

Resilience: Build skills to endure hardship

Resilience — Improve coping skills so that you can handle life's hardships better.
From MayoClinic.com

When something goes wrong, do you tend to bounce back or fall apart? When you have resilience, you harness inner strengths and rebound more quickly from a setback or challenge, whether it's a job loss, an illness, a disaster or the death of a loved one.

In contrast, if you lack resilience, you tend to dwell on problems, feel victimized, become overwhelmed and turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse. You may even be more inclined to develop mental health problems.

Resilience won't make your problems go away. But resilience can give you the ability to see past them, find enjoyment in life and handle stress better. If you aren't as resilient as you'd like to be, you can develop skills to become more resilient.

Resilience means adapting to adversity

Resilience is the ability to roll with the punches. It means that although you encounter stress, adversity, trauma or tragedy, you keep functioning, both psychologically and physically.

Resilience isn't about toughing it out or living by old cliches, such as "grin and bear it." It doesn't mean you ignore your feelings. When adversity strikes, you still experience anger, grief and pain, but you're able to go on with daily tasks, remain generally optimistic and go on with your life. Being resilient also doesn't mean being stoic or going it alone. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key component of being resilient.

Resilience and mental health

Resilience helps protect you against mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety. It can also help offset factors that put you at risk of mental illness, such as lack of social support, being bullied or previous trauma. And being resilient can help you cope better with an existing mental illness.

Tips to improve your resilience

Working on your mental well-being is just as important as working on your physical health. If you want to strengthen your resilience, try these tips:

Get connected. Build strong, positive relationships with family and friends, who provide support and acceptance. Volunteer, get involved in your community, or join a faith or spiritual community.

Find meaning. Develop a sense of purpose for your life. Having something meaningful to focus on can help you share emotions, feel gratitude and experience an enhanced sense of well-being.

Start laughing. Finding humor in stressful situations doesn't mean you're in denial. Humor is a helpful coping mechanism. If you can't find any humor in a situation, turn to other sources for a laugh, such as a funny book or movie.

Learn from experience. Think back on how you've coped with hardships in the past. Build on skills and strategies that helped you through the rough times, and don't repeat those that didn't help.

Remain hopeful. You can't change what's happened in the past, but you can always look toward the future. Find something in each day that signals a change for the better. Expect good results.

Take care of yourself. Tend to your own needs and feelings, both physically and emotionally. This includes participating in activities and hobbies you enjoy, exercising regularly, getting plenty of sleep and eating well.

Keep a journal. Write about your experiences, thoughts and feelings. Journaling can help you experience strong emotions you may otherwise be afraid to unleash. It also can help you see situations in a new way and help you identify patterns in your behavior and reactions.

Accept and anticipate change. Expecting changes to occur makes it easier to adapt to them, tolerate them and even welcome them. With practice, you can learn to be more flexible and not view change with as much anxiety. Work toward a goal. Do something every day that gives you a sense of accomplishment. Even small, everyday goals are important. Having goals helps you look toward the future. Take action. Don't just wish your problems would go away or try to ignore them. Instead, figure out what needs to be done, make a plan and take action.

Maintain perspective. Look at your situation in the larger context of your own life and of the world. Keep a long-term perspective and know that your situation can improve if you actively work at it.

Practice stress management and relaxation techniques. Restore an inner sense of peace and calm by practicing such stress-management and relaxation techniques as yoga, meditation, deep breathing, visualization, imagery, prayer or muscle relaxation.

When to seek professional advice

Becoming more resilient takes time and practice. If you don't feel you're making progress — or you just don't know where to start — consider talking to a mental health professional. With their guidance, you can improve your resiliency and mental well-being.

Resilience helps you thrive

Resilience can help you endure loss, chronic stress, traumatic events and other challenges. It'll enable you to develop a reservoir of internal resources that you can draw on, and it may protect you against developing some mental illnesses or help you cope better with an existing mental illness. Resilience will help you survive challenges and even thrive in the midst of hardship.

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