

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Resilience is the capacity to cope with change.

Resilience encourages people to make small behavioural changes which have significant positive impacts on their ability to reset and recover.

This in turn, boosts the likelihood that they have the cognitive capacity to persevere, deal with setbacks and cope with increased pressure without depleting their wellbeing bank account that supports their self-esteem.

What is resilience?

Psychologists define resilience as 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 – and yes even Covid-19. As much as resilience involves “bouncing back” from these difficult experiences, it encourages personal growth.

While certain factors might make some individuals more resilient than others, resilience isn't necessarily a personality trait that only some people possess. On the contrary, resilience involves behaviours, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop. The ability to learn to increase resilience is one reason, research has shown, that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary.

Of course, making small behaviour changes affects people differently, bringing a unique flood of thoughts, strong emotions, and uncertainty. Yet people generally adapt well over time to life-changing situations and stressful situations—in part, thanks to resilience.

What resilience isn't.

Being resilient doesn't mean that a person won't experience difficulty or distress. Even the most resilient people may suffer major adversity or trauma in their lives. Being resilient does not make you immune to experiencing emotional pain, setbacks and stress.

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Recognising resilience.

Resilient people can be identified as people who;



Deal resiliently with work pressures and negative criticism by maintaining an optimistic outlook and developing and applying effective wellbeing strategies.



Remain focused on the objectives even in difficult and uncertain circumstances.



Take action to take care of themselves.



After setbacks, compassionately remain positive, motivated and focused.



Show empathy towards their suffering and pain as a wellbeing strategy.



Improvise with flexibility in response to unexpected situations.

How resilient are you?¹ Complete the exercise below:

1. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.
2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events.
3. It doesn't take me long to recover from a stressful event.
4. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.
5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.
6. I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life.

Scoring for 1, 3, 5:

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

Scoring for 2, 4, 6:

5 = strongly disagree, 4 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 2 = agree, 1 = strongly agree

A higher score indicates greater resilience.

1. Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P. and Bernard, J. (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the ability to bounce back, *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 15: 194-200.

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Increasing your capacity for resilience

Like developing a muscle, increasing your resilience needs to happen intentionality. To increase your capacity for resilience, focus on four core components - connection, healthy thinking, wellness and finding meaning.

Consider one or two of the following tactics:

Prioritise connecting with helpful relationships. The pain of traumatic events can lead some people to isolate themselves. Connecting with empathetic and understanding people can remind you that you're not alone in the midst of your pain. Find a trustworthy and compassionate friend who will validate your feelings.

Practise mindfulness. Mindful journaling, yoga, and other spiritual practices like prayer or meditation can also help people build connections and restore hope.

Foster body-wellness. Promoting positive lifestyle factors like proper nutrition, ample sleep, hydration, and regular exercise can strengthen your body to adapt to stress and reduce the toll of emotions like anxiety or depression.

Make room for uncomfortable emotions. Giving your body the resources to manage uncomfortable emotions, rather than seeking to eliminate or mask the feeling altogether.

Be proactive. It's helpful to acknowledge and accept your emotions during hard times, but it's also important to help you foster self-discovery by asking yourself, "What can I do about a problem in my life?" If the problems seem too big to tackle, break them down into manageable pieces.

Find purpose by helping others. Whether you volunteer with a local homeless shelter or simply support a friend in their time of need. Gain a sense of purpose, foster self-worth and connect with other people to grow in resilience as well as self-esteem.

Move towards achievable goals. Develop some realistic goals and do something to develop a healthy habit—even if it seems like a small accomplishment. Instead of continuing with unhelpful tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in a helpful direction?"

Maintain an outlook of hope. An optimistic hopeful outlook empowers you to expect that good things will happen to you. Rather than worrying about what you fear, try visualizing what you want.

Use not only foresight but also hindsight. By looking back at who or what was helpful in previous times of distress, you may discover how you can respond effectively to new difficult situations. Recognize where you've been able to find strength and ask yourself what you've learned from those experiences.

Keep unhelpful thoughts on a perspective leash. Try to identify areas of irrational thinking, such as a tendency to catastrophise or assume the problem is bigger than it actually is. Adopt a more balanced and realistic thinking pattern by imagining you are changing radio stations in your mind. For instance, if you feel overwhelmed by a challenge, remind yourself you can change how you interpret and respond to it.

Embrace change. Because of your adversity, certain goals or ideals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations in your life. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

When resilience is not enough.

Getting help when you need it is crucial when building your resilience. These resources are available to you if you feel stuck or are finding it difficult to make progress on the road to resilience:

1. Access a comprehensive resilience program with self-managed resources via your wellness gateway
2. Consult your Employee Assistance Program for resilience counselling and coaching
3. Speak to your GP if you are feeling overwhelmed.

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