



be resilient

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Did You Know?

Resiliency is not an innate trait that some people are born with while others are not. It is a tool that develops as we gain better self-management skills and more self-awareness. Resiliency can also be learned at a young age. Many of the things that support healthy development in young children also help build their resilience. These things include a secure bond with a caring adult, relationships with positive role models, opportunities to learn skills, and opportunities to participate in meaningful activities.

RESILIENCE

Our modern world moves quickly and we must constantly be learning to adapt to the changes. The stresses of working full-time and managing a home, dealing with children, or perhaps aging parents, can really fill up our days; not to mention there is the potential for some very difficult situations. Fitting in friends, exercise, hobbies or relaxation can be problematic. The rates of depression and anxiety continue to rise. We need new ways to manage the stress.

Have you ever wondered why some people are better able to adapt and go with the flow? They have developed resilience, which is a concept that has grown out of psychological research over the past thirty or so years. Resilience is the ability to spring back into shape after being bent, stretched or compressed. (Sound like one of your days?) As it applies to people, this means the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions. This definition needs qualifiers because there are many situations in life that we cannot recover quickly from, nor would we want to. Sometimes just getting through a major loss represents resilience.

The competencies of resilient people reveal some important skills for us to consider, and some fascinating new brain science indicates the simple ways in which we can enhance our own resilience.

The Competencies of Resilient People

Drawing upon research, highly resilient people exhibit many of the following qualities:

- Constantly learn from experience. Assimilate new and unexpected experiences and integrate the learning that comes from them.
- Adapt quickly and are flexible mentally and emotionally.
- Have solid self-esteem. This inner strength can be a buffer against the unpleasant or hurtful things that come at us.
- Strong self-confidence. Future actions can be based on current experience and past success.
- Have good friendships, loving relationships. Talking to others who truly care diminishes the impact of difficulties.
- Have the ability to modulate their emotions. Can express feelings honestly and when circumstance warrants, feelings can also be repressed.
- Expect things to work out well. There is a deep optimism based on values and beliefs, as well as a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.

- View others with empathy. Even the perspective of antagonists can be considered.
- Use intuition and trust creative hunches.
- Have a curious nature. A playful, childlike curiosity, wondering and asking questions.
- Have clearly defined boundaries and will not accept mistreatment. Will find resources and support.
- Learn from bad experiences. Can take a difficult situation or misfortune, learn from it, and not feel victimized.

As we can see, the qualities of resilient people are cognitive skills. If we are prone to see the glass half empty, how do we become more optimistic? Optimism is a practice that can be learned. If we develop these skills, our stress levels drop. Worry and negativity can sap our energy and take away the potential for happiness.

It is completely possible to learn new skills. Here are three concepts to think about as you go about your daily life. If you start to consider things a little differently you will further develop the competencies of resilience.

Taking Things Personally

Have you ever come into work in the morning and said hello to a co-worker and had them quietly mutter a response? Did your mind go back to the afternoon before and you wondered if you had done or said anything to them that would cause them to be angry with you? How about a situation with a family member who may not want to talk to you? Do you wonder what you have done to cause their withdrawal?

We misinterpret the world frequently by taking things personally that have nothing to do with us. We can ask people we're close to if there's a problem, but it is also up to others to let us know if we have offended them. We can waste a great deal of energy worrying about problems that don't exist.

The ABCs of Cognitive Understanding

This skill can be very helpful in managing our emotional responses and developing empathy and optimism. We can also gain insight into what is behind our behaviour.

A stands for Adversity. The difficult things we have to deal with in life.

B stands for Belief. What we believe about the adversity will determine C.

C is the Consequence. This is the emotional response we have.

Here is a simple example:

A Someone cut me off in traffic.

B How dare they do that to me! That is not right.

C The emotional response could be anger or frustration.

If we think about this situation differently, than our emotional response will change. New beliefs: I remember the last time I cut someone off. It was a mistake. Or, that person doesn't know me, why should I take it personally? The new emotional consequence could be little or no emotion, just an acknowledgement that the person made a mistake as we all do. This quick self-analysis comes in handy for many of life's frustrations.

Change your Brain

In his new book, *Hardwiring Happiness*, author Dr. Rick Hanson puts fourth new brain science and some surprisingly simple techniques to literally change the structure of our brain. Dr. Hanson states that parts of our brain are primitive and lean towards awareness of negative stimuli because that is what humans had to pay attention to in order to survive. However, the research being done in neuroscience indicates that new pathways are always being created in the brain by positive experiences as well. This malleability is called neuroplasticity.



REMINDER: The Employee Assistance Centre has a complete library of resource material on a wide range of family assistance and health promotion topics. Individuals accessing services through the Centre can use the library at no charge.

Dr. Hanson says that our positive experiences can be fleeting, but all we need to do to create positive pathways that lead to greater happiness is to hold onto the experience and take it all in for 20 more seconds. If we do this 6 or more times a day, the pathways become hard-wired. The positive experiences can be small moments such as holding a baby, seeing something beautiful in nature, feeling love, or being absorbed in something creative.

He states that taking in the good is the deliberate internalization of positive experiences in implicit memory. It involves four simple steps (the fourth one is optional) including (1) Have a positive experience, (2) Enrich it, (3) Absorb it, and (4) Link positive and negative material. The first letter of each step forms the acronym HEAL. Step 1 activates a positive experience and steps 2 to 4 install it in your brain.

There are simple things we can do to increase our resilience. We can take things less personally, look for the beliefs in our head and change them to create less emotional stress, and make a point of absorbing wonderful moments in our lives. We have much to be thankful for, and in our busy lives it is important to value and pay attention to what matters.

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Some interesting books to read on the topic of resilience:

Hardwiring Happiness by Dr. Rick Hanson

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are by Dr. Brené Brown

The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles by Dr. Karen Reivich and Dr. Andrew Shatté

The HEB Manitoba EAP is a one program, multi-site model. EAP offices are located at the following sites:

Employee Assistance Centre
599 Empress Street
Winnipeg, MB R3G 3P3

St. Boniface Hospital
Nursing Education Bldg
Room N5052, 431 Tache Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R2H 2A6

Please contact Manitoba Blue Cross to obtain rural EAP site locations.

Please direct request for all sites to:
204.786.8880, TTY 204.775.0586, Toll Free 1.800.590.5553

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Consult a professional (counsellor, physician, etc.) before taking action with respect to any topics discussed.

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