

Developing Resilience

A sense of personal control over one's life plays a major role in emotional and physical well-being and in dealing effectively with stress and pressure.

Although some people have a head start, everyone can become more resilient.

Resilient people focus on what they can control and spend little, if any, time and energy on matters that are beyond their influence. In other words, they use the Serenity Prayer as a guide:

Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can, and
Wisdom to know the difference.

Resilient people:

1. Can take control of their lives in ways others can't.
2. Manage by instigating change or by accepting what they cannot change instead of just letting things happen to them.
3. Follow their own road maps through life.

Cultivating true resilience is a lifelong project. Resilient people studied from childhood have what some people call positive, protective factors around them:

1. Strong friends to lean on.
2. Role models to look up to.
3. A community to belong to.

When adversity strikes, these support systems serve them well.

Internal Resources for Developing Resilience

1. **Recognize that you must assume personal control of your life, that you hold the key to changes, and that you have the power to bring about good results or at least fix the bad ones.**

Don't wait for other people to change for you to achieve your goals and happiness.

2. **Value your strengths and accept your flaws.**

Recognize your strengths and vulnerabilities and live an authentic, balanced life in which your behaviors are in accordance with your values and goals.

3. Put things in perspective.

If you can limit the scope of the problem, you can limit its effect.

4. Have faith that life makes sense.

When you believe that life has a higher purpose and deeper meaning, it is easier to look at setbacks as painful parts of the journey (a trip that includes both ups and downs) instead of insurmountable roadblocks.

5. Never underestimate the importance of a sense of humor.

Finding the humor or the absurdity in disaster is not making light or fun of it, but a bold act of autonomy that puts the situation under your control.

6. Set and regularly evaluate short-and long-term goals that are realistic, achievable, and in line with your values.

Be optimistic, but don't forget that change takes time and cannot be realized overnight.

7. Anticipate mistakes and setbacks.

Be prepared with a backup plan. Remember that mistakes serve as the basis for learning. Assume that the worst will happen, and brace yourself for the shock and the recovery.

8. Relish your accomplishments.

Take credit for your achievements and successes. Pat yourself on the back for a job well done. Experience the joy of success. When you succeed, believe that you are a major contributor to your success and experience a sense of pride and accomplishment, instead of attributing your success to good luck or some other factor.

9. Develop self-discipline and self-control.

Self-discipline and self-control play a significant role in all of our daily activities. We are displaying self-discipline and self-control when we:

- Think before we act.
- Consider the feelings of others.
- Reflect on possible solutions to a problem.
- Behave in a rational and thoughtful way.
- Keep from screaming at someone who has done something to make us angry.

External Resources for Developing Resilience

1. Take risks.

Become aware of your comfort zone, and try to take deliberate steps beyond it.

2. Keep learning.

Education connects you to a broader network of people, and more information means more choices.

3. Find something you are passionate about.

Meaningful work, paid or unpaid, builds a sense of mastery or control over one's life.

4. Reach out to others for help and support to build your sense of strength.

Resilient people have relationships that help them believe in themselves and that give them the confidence and the courage to keep at it.

5. Do what you can to make your workplace one that helps build up your self-confidence, shield you from life's other problems, and build ties to other people.

Work is more than a place to make a living. Work is a place where you connect with others for community and inspiration. Seek out friends and mentors at work. If that doesn't work, consider networking through a professional organization.

6. Do something good for someone else.

Realizing there is always someone worse off gives you perspective and helps you feel better. Also, seeing yourself as being capable enough to lift someone else out of trouble will give you the confidence to change your own world.

7. View life through the eyes of others.

Empathy does not imply that you agree with another person, but simply that you appreciate and validate that person's point of view. Ask yourself:

- Am I saying or doing things in a way that others will be most willing to listen to and respond to me?
- Am I treating others in the same way that I would like to be treated?

Being empathetic toward those people whose ideas agree with ours and who are cooperative and helpful is easier than being empathetic when we are upset, angry, annoyed, or disappointed with others.

8. Communicate effectively.

Effective communication includes an appreciation of how our verbal and nonverbal messages are perceived and a capacity for active listening. When we listen actively, we attempt to understand and validate what other people are communicating without belittling them.

Many people believe they communicate effectively. However, when someone does not respond in ways they would like, they tend to blame the other person. When others appear not to listen to our messages, we should ask ourselves, “How can I change the way I have been saying things so that others might be more receptive to what I have to say?”

The more effectively we learn to convey our feelings, thoughts, and beliefs verbally and nonverbally, the more successful and resilient we will be.

Maintaining a Resilient Lifestyle.

Once we have developed the features associated with a resilient mindset and lifestyle, we cannot sit back and assume that our mindset and behaviors will go into automatic pilot. Expected and unexpected challenges emerge that will test our ability to be resilient.

The more we understand the characteristics of resilient individuals, the more we can engage in daily and long-term “exercises” to maintain and even strengthen a resilient mindset. We must have a “resilience plan” to ensure as much as possible that our future will be filled with satisfaction and accomplishment.

Even with clearly defined guideposts, the road to a resilient lifestyle often contains obstacles and detours that interfere with reaching our destination.

In their book, **The Power of Resilience**, Robert Brooks, Ph.D., and Sam Goldstein, Ph.D., recommend the following exercise for working on resilience every day.

Set aside a few minutes each day for a resilience exercise and consider the following questions:

1. Have I truly listened during the past day and attempted to understand the viewpoints of others?
2. How have I related to others? Have I practiced empathy and respect?
3. How have I responded to stress, mistakes, and setbacks? If I am not happy with my response, what will I do differently next time?
4. In what areas did I do well? How do I maintain or reproduce these positive behaviors tomorrow?

Spending even a few minutes on a daily basis thinking about these or similar questions will help to fortify and maintain a resilient mindset.