

Wellness Tip Sheet

Resilience building for challenges

How resilient are you? Resilience in psychology is the positive capacity of people to cope with stress and adversity. Whilst some people thrive in times of adversity others need to work hard on building resilience.¹



Personal resilience

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

– Nelson Mandela

In psychology resilience is defined as the ability to move forward and adapt positively following, or as a result of, an adverse event in your life. Important determinants of resilience include healthy relationships, emotion regulation skills, self awareness, goal setting and self-motivation.²

Being realistic about our emotions, understanding that they all have an important role to play, is one of the essential ingredients of resilience.

Essentially the basis of resilience is having the confidence and ability to adapt and grow from life's hardships, rather than trying to avoid those undesirable feelings or situations that might lead to pain, stress or adversity.

Some people seem to cope with most things that life throws their way with relative ease. For many people, resilience is something that needs to be continually worked on and developed throughout their lives. Developing personal resilience in the workplace is one half of the equation - it's important to remember that workplaces also need to be safe and healthy environments in order for people to thrive.

Key ingredients for building resilience

- **Allow both positive and negative emotions** – our ability to express both positive and negative emotions contributes to resilience in times of adversity; both kinds of emotions

are important for healthy relationships as well as creating opportunities to adapt in challenging situations; accepting negative emotions with compassion opens the opportunity for resolution³

- **Enjoy your relationships with family, friends, and colleagues, and make time for them** – research shows that fostering closeness in your relationships is a key component to resilience; good relationships allow your natural protective systems to develop⁴
- **Be proactive in your coping** – resilient people cope by tackling problems directly (problem focused coping) and/or by handling the feelings of distress caused by the problem (emotion-focused coping);⁵ avoidant coping, such as burying your head in the sand or blaming others, might work in the short-term but is not helpful long-term and is more likely to lead to further emotional distress
- **Don't be afraid to lean on others** – our friends and families are there to help support us; as the saying goes “a problem shared is a problem halved”; they won't know to offer their help and support if you keep putting on a brave face in front of them; don't be afraid to access professional support such as counselling either; we all need an impartial ear from time to time and it can be a great opportunity to process some tough feelings in a confidential space
- **Try not to catastrophise** or ruminate over difficulties; instead constructively plan possible outcomes and make steps to achieve them; this helps reduce anxiety and maintain a course of action
- **Keep active** – this is such a straightforward notion but making time for it regularly can seem daunting; remember that doing a small amount of exercise, and often can be a great way to start; exercise triggers the

release of our feel-good hormones, helps relax us, clears our cluttered minds and promotes better sleep

- o **Make time for yourself** – this can be hard with competing demands for our time and attention, however it is essential for building and maintaining our emotional buffer; this includes setting aside time to exercise, eat nutritiously and get enough sleep; these things can easily be overlooked as soon as we feel overwhelmed or stressed; sticking to these basics helps us reduce stress and cope better long-term
- o **Maintain perspective and build mental toughness** – remind yourself that change is constant, so you probably won't feel this way forever; chances are you'll feel differently tomorrow; how we feel about a situation is largely determined by how we choose to perceive and respond to it; try to choose a calmer, more optimistic or more realistic approach and keep those irrational and unhelpful thoughts at bay; when facing a difficult situation, a good question to ask yourself is, "How will I feel about this in 6 months' time?"; so often, something that seems huge today is all but forgotten within weeks
- o **Practise gratitude** – use a journal to help you reflect on the positive aspects of your life; write down three things you are grateful for each day; this will help you move the focus from the negative events in your day to positive and help remind you that more things went right than went wrong; alternatively, you could simply focus on thanking a co-worker, friend or family member for something they did for you to help you through your day.⁵


References

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