

RESILIENCY

Sometimes life can feel like we are on a roller coaster ride. We all have periods of relative stability and smooth riding, and then suddenly, we can experience a flurry of events that can throw us into turmoil. Our world can be turned upside down and make us feel unstable and uncertain about what the future holds.

At times like these, we may ask ourselves – is it possible to learn how to manage life’s stressors and problems with strength and fortitude? The answer is a resounding yes!

How is it that some people survive and even thrive in the face of adversity? There is something called “resilience” that allows you to bounce back from difficult times relatively intact. Of course it depends on the depth and breadth of a crisis as to how quickly this happens, but usually by calling upon our strengths and looking at the situation in a more positive light we can be proactive and move forward.

We all possess resilience to a greater or lesser degree. Some are just born with a greater amount of innate resilience and seem to have the ability to weather life’s trials and tribulations with relative ease. Others, like most of us, develop “thicker skin” with time and experience. This explains why it is so important to let children try to work things out for themselves as much as they can so that they can learn good coping and problem solving skills that will carry them through their lifetime.

Researchers Werner and Smith have identified “protective factors” that, if in place in one’s life, can increase the likelihood that an individual will develop resilience, allowing them to manage and cope with life’s adversities.

These factors include:

⇒ Caring connections with positive people in our lives, such as adult mentors, positive role models and peers.

- ⇒ Having high expectations for the future for ourselves, and having people in our life that also expect well of us.
- ⇒ Having meaningful involvement in things that provide a sense of purpose and a feeling that we have something to contribute.

It does not take possessing all of these protective factors to increase one’s chances of improving their resilience. Even if one of the above is in place, it can make enough of a difference.

As noted by Werner and Smith, some of the many traits that resilient individuals often possess include:

- Having a sense of humor
- Being flexible and able to adapt to new situations easily
- Having a particular talent or passion
- Possessing good problem solving skills
- The ability to “adaptively distance” from the dysfunction present in our lives
- Learned or acquired helpfulness
- Having goals and a belief in a brighter future

Resilience means recognizing and maximizing your strengths and identifying your weaker areas and working on them. Focusing on the good during difficult times helps strengthen your inner belief in the ability to overcome, and to stay on course in spite of the negativity around you.



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10 Ways to Become More Resilient

By Kendra Van Wagner, About.com

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 techniques to focus on in order to foster your own resilience.

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.

Find a Sense of Purpose in Your Life – In the face of crisis or tragedy, finding a sense of purpose can play an important role in recovery. This might include becoming involved in your community or participating in activities that are meaningful to you.

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.

Embrace Change – Flexibility is an essential part of resilience. Learning how to be more adaptable often assists in being 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, and are often able to adapt and thrive.

Be Optimistic – Maintaining a hopeful outlook is an important part of resiliency. Being an optimist 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 that you face.

Nurture Yourself – When you are stressed, it can be all too easy to neglect yourself. Losing your appetite, ignoring exercising, and not getting enough sleep are all common

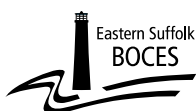
reactions to a crisis situation. Focus on building your self-nurturance skills, even when you are troubled. Make time for activities that you enjoy. Taking care of your own needs often helps to boost your overall health and resilience, and be fully ready to face life's challenges.

Develop Problem-Solving Skills - Research suggests that people who are able to 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. Practicing problem-solving skills on a regular basis often helps to be better prepared to cope when a serious challenge emerges.

Establish Goals – Crisis situations can be daunting, and at times, 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.

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.

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 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.



1741D North Ocean Avenue, Medford, NY 11763 (631) 289-0480
35 Crooked Hill Road, Suite 103, Commack, NY 11725 (631) 858-9177
10 Mitchell Road, Westhampton Beach, NY 11978 (631) 288-8865

