



Understanding resilience

What is resilience?

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences. It can be a key factor in ensuring we are effective in dealing with life. Resilience involves maintaining flexibility and balance in life as you deal with stressful circumstances and traumatic events. Being flexible and balanced means:

- Allowing yourself to experience strong emotions, but not allowing them to overwhelm you when you need to continue to function.
- Taking action to deal with your problems and meet the demands of daily living.
- Taking care of yourself and ensuring you rest and re-energise.
- Spending time with loved ones to gain support and encouragement

Factors associated with resilience

- Many studies show that the primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within/outside the family; relationships which create love and trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster a person's resilience.
- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.
- Skills in communication and problem solving.
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Resilience is not a "you either have it or you don't" trait. Resilience is a trait you can work on and develop.

Strategies for building resilience

People react in different ways to traumatic and stressful life events and use different coping strategies. The key is to find strategies which work for us as individuals.

Make connections. Positive relationships with people are important; accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you can strengthen resilience. Some people find that belonging to civic groups, faith-based organisations, or other groups provides social support and can help with rebuilding hope if life has been difficult. Assisting others in their time of need can also benefit the person offering assistance.

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 part of living. Certain goals may no longer be attainable because of adverse situations. Accepting that some circumstances that cannot be changed or controlled can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter/have some control over.

Move toward your goals. Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move towards your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks which seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

Take decisive actions. Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Look for opportunities for learning. People often learn something about themselves and find that they have grown in some respect because of their struggle through difficult circumstances. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, a greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, an increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

Build a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts can develop resilience.

Try to 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 catastrophising or blowing the event out of proportion. When communicating with others try to avoid highly emotive language, e.g. "This is a disaster", "What an absolute nightmare" as this may feed individual or group anxiety.

Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities you enjoy and exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with difficult situations.

Additional ways of strengthening resilience. For example, some people write about their 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 is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your personal strategy for developing resilience.