



FYI: 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 problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that anyone can learn and develop.

Developing your resilience is a personal journey. An approach to building resilience that works well for one person might not work for another. People use varying strategies. Some variation may reflect cultural differences. For example, an individual's culture might have an impact on whether and how he or she connects with others and communicates feelings.

The following pointers may be helpful to consider in developing your own strategy for building resilience.

Make connections

Good relationships with close family members, friends, or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need can also benefit the helper.

Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems

You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

Accept that change is a part of living

Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

Move toward your goals

Think about possible solutions to the problems you are facing and decide what realistic goals you want to achieve. Do something regularly – even if it seems like a small accomplishment – that enables you to move forward. Focus away from tasks that seem unachievable. Instead, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

Many people find it helpful to track their progress by making a record of any accomplishment that moves them toward their goals. It is important to spend a moment reflecting on the fact that you are taking action and achieving what you believe you need to do.

Take decisive actions

Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away. Being active instead of passive helps people more effectively manage adversity.

Find positive ways to reduce stress and negative feelings

Following a stressful event, many people feel they need to turn away from the negative thoughts and feelings they are experiencing. Positive distractions such as exercising, going to a movie or reading a book can help renew you so you can re-focus on meeting challenges in your life. Avoid numbing your unpleasant feelings with alcohol or drugs.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery

People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle

with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

Nurture a positive view of yourself

Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

Keep things in perspective

Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion. Strong emotional reactions to adversity are normal and typically lessen over time.

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. Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing and that contribute to good health, including regular exercise and healthy eating. Taking care of yourself helps keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful

For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope. The key to developing an effective personal strategy is to identify ways of building your resilience that are likely to work well for you.

Where to look for help

Getting help when you need it is crucial to building your resilience. Many people turn to family members, friends and others who care about them for the support and encouragement they need.

Self-help and community support groups can aid people struggling with hardships, such as the death of a loved one. By sharing information, ideas and emotions, group participants can assist one another and find comfort in knowing that they are not alone in experiencing difficulty.

For many people, using their own resources and getting help from others may be sufficient for building resilience. At times, however, an individual might get stuck or have difficulty making progress on the road to resilience.

A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist people in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living as a result of a traumatic or otherwise stressful life experience.

Different people tend to be comfortable with different styles of interaction. A person should feel at ease and have a good rapport when working with a mental health professional or participating in a support group.

This fact sheet is adapted largely from "The Road to Resilience," available on the Psychology Help Center (<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/index.aspx>), located online. The American Psychological Association Practice Directorate gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Rick Allen, PhD; Lillian Comas-Diaz, PhD; Suniya S. Luthar, PhD; Salvatore R. Maddi, PhD; H. Katherine (Kit) O'Neill, PhD; Karen W. Saakvitne, PhD; and Richard Glenn Tedeschi, PhD, in developing this material.

This publication may be reprinted in its entirety without modification.

Visit the Psychology Help Center (<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/index.aspx>) for additional information and to find psychologists in your area.

Find this article at:

<http://www.apapracticecentral.org/outreach/building-resilience.aspx>