are really big things in the end. Healthy relationships are the foundation for raising resilient kids. In fact, there's research that found that having just one healthy relationship with an adult can be instrumental in helping kids be resilient. And it doesn't necessarily even have to be with a parent. A kid who comes from a really
rough home life might benefit from having a great coach or a neighbor who
gives them attention or a child that has a great grandparent or an aunt or
an uncle can thrive sometimes even if their parents aren't able to meet their
needs. The best way to build that healthy relationship is by spending quality
time together. Those little things you do together every day are an
investment that will help you bond and help your child build resilience.

I used to teach a parenting class where we challenged parents to
spend 10 minutes a day playing with each child individually. The vast
majority of parents struggled to find that time. It sounds easy on the
surface, but for busy families, it's tough to do sometimes. You have to
make it a priority to ensure that it happens.

So those are three of Kobe's strategies for helping kids build
resilience that I highly recommend! Apologize to your kids when it's
warranted, stay hopeful, and enjoy the little things together.

If you want to hear more ideas about how to help kids develop mental
strength, listen to Episode 63 called “13 Things Strong Kids Do.” In that
episode, I share some of my favorite mental strength-building strategies for
kids straight from my book, which is also called 13 Things Strong Kids Do.

And if you know someone who could benefit from learning more
about how to foster resilience in kids, share this episode with them. Simply
sharing a link could help them feel better and grow stronger!

Do you want free access to my online course? It's called “10 Mental
Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To
get your free pass all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple
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Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to The
Verywell Mind Podcast! And as always, a big thank you to my show's
producer (who introduced me to The Avengers movies), Nick Valentin.