

Resilience



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COACHING

Resilience

When something goes wrong, are you more likely to recover quickly or fall apart?

Simply put, resilience is your ability to adapt to what happens to you. Some people are born resilient while others are born much less so. We are also affected by our upbringing: if you came from a family where upsets were treated as major disasters, you are likely to be less resilient yourself.

Fortunately, whatever your current level of resilience, you can develop and learn skills to become more resilient.

While resilience is a positive and effective trait, it is important to be mindful not to tip over into unhelpful aspects such as taking on too much responsibility or becoming overly stressed. By understanding what helps create resilience, you can build this essential skill into your life and better deal with challenging situations. Vital aspects of resilience include having a support system and being realistic about your and others' abilities.

This resource will help you to understand what resilience is and will give you tips you can use to build your own resilience further. You can also use these tips to help spot when your children or loved ones are less resilient and be able to support them better.

What is resilience

Resilience is a quality that we possess in varying degrees. It speaks to how well we cope with difficulties: how we are in the moment, how we deal with the aftermath and how we go on to live afterwards.

When you have resilience, you have the inner strength and techniques that help you deal with an issue and recover from the setback or challenge. Examples include losing your job, illness, an accident or natural disaster or the death of a loved one or close friend. If you lack resilience, you might end up dwelling on your problems, feel responsible or like a victim, become overwhelmed or turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms..

If you possess lots of resilience, you will tend to cope better when the situation arises, you will bounce back more quickly and be less impacted down the line.

It is worth saying that resilience will not prevent problems from occurring — but resilience will give you the ability to see them differently and cope better, resulting in more enjoyment in life and a lot less stress.

Common characteristics of low resilience

Clinically, a lack of resilience can cause a range of problems, both physical and mental. Some examples include:

1. **Difficulty coping with stress:** When individuals lack resilience, they may find it hard to deal with challenges, leading to increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.
2. **Poor performance:** A lack of resilience can negatively affect an individual's ability to perform in their personal and professional life. This can result in difficulty meeting deadlines, achieving goals, and performing well on tasks. This can include in the home and socially with memory and concentration problems.
3. **Relationship issues:** Individuals with low resilience may struggle to maintain healthy relationships with others, leading to frustration, conflicts and breakdowns in communication.
4. **Health problems:** The inability to cope with stress can lead to a range of health problems, including sleep difficulties, chronic fatigue, insomnia, and increased susceptibility to illness.
5. **Reduced problem-solving skills:** Without resilience, individuals may lack the necessary problem-solving skills to overcome obstacles and navigate difficult situations.

That said, there are a whole variety of symptoms and a huge range of degrees varying from a tendency to slight irritation all the way through to much more serious problems. For most of us on a day-to-day basis having less resilience simply affects our energy, mood, sense of joy and satisfaction and perhaps the odd sleepless night.

What resilience looks and feels like

Resilient people tend to see a difficulty as a challenge, not as a disaster or a cause for giving up. They often see their mistakes as lessons to be learned from or opportunities to grow.

Most importantly, resilient people will not view what happens as a judgement of their own abilities, talents, potential or self-worth.

Resilient people are usually clear about and committed to their goals. They seem to know the reason they get out of bed in the morning. They put a lot of effort into their relationships, friendships, family, “causes” and may have strong religious or spiritual beliefs.

Resilient people tend to focus their time and energy into situations that they have control over and don't get bogged down in what is outside of their sphere of influence. They put their efforts where they can have the most impact. As a result, they will likely feel confident and will usually appear successful. In contrast, those with less resilience spend time worrying, often feel lost,

helpless, and powerless to take action. They cope less well in the face of an upset and take longer to recover afterwards.

Optimism and Pessimism

There are similarities between high and low resilience and optimism and pessimism since these are all related to how we understand and think about setbacks.

People who are optimistic - and therefore have more resilience - tend to see the effects of an upset as temporary. For instance, they might say "My boss didn't like the work I did on that project" instead of "huh, my boss never likes my work." People who are pessimistic tend to see problems as longer lasting, which immediately means the problem feels bigger and more difficult to resolve. This is also an example of "generalisation" - of taking a few (or even a single) instance and making that mean that "it is always true".

