

+ BUILDING RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF STRESS

We are living in stressful times. Some stressors we can anticipate and others take us by surprise. Because we may not be able to avoid stress, it's important to have strategies for managing it. Building your resilience can help you manage on a day-to-day basis. Resilience is the ability to adapt well to difficulty, change, or other sources of stress. Being resilient doesn't mean that you will not feel stress or anxiety. It does make it more likely that you'll be able to manage that stress and feelings of anxiety or uncertainty.

How can you encourage a resilient mindset?

Manage fears and worries. Managing your emotions can help stress feel less overwhelming. Get in the habit of checking in with yourself when worries start to feel unmanageable. It may be helpful to then try out a different sort of response. Ask yourself, "What's the worst that could happen?" Allow yourself to consider all the possibilities. Then imagine how you might prepare or cope with these outcomes. Taking this thoughtful perspective can slow down runaway worries and help you see that you could manage. It may also help to limit the amount of time in your day that you worry. Try setting aside specific worry times to prevent fearful thoughts from taking over your day.

Focus on what you can control. There are many things you can't control in difficult situations. Thinking too much about those things can weigh you down. If you turn your focus to the things you can control – your thoughts and actions – you can reclaim a sense of power over what happens next. Taking active steps to manage the challenges can also help you'll feel more resilient.

Think about how you've coped in the past. Identify what has worked in the past when you have faced challenges. Remind yourself of your strengths. Trust that your natural strengths will help you cope. You may want to keep a list of your strengths or successes nearby. Turn to them when you need a reminder.

Be mindful and aware. If you tend to dwell on distressing "what if" thoughts, it may be helpful to try to shift your focus on the here and now. Focusing on the present moment without judging what you're experiencing as good or bad can help build resilience. Take brief opportunities during the day to stop and take a few deep breaths. As you do, bring your attention to the present. Notice and appreciate the world around you using all your senses. Let stressful thoughts of the past or future pass like clouds moving across the sky.

Seek out the positive. When faced with difficulties, push yourself to see what remains good and manageable in your world. You may still struggle, but this balanced perspective can help you feel stronger. You may want to start or end your day thinking of three things that are positive or that make you feel grateful. Doing this repeatedly can create new brain connections that make it easier to see things in a balanced, less stressed way. (Chowdhury, 2020)

Actions that can help you manage stressors and practice resilience

Seek other perspectives. Having a broader viewpoint may give you a better base from which to understand and manage what's happening. Remember that others may be feeling this stress too. Be sure to focus on useful conversations and avoid getting stuck in negativity.

Build a support network. Staying connected to others can help you feel more resilient. Having a strong support network is like a safety net that helps to cushion the extreme effects of stress. The encouragement of friends and family can also make you feel stronger and more prepared when stress hits.

Consider ways to make a positive difference. Identifying meaningful ways to address challenges can give you a way forward instead of feeling stuck.

Focus on healthy self-care. It can be easier to be resilient when you're well, strong, and energized. This means eating nutritious foods regularly throughout the day. It includes staying hydrated, exercising regularly, and getting restful sleep on a regular basis. Avoid using alcohol, drugs, or other unhealthy methods of coping. Make time for activities that are enjoyable whenever possible.

References

Chowdhury, M.R. (2020). The neuroscience of gratitude and how it affects anxiety and grief.
Retrieved from <https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-gratitude/>

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