



Trauma
Care

Newsletter

TraumaCare

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RESILIENCE

Dealing with change or loss is an inevitable part of life. At some point, everyone experiences varying degrees of setbacks. Some of these challenges might be relatively minor (not getting into a class you really wanted to take), while others are disastrous on a much larger scale (natural disasters or terrorist attacks). How we deal with these problems can play a major role in not only the outcome, but also the long-term psychological consequences.

What Is Resilience?

Have you ever wondered why some people seem to remain calm in the face of disaster, while others seem to fall apart? People that are able to keep their cool have what psychologists call resilience, or an ability to cope with problems and setbacks. Resilient people are able to utilize their skills and strengths to cope and recover from problems and challenges, which may include job loss, financial problems, illness, natural disasters, medical emergencies, divorce or the death of a loved one.

Those who lack this resilience may instead become overwhelmed by such experiences. They may dwell on problems and use unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with such challenges. Generally, these individuals are slower to recover from setbacks and may experience more psychological distress as a result.

Resilience does not eliminate stress or erase life's difficulties. Instead, it gives people the strength to tackle problems head on, overcome adversity and move on with their lives. In the wake of traumas such as the 9/11 attacks and the Hurricane Katrina disaster, many individuals demonstrated the behaviors that typify resilience. Even in the face of events that seem utterly unimaginable, people are able to marshal the strength to not just survive, but to prosper.

Some individuals come by these abilities naturally, with personality traits that help them remain unflappable in the face of challenge. However, these behaviors are not simply an inborn trait found in a select few individuals. According to many experts, resilience is actually quite common and people are very capable of learning the skills that it takes to become more resilient.



Characteristics of Resilience

While people vary dramatically in the coping skills they use when confronting a crisis, researchers have identified some key characteristics of resilience. Many of these skills can be developed and strengthened, which can improve your ability to deal with life's setbacks.

Awareness:

Resilient people are aware of the situation, their own emotional reactions and the behavior of those around them. In order to manage feelings, it is essential to understand what is causing them and why. By remaining aware, resilient people can maintain their control of the situation and think of new ways to tackle problems.

An Understanding that Setbacks are Part of Life:

Another characteristic of resilience is the understanding that life is full of challenges. While we cannot avoid many of these problems, we can remain open, flexible, and willing to adapt to change.



An Internal Locus of Control:

Do you perceive yourself as having control over your own life? Or do you blame outside sources for failures and problems? Generally, resilient people tend to have what psychologists call an *internal locus of control*. They believe that the actions they take will affect the outcome of an event. Of course, some factors are simply outside of our personal control, such as natural disasters. While we may be able to put some blame on external causes, it is important to feel as if we have the power to make choices that will affect our situation, our ability to cope, and our future.

Strong Problem-Solving Skills:

Problem-solving skills are essential. When a crisis emerges, resilient people are able to spot the solution that will lead to a safe outcome. In danger situations, people sometimes develop tunnel vision. They fail to note important details or take advantages of opportunities. Resilient individuals, on the other hand, are able to calm and rationally look at the problem and envision a successful solution.

Having Strong Social Connections:

Whenever you're dealing with a problem, it is important to have people who can offer support. Talking about the challenges you are facing can be an excellent way to gain perspective, look for new solutions, or simply express your emotions. Friends, family member, co-workers, and online support groups can all be potential sources of social connectivity.

Identifying as a Survivor, Not a Victim:

When dealing with any potential crisis, it is essential to view yourself as a survivor. Avoid thinking like a victim of circumstance and instead look for ways to resolve the problem. While the situation may be unavoidable, you can still stay focused on a positive outcome.



Being Able to Ask for Help:

While being resourceful is an important part of resilience, it is also essential to know when to ask for help. During a crisis, people can benefit from the help of psychologists and counselors specially trained to deal with crisis situations. Other potential sources of assistance include:

- **Books** – Reading about people who have experienced and overcome a similar problem can be both motivating and good for ideas on how to cope.
- **Online Message Boards** – Online communities can provide continual support and a place to talk about issues with people who have been in a similar situation.
- **Support Groups** – Attending support group meetings is a great way to talk about the challenges you're facing and find a network of people who can provide compassion and support.
- **Psychotherapy** – If you are having trouble coping with a crisis situation, consulting a qualified mental health professional can help you confront the problem, identify your strengths, and develop new coping skills.

10 Ways to Become More Resilient

Build Your Resilience and Coping Skills With These Tips

Research has shown that while some people seem to come by resilience naturally, these behaviors can also be learned. The following are just a few of the techniques you should focus on in order to foster your own resilience.

1. Build Positive Beliefs in Your Abilities

Research has demonstrated that self-esteem plays an important role in coping with stress and recovering from difficult events. Remind yourself of your strengths and accomplishments. Becoming more confident about your own ability to respond and deal with crisis is a great way to build resilience for the future.

