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# Monitor



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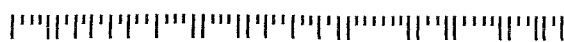
# Curbing climate change

and other reports  
from APA's Annual  
Convention

DNA ISN'T THE WHOLE STORY

**RESILIENT KIDS LEARN BETTER**

A LITTLE-KNOWN EPIDEMIC



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#000076967747/4#  
PL1 5  
ADA M00 PHD  
111 E WACKER DR STE 2900  
CHICAGO IL 60601-4277

# Resilient kids learn better

New research by Martin E.P. Seligman shows how a more positive curriculum pays off.

BY AMY NOVOTNEY

**E**mbed lessons on optimism, assertiveness and flexibility into class instruction and you'll improve a child's outlook on life, curb his likelihood for depression and boost his grades, according to new research presented at APA's Annual Convention by University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD.

Seligman's findings come at a critical time for the country, when nearly 20 percent of young people experience depression at some point — double the rate of their parents.

"In spite of the fact that all of our economic indicators over the past 60 years have gone up, life satisfaction has been flat," Seligman said.

To combat this epidemic of unhappiness, Seligman, in collaboration with Jane Gillham, PhD, and Karen Reivich, PhD, has developed two education programs. In the first, the Penn Resiliency Program, over a series of 19 controlled studies worldwide, more than 2,000 8- to 15-year olds were taught to think more realistically and flexibly about the problems they encounter every day. Teachers emphasized the importance



Teaching children to be more flexible and realistic about their problems cuts their risk of depression in half.

of slowing the problem-solving process down by helping students identify their goals, gather information and develop several possible ways to achieve those goals. Over the next two years, students' optimism levels increased, and their risk for depression was cut in half.

The second intervention, the Positive Psychology Program, sought to help students identify their signature character strengths, such as kindness, courage and wisdom, and incorporate these strengths into everyday life. In an unpublished study of the program, 240 ninth-graders were randomly assigned to literature courses with or without a positive psychology component. The positive psychology group read "Romeo and Juliet," "The Scarlet Letter" and other literary works also taught in the control-group class — the difference was the positive psychology group spent more time exploring the strengths of the main characters and were required to do three "loving" things for another person.

At the end of high school, the positive psychology students had improved their social skills and had a greater

love of learning and higher grades than those in the standard literature class.

"Under conditions of high well-being, more classroom learning occurs," Seligman hypothesized.

Seligman previewed a new initiative he is undertaking with the U.S. Army to teach soldiers resilience before they deploy. The program, called Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, will begin to be rolled out this fall, and focuses on providing holistic training in five key areas: physical, emotional, social, spiritual and family. Ultimately, all 1.1 million soldiers will be exposed to resilience training. It's all in an effort to prepare them for the psychological challenges they'll face on the battlefield, and to ward off rising suicide, substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder rates among the military.

The December *Monitor* will include a more in-depth look at Seligman's work with the U.S. Army. ■

*Amy Novotney is a writer in Chicago.*