Optimistic, more resilient people take the incident at face value and don't make it mean anything else or anything bigger than the event. An optimistic person whose performance in a task is challenged might say "I didn't do that very well", rather than "I'm no good".

A consequence of lower resilience is often giving something a meaning based on little or no evidence. You have probably heard the example of a person sitting waiting for another for a lunch date and that person doesn't show. The only facts you know are that clearly one was expecting the other but that person didn't arrive at the expected place and time. It would be easy to make this mean that they were upset with you or don't like you or had something more important to do, i.e. more important than you. There are no facts to support any of these possibilities and a more resilient person may simply go back to the office to find out what really happened.

People with more resilience don't tend to only blame themselves when bad events occur, they also take into account the actions of other people, or the circumstances, as part of the cause. For instance, they might conclude that "I didn't get the support I needed to finish that project successfully," rather than "I messed that project up because I can't do my job."

Adapting to adversity

Resilience does not mean the ability to avoid all difficult situations.

When stress, adversity or trauma strikes, you still experience anger, grief and pain, but you're able to keep functioning — both physically and psychologically. However, resilience isn't about putting up with something difficult, being stoic or figuring it out on your own. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key part of being resilient.

Learn from experience. Think of how you've coped with hardships in the past. Consider the skills and strategies that helped you through difficult times. You might even write about past experiences in a journal to help you identify positive and negative behavior patterns — and guide your future behavior.

6 Pillars of Resilience

Resilience can be said to consist of a number of pillars: Self Awareness, Mindfulness, Self Care, Agency, Positive Relationships and Purpose.

By strengthening these pillars, we in turn become more resilient. Instead of experiencing an overwhelming downward spiral when we encounter stress in our lives, these pillars work together to lift us up out of the chaos we are feeling.

1. Self awareness

Self Awareness is having a clear perception of your personality, including strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motivation, and emotions. Self Awareness allows you to understand other people, how they perceive you, your attitude and your responses to them in the moment.

This also means acknowledging your feelings: It's important to acknowledge your feelings when you're facing adversity. Don't try to bottle up your emotions or pretend everything is okay when it's not. Allow yourself to feel angry, sad, or scared. Acknowledging your feelings will help you process them and move on.

A feeling is simply energy, it is an emotion. You don't need to react from an emotion, in fact it is generally better not to react from an emotion, especially one that causes you to feel out of control.

It is useful to get your feelings out - to express them safely. This can be done by journaling, speaking then out to a trusted friend or even ranting to yourself on a walk. You could record yourself voicing your feelings and delete the recording. Write a letter and burn it. The point is to

vent and vomit and get the feelings out so that you can begin to process what has happened without all the energy of those emotions getting in the way.

2. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention to the present. When you're mindful, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness means living in the moment and awakening to experience.

This might allow you to notice the feelings as they arise within you, to see your anger or frustration and watch it rather than get consumed by it. This is definitely a process that requires learning and practice, but it is powerful.

Remain hopeful. You can't change the past, but you can always look toward the future. Accepting and even anticipating change makes it easier to adapt and view new challenges with less anxiety.

3. Self care

Self care is unique for each person and can be understood in many different ways. In its simplest form, the term refers to our ability as human beings to function effectively in the world while meeting the multiple challenges of daily life with a sense of energy, vitality, and confidence. Self care is initiated and maintained by us as individuals — it requires our active engagement.

Take care of yourself. Tend to your own needs and feelings. Participate in activities and hobbies you enjoy. Include physical activity in your daily routine. Get plenty of sleep and create consistent bedtime rituals. Eat a healthy diet. Practice stress management and relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing or prayer.

At its root, self care is about maintaining ourselves in a better state to deal with what comes our way rather than feeling exhausted, spent and depleted by normal life and having nothing left in the tank when the unexpected comes along. In a sense it is emptying your stress bucket regularly, each day ideally, rather than waiting for the weekend or your holiday.

