

Grawemeyer Awards

Scholar who explains how resilience develops wins 2024 psychology award

By Denise Fitzpatrick

A child psychologist who discovered that resilience in human development depends on “ordinary magic” has won the 2024 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Psychology.

Ann [Masten](#), a professor in the University of Minnesota’s Institute of Child Development, earned the prize for showing that our capacity to overcome potentially harmful experiences comes from ordinary but powerful adaptive processes inside us and from our supportive connections with others.

Resilience science began around 1970 as a search to explain how some children who face severe adversity seem to thrive while others do not.

“As I studied children and families dealing with war, disasters, poverty, violence and homelessness, I found a consistent set of surprisingly ordinary but powerful factors at work,” she said. “Resilience didn’t depend on special qualities but on a capacity to adapt that we develop over time as we are nurtured, learn and gain experience.”

Supportive relationships, a sense of belonging, self-control, problem-solving skills, optimism, motivation and a sense of purpose all play a part in creating the “ordinary magic” that makes us resilient, she found.

“Her work is inspiring because it reveals that the human capacity to overcome adversity does not rely on rare ingredients,” said Nicholas Noles, psychology award director. “The seeds of resilience, of success, are within all of us, and we need only time and the right kind of relationships and experiences to overcome the obstacles we face.”

Masten’s findings have shaped policy and practice in many fields outside psychology such as pediatrics, school counseling, social work and disaster response. People in more than 180 countries including Ukraine have taken part in her online course about the resilience of children in war and disaster.

A licensed psychologist in Minnesota since 1986, Masten holds a doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Minnesota and a bachelor’s degree from Smith College. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2021 and has received mentoring and lifetime contribution awards from the American Psychological Association.