2. Find a Sense of Purpose in Your Life

After her 13-year-old daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Candace Lightner founded Mother's Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Upset by the driver's light sentence, Lightner decided to focus her energy into creating awareness of the dangers of drunk driving. "I promised myself on the day of Cari's death that I would fight to make this needless homicide count for something positive in the years ahead," she later

explained. In the face of crisis or tragedy, finding a sense of purpose can play an important role in recovery. This might involve becoming involved in your community, cultivating your spirituality, or participating in activities that are meaningful to you.

3. Develop a Strong Social Network

Having caring, supportive people around you acts as a protective factor during times of crisis. It is important to have people you can confide in. While simply talking about a situation with a friend or loved one will not make troubles go away, it allows you to share your feelings, gain support, receive positive feedback, and come up with possible solutions to your problems.

4. Embrace Change

Flexibility is an essential part of resilience. By learning how to be more adaptable, you'll be better equipped to respond when faced with a life crisis. Resilient people often utilize these events as an opportunity to branch out in new directions. While some people may be crushed by abrupt changes, highly resilient individuals are able to adapt and thrive.

5. Be Optimistic

Staying optimistic during dark periods can be difficult, but maintaining a hopeful outlook is an important part of resiliency. Positive thinking does not mean ignoring the problem in order to focus on positive outcomes. It means understanding that setbacks are transient and that you have the skills and abilities to combat the challenges you face. What you are dealing with may be difficult, but it is important to remain hopeful and positive about a brighter future.

6. Nurture Yourself

When you're stressed, it can be all too easy to neglect your own needs. Losing your appetite, ignoring exercise, and not getting enough sleep are all common reactions to a crisis situation. Focus on building your self-nurturance skills, even when you are troubled. Make time for activities that you enjoy. By taking care of your own needs, you can boost your overall health and resilience and be fully ready to face life's challenges.

7. Develop Your Problem-Solving Skills

Research suggests that people who are able come up with solutions to a problem are better able to cope with problems than those who cannot. Whenever you encounter a new challenge, make a quick list of some of the potential ways you could solve the problem. Experiment with different strategies and focus on developing a logical way to work through common problems. By practicing your problem-solving skills on a regular basis, you will be better prepared to cope when a serious challenge emerges.

8. Establish Goals

Crisis situations are daunting. They may even seem insurmountable. Resilient people are able to view these situations in a realistic way, and then set reasonable goals to deal with the problem. When you find yourself becoming overwhelmed by a situation, take a step back to simply assess what is before you. Brainstorm possible solutions, and then break them down into manageable steps.

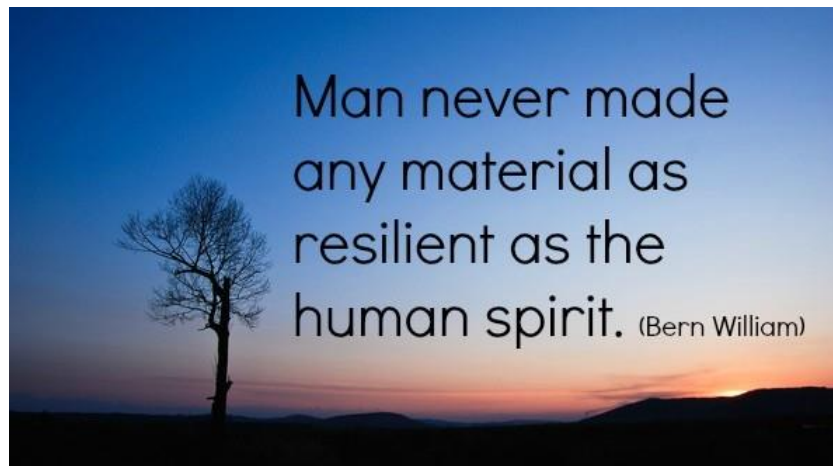


9. Take Steps to Solve Problems

Simply waiting for a problem to go away on its own only prolongs the crisis. Instead, start working on resolving the issue immediately. While there may not be any fast or simple solution, you can take steps toward making your situation better and less stressful. Focus on the progress that you have made thus far and planning your next steps, rather than becoming discouraged by the amount of work that still needs to be accomplished.

10. Keep Working on Your Skills

Resilience may take time to build, so do not become discouraged if you still struggle to cope with problematic events. According to Dr. Russ Newman, "research has shown that resilience is not an extraordinary thing but is rather ordinary and can be learned by most anyone". Psychological resilience does not involve any specific set of behaviors or actions, but can vary dramatically from one person to the next. Focus on practicing some of the common characteristics of resilient people, but also remember to build upon your existing strengths.



This newsletter has been issued by:
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medical professional for a correct diagnosis.