

Psychologist offers guidance to help parents raise resilient kids



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Author Dr. Robert Brooks speaks on the topic of raising resilient children and teens at Brookside School in Allendale on Wednesday.

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ALLENDALE - Psychologist Robert Brooks spoke to parents at Brookside School in Allendale on Wednesday night, sharing tips he's learned through decades of experience in the field, and as a father, on how to raise resilient children.

The talk was part of area school districts' effort to put an emphasis on wellness of the whole child, through initiatives that administrators say permeate every aspect of a student's education, and extend to life at home.

It's an effort that's always been a focus, Northern Highlands Vice Principal Mike Koth said, but since the suicide of two alumni of the high school in 2014 — Madison Holleran and Michael Menakis — educators have strived to "reevaluate and recommit" to strategies.

Throughout his humorous and touching presentation, Brooks shared anecdotes from his professional and personal life, focusing on the important role that parents and mentors have in helping their kids be resilient — giving them the ability to bounce back from adversity.

The Harvard Medical School faculty member and author of 16 books said the

See KIDS, Page 6L

Kids

Continued from Page 1L

No.1 factor that helps children become resilient is having even just one person who believes in them and stands by them as a child — a figure he calls a charismatic adult, from which a child gathers strength.

Brooks stressed the importance of parents' being empathetic to their child, and focusing not on their child's weaknesses, but their strengths, or "islands of competence."

"Ask yourself when you put your child to bed: 'Is my child stronger because of things I've said to them today, or less strong?'" he said.

Brooks said in order to do this, it's important to note that all children are born different, and parents must know their child's temperament in order to help them become problem solvers.

"Resilient people see problems as things to be solved rather than overwhelmed by," he said.

The psychologist noted that children who feel that they are giving back to the world, and making a difference in other people's lives, are more resilient.

He asked parents to lead by example and do charitable things as a family, teaching them that they can make a positive difference in things they have control over.

Parents attending the presentation said they were there to learn more, to help teach their children that it's OK to fail, and to give them the tools and support to move on af-

ter a failure.

Parent Soma Das of Allendale said she's read articles about anxiety and depression and some children's "lack of resilience," and was hoping to learn how she can help her children cope, particularly her 9-year-old, who has "perfectionist tendencies."

Germein Ibrahim said she hoped to learn more about resilience, particularly because her son, who is in kindergarten, takes failure to heart.

Brooks said all children deal with adversity differently — some get right back up and keep trying, but to others "each mistake is like a rock around their neck, and soon they're sinking in quicksand."

"We also must recognize that every kid will fall on his or her face," Brooks said. "It's about how we respond."