

Building your resilience

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress such as family and relationship issues, serious health problems, school or financial stressors. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or don't but involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that anyone can learn and develop.

Developing resilience is a personal journey. What works well for one may not work for another so people must use several strategies. Some variations can reflect cultural or other differences.

The following points may help in considering one's own strategy for building resilience:

1. **Make connections.** Good relationships with others are important. Accepting help and support from people who care about you and will listen to you strengthens your resilience. Being active in various groups like Boy Scouts, churches or Rotary provide social support and help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need can also benefit and help.
2. **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.** You can't change the fact that highly stressful events occur but you can change how you interpret or respond to them. It's important to look beyond the present to how future circumstances can be better.
3. Accept that **change is a part of living.** Certain goals may not be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed will help you focus on circumstances that you can.
4. **Move toward your goals.** Think about possible solutions to problems you are facing and decide what realistic goals you want to achieve. Do something on a regular basis even if it seems like only a small accomplishment in order to move yourself forward. Focus away from tasks that are unachievable. It is important to ask yourself what is one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps move me in the direction I want to go. Some people find it helpful to track their progress by making a record of any accomplishments that move them toward their goals. It is important to reflect on the fact that you are taking positive action and achieving what you need to do.
5. **Take decisive actions.** Act on adverse situations as quickly and completely as you can. Take decisive actions and not just detach from problems and stresses and simply wish them away. Being active instead of passive helps people be more effective in managing adversity.
6. **Find positive ways to reduce stress and negative feelings.** After a stressful event many people feel they need to turn away from negative thoughts and feelings they are experiencing. Positive distractions like exercising, going to a movie or reading a book can help renew you so that you can refocus on meeting challenges in your life. Avoid numbing unpleasant feelings with alcohol or drugs.
7. **Look for opportunities for self-discovery.** A crisis or loss often enable someone to learn important things about themselves and to grow in important ways. Many people who have experienced tragedies have reported better relationships, a greater sense of strength even

though they feel more vulnerable, increased self-esteem, increased spirituality and a heightened appreciation for life.

8. Nurture a **positive view of yourself**. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts will help build resilience.
9. **Keep things in perspective**. Even in painful situations try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Don't blow the event out of proportion. Strong emotional reactions are normal and typically lessen over time.
10. **Maintain a hopeful outlook**. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want rather than worrying about what you fear.
11. **Take care of yourself**. It is important to pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that are relaxing and contribute to good health like exercise and healthy eating. Taking care of yourself enables you to recharge your batteries and be better prepared to deal with other situations that require resilience.
12. Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful. Some people **write** about their deepest thoughts and feelings or use **meditation** or other spiritual practices that enable them to build connections and restore hope. The key is to find ways of building your resilience that are likely to work well for you.
13. Where to **look for help**. Getting help when you need it is crucial to building your resilience. Many people turn to family members, friends or others who care about them for support and encouragement. Self-help and community support groups can be helpful. Sharing information, ideas and emotions allow group participants to assist one another and find comfort in knowing they are not alone in experiencing difficulty. If using ones own resources and getting help from others is not sufficient for building resilience, seeking the assistance of a licensed mental health professional can be an important next step.

Larry Kubiak, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist PY4011 Past District Governor 6940