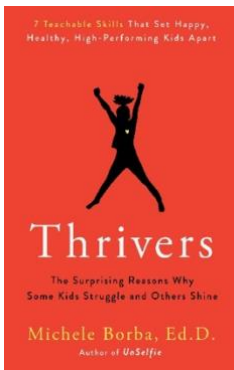


# 35 Science-Backed Tips to Raise Thrivers

By Dr. Michele Borba, author of

**THRIVERS: The Surprising Reasons Why Some Kids Struggle and Others Shine**



Across the nation, student mental health is plummeting, depression rates among teens are rising, kids are reporting severe anxiety at ever-younger ages – and the pandemic has only exacerbated this crisis. When Dr. Borba asks students to “tell me about your generation,” most respond with stories of stress, loneliness and fear. “We’re like packages with nothing inside,” said one teen.

But despite a Pandemic some young people aren’t struggling; they’re thriving. They can cope with adversity, develop healthy relationships, and embrace change. They are ready for whatever the world throws at them, even in today’s uncertain times. Dr. Borba calls these kids Thrivers, and the more she studied them, she wondered, “*What is their secret? And can it be taught to others?*”

Dr. Borba combed scientific studies on resilience, spoke to dozens of researchers and experts in the field, and interviewed more than 100 young people from all walks of life. In the end she found something surprising: The difference between those who struggle and those who succeed comes down not to grades or test scores, but to seven essential character strengths that set Thrivers apart (and set them up for happiness and greater accomplishment later in life).

Each of these character strengths is like a superpower that helps safeguard kids against the depression and anxiety that threatens to derail them. When those superpowers are combined, they become even more potent, creating a Multiplier Effect that prepares children to succeed in our fast-paced, ever-changing world. The best news of all: these strengths aren’t inborn. *They can be taught* – and Dr. Borba shows parents and educators simple, proven ways to do it. Doing so will help us raise mentally healthy, resilient kids who are better prepared for an uncertain, fast-paced world.

## **SELF-CONFIDENCE: Healthy identity, using personal strengths to find purpose & meaning.**

1. Kids who understand, value, and apply their Core Assets are happier, and more resilient.
2. It’s only when we have an accurate picture of our sons and daughters that we can nurture their strengths and help them compensate for their weaknesses.
3. Real confidence is an outcome of doing well, but the child is always the doer and director of his own triumphs.
4. Knowing your purpose steers kids closer to the path that brings deeper joy and pride, and aligns them with something bigger than themselves.
5. While we can’t eliminate hardships, we can minimize potential negative effects by helping kids develop and apply their core strengths.

## **EMPATHY: Understanding and sharing another’s feelings, and acting compassionately.**

6. Kids are likely to be more empathic if they understand why empathy is important.
7. To teach kids empathy, you must show kids empathy. Model what you want copied.
8. Children must be able to identify different emotional states before they can become sensitive to others’ feelings. Ask often: “How do you feel?” until you can ask, “How do *they* feel?”
9. Kids exposed to different perspectives are more likely to empathize with those whose needs and views differ from theirs. Expand your child’s caring circles.
10. If you want your child to feel for others—expect and demand your child to feel for others.

## **SELF-CONTROL: Managing stress, delaying gratification, strengthening focus.**

11. Self-control is like a muscle that gets stronger from regular daily exercise.
12. Taking a slow, deep breath and exhaling twice as long as the inhale helps kids gain control.
13. Odds that a child will adopt a self-control skill are more likely if he practices it over and over.
14. A child’s ability to control attention, emotions, thoughts, and actions is one of the most highly correlated strengths of success and resilience.
15. We are living textbooks to our kids. Model self-control so your child catches it.

**INTEGRITY: Valuing and adhering to strong moral code, ethical thinking to lead a moral life.**

16. Children's moral growth is an ongoing process that spans the course of their lifetime.
17. Parents play a significant role in helping kids develop moral codes to guide behavior.
18. Integrity must be nurtured, influenced, modeled, and taught. Use your time wisely!
19. Kids must hear repeated messages about character. Keep explaining why it matters.
20. Moral development isn't learned in a vacuum but is influenced by parents, neighbors, peers, schools, and communities. Find ways to create a culture of integrity.

**CURIOSITY: Having open-mindedness, willingness to try new ideas, take risks & innovate.**

21. Curiosity flourishes with open-ended, hands-on, child-guided opportunities.
22. Children must feel supported from adults to deviate from the norm and be creative.
23. Kids are more likely to think outside the box and take creative risks when not rewarded.
24. Curiosity and peak performance are driven by passion: help children find their passions.
25. When people collaborate and build on one another's work, curiosity increases.

**PERSEVERANCE: Exhibiting fortitude, tenacity and resolve to endure so as to bounce back.**

26. Perseverance flourishes with open-ended, hands-on, child-guided opportunities.
27. To stretch your child's perseverance, praise effort, not the end product.
28. Thrivers use mistakes as success tools so they stick to tasks longer and don't give up quickly.
29. A demanding and supportive parental style in equal parts is the formula for perseverance.
30. Chunking tasks into smaller parts helps kids who have difficulties focusing, getting started, or feeling overly concerned that "everything's right!" And they're more likely to succeed.

**OPTIMISM: Learning self-advocacy and keeping unrealistic pessimism to encourage hope.**

31. Kids who remain upbeat about life despite uncertain times have parents who model optimism. Be the model you want your kids to copy.
32. Ungrounded pessimistic thinking erodes hope, sets kids up for failure, and shortchanges their thriving abilities, but optimism can be taught.
33. Seeing repeated violent images exacerbates anxiety, increases fear, and decreases optimism, which is why we must monitor kids' news intake during disasters or tragedies.
34. Parents who raise grateful kids expect them to be appreciative.
35. Every kid makes negative comments; be concerned when pessimism becomes your child's typical operating mode.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Michele Borba, Ed. D.**, is the author of 24 books including *Thrivers: The Surprising Reason Why Some Kids Struggle and Others Shine* and *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About Me World*, and is an internationally renowned educational psychologist, and an expert in parenting, resilience and character development. A sought-after motivational speaker, she has spoken on 19 countries in five continents to over one million parents and educators, and served as a consultant to hundreds of schools and corporations including Sesame Street, Harvard, U.S. Air Force Academy, 18 US Army bases in Europe and the Asian-Pacific, H.R.H. the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, a TEDx Talk: "Empathy Is a Verb" and is the recipient of Sanford N. McDonnell Award for Lifetime Achievement in Character Education. Dr. Borba is a regular NBC contributor who appears regularly on *Today* and has been featured as a parenting expert on *Dateline*, *The View*, *Dr. Phil*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Fox & Friends*, *Dr. Oz*, and *The Early Show*, among many others.

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