

Building Your Resilience

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We'll all experience great highs and great lows during our lives. And while the great highs are exhilarating, the great lows can knock us to our knees. Some people seem to have difficulty dealing with adversity, while others get up, dust themselves off and carry on. These are people who have more of what psychologists call 'resilience'.

Resilience is an important quality in today's fast-paced, stressful, ever-changing world. It's basically the ability to face life's challenges, cope with disruptive change and catastrophe and the ability to rebound from setbacks without acting in a dysfunctional way.

Being resilient doesn't mean we don't feel sad, angry or upset because of a traumatic or difficult event. It simply means we find a way to deal with it.

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We all need this ability if we are to learn, endure tough times and become stronger individuals. While some people seem to be naturally resilient thanks to a combination of temperament and upbringing, most of us have to build our resilience. This can be done with a few changes to our lifestyle and outlook. If you feel you need to build your resilience, try the following:

- Create a support system. Having family members or close friends with whom you can share feelings, discuss problems and receive advice is an essential part of weathering life's ups and downs.
- Be an optimist. Try to see the positive in every situation and remain hopeful and excited about what life has to offer. When faced with a setback, know that you can and will get through it. Negativity is contagious, so try to surround yourself with positive people. They'll help you remain upbeat and be ready to tackle challenges.

- Accept change. We can't fight change. It's part of life. It may be disruptive, but if you adapt rather than resist, you'll feel happier and less stressed. Resilience involves finding creative solutions to adverse situations and remaining calm in times of turmoil.
- Adopt a survivor view of life. Resilient people never blame others or see themselves as victims of circumstances. They don't say, "Why do things like this always happen to me?" Instead they say, "I can, and will, get through this."
- Develop your problem solving and communication skills. When faced with a crisis or problem, learn to rationally examine the situation and come up with solutions. Stay calm and remain focused on the problem instead of getting upset and lashing out at others.
- Have a sense of humour. Being able to laugh at yourself or the situation you're in helps keep things in perspective. Resilient people don't take themselves too seriously.
- Be in control. Take decisive actions rather than hoping the problem will go away or that others will resolve the situation. Feeling in control not only helps us cope, but helps us come up with creative solutions.
- Learn from failure. Use setbacks to develop better coping, problem solving or people skills. Be willing to take risks and learn from setbacks—what you did right, what you could have done better and what you will do next time. We can't become wiser, more capable people if we don't learn from experience.
- Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your physical and emotional health. Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly and find time to do things you enjoy. Find healthy ways to cope with stress and you'll find it easier to weather tough times.

- Ask for help. A support system is great, but we have to know when to reach out for professional support. If you're feeling overwhelmed by a problem or situation, contact your family doctor or your Employee Assistance Program and ask to speak to a counsellor.

Resilience helps us in every aspect of our lives—from the day-to-day frustrations and challenges of parenting and working to coping with unexpected tragedies and setbacks. It's more than bouncing back from adversity. Resilience is the ability to bounce forward—coming back stronger, wiser and better able to face future challenges.