There is no one size fits all for self care - rather it is about discovering what works best for you.

4. Agency

Simply put, agency is the feeling of control over your actions and their consequences. It is your ability to do something and your willingness to seek and use the resources available towards your goals.

This means be proactive. Don't ignore your problems. Instead, figure out what needs to be done, make a plan and take action.

One of the most debilitating feelings for a human being is the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. The irony is that these situations are both rare. It is almost always possible to do something, although it may not always be palatable or your number one choice.

Being clear on what you CAN do and then choosing from those possibilities is a sure-fire way to shift that feeling of helplessness. Nothing beats depression quite like action taken.

The other vital aspect of agency is the recognition of what you cannot control and the letting go of wanting to change that. This is a massive shift when you can get your head around it. I quote this to my clients a lot: "Do what you can do. When you have done everything you can do, there is nothing else you can do, so let the rest go". You might have to go back and re-read that a few times to see what it really means.

Although it can take time to recover from a major setback, traumatic event or loss, know that your situation can improve if you work at it and nothing that you do will change those things over which you have no control.

5. Positive relationships

Positive Relationships are the people who support and care for us — and we care for them. One of the most profound experiences we can have in our lives is the connection we have with other human beings. By building positive relationships with others, we will be happier and more fulfilled and feel more supported, supportive, and connected. Positive and supportive relationships will help us to feel healthier, happier, and more satisfied with our lives.

Get connected. Building strong, positive relationships with loved ones and friends can provide you with needed support, guidance and acceptance in good and bad times. Establish other important connections by volunteering or joining a faith or spiritual community. Spend time with those in your network. Keep in touch, share what you are up to and ask them what is going on in their world. Not only does this keep your relationships current and provide you a larger pool of people who will listen to you but it daily builds your confidence, self esteem and empathy simply by interacting with others.

When you're facing a challenging situation - SEEK OUT SUPPORT. Know that asking for support is NOT a sign of weakness. It does not make you needy or lacking in any way. Quite the opposite is true. By asking for help, you will get support in your situation and you will encourage others to ask for support when they are struggling. Also, just knowing that you're not alone can make a big difference. Talking to someone who understands what you're going through can also be helpful. A rising tide lifts all ships.

Building positive relationships might mean letting some people go: those that you feel draw from you more than they give back. While there is always give and take in a good relationship, you will know from experience that some people give little back and draw from you during every interaction. With no judgement - and great love - let them go as simply not being supportive to you at this time.

A vital aspect of resilience is knowing what doesn't serve you and doing what you can to reduce or eliminate that from your life.

6. Purpose

Purpose is a recognition that we belong to and serve something bigger than ourselves. Our purpose helps to shape the mindset and attitude we have toward others and the events we experience. We can find purpose in our faith, family, a political party, being green, or being a part of an organization like the Boy Scouts.

There is a lot of research that those people who are happiest and most fulfilled - as well as being amongst the most resilient - are those who know why they are getting out of bed in the morning. Their lives have purpose, meaning and they are clear on the value that they bring.

Make every day meaningful. Do something that gives you a sense of accomplishment and purpose every day. Set clear, achievable goals to help you look toward the future with meaning.

When to seek professional advice

Becoming more resilient takes time and practice. If you don't feel you're making progress — or you don't know where to start — consider talking to a mental health professional or your GP in the first instance. With guidance, you can improve your resilience and mental well-being.

There is no shame in seeking help. An inability to cope right now is no judgement of you - it is simply recognition that the demands being made on you exceed your ability to provide at this time. Demand is greater than supply right now, that is all. To supplement your supply you might

need to seek professional support temporarily until the demands reduce or you have build your capacity to cope.

Conclusion

We are born and grow up to have a certain degree of resilience. Some have lots, some have little and it changes over time for us all.

For those born with lots, they tend to cope well without consciously adopting strategies. For those of us born with less resilience, we need strategies to enable us to cope better.

But - once we have learnt the strategies that work best for us, they form part of our arsenal and enable us to cope far better than ever before.

Resilience is one of the character traits that can be grown over time and then remains with us for life.