

What Is Resilience?



Resilience is the capacity to adapt successfully in the face of threat or disaster.

It is also not something that you're either born with or not. Resilience develops as people grow and gain better thinking and self-management skills and more knowledge.

Resilience also comes from supportive relationships with parents, peers and others, as well as cultural beliefs and traditions that help people cope with the inevitable bumps in life.

Some people have the requisite personality characteristics to be resilient alongside the skills and strengths that they have learned. Others may not be as resilient or have the necessary skills etc. and they are likely to be overwhelmed in difficult situations.

Learning to be resilient is an important quality.

Resilience Characteristics

1. Overall awareness

People who are resilient are sensitive to their own emotions and those of the people around them. They are able to understand the reasons for emotions and remain able to have some control in situations and be creative when dealing with problems. They are good at managing and dealing with their emotions authentically.

2. Being realistic

Resilient individuals are realistic that life brings problems and challenges and are able to understand that they will need to change as much as possible. They appreciate the positive aspects of life.

3. Locus of control

If you have a sense that you have some control in your life, then you are likely to be able to manage more effectively and be resilient. If you feel that life happens to you, then you are less likely to be resilient.

4. Solving problems

People who are resilient will have effective and efficient problem solving skills. They will be able to understand a situation, identify the correct issue and create the best solution. They are unlikely to misread the situation, identify the wrong topic and then produce the incorrect answer to that issue.

Those who are not as resilient may not solve problems as well and may inadvertently choose options to make the situation worse.

5. Social Connections

Resilient people have a good and productive social system and they are willing to share their problems and emotions. Those who are less resilient may be likely to isolate themselves and/or have very few social contacts and be disinclined to share their views, fears and concerns.

6. Mental Agility

Those who are resilient are flexible in their thinking and conceptualizing even in difficult times. They are unlikely to ignore data and information (central and peripheral) in any given situation.

7. Mindset

People with resilience think positively and consider that they can survive a situation rather than succumb to it. They remain focused and think about what is possible rather than only thinking about the negative aspects of the situation. They are resourceful but also able to recognize when they need help and are prepared to ask. Essentially, they have a positive and optimistic approach.

Optimists are said to cope better with stress and are more likely to identify core issues of a problem, identify more easily what they can control and influence and more likely to seek information, ask for help etc.

They are less likely to fall into thinking traps, e.g. catastrophizing, feeling helpless.

Less resilient people are likely to think that they can be overwhelmed by a situation and focus only on the negative aspects.

Building Resilience

1. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is composed of two components: doing well and feeling good (Seligman, 1995).

Find ways to increase your self-esteem.

What was good about the way in which you last dealt with a crisis or problem or critical incident?

What will you praise yourself for?

What could have been done differently next time?

Think about all of your strengths and talents. List them.

Remind yourself of your sense of purpose. Place reminders of it around you, e.g. pictures.

2. Social network

Review your current social network and consider who is helpful, positive and supportive. Ensure that there is at least one person in whom you can confide.

3. Being flexible

Learn how to be more adaptable and flexible when you face a problem. Remember to think carefully and slowly. Have you gathered all of the necessary information? Have you considered all possible solutions? Remember to select more than one answer so that you can adapt if the first attempt is not successful.

4. A positive approach

It is important to think positively, e.g. 'how can I?' instead of, 'this is too much'. Such a mind-set will lead you to see the situation differently and generate better ways forward.

Remember that you have some sterling qualities which could include wisdom, courage, a sense of humanity and justice. Think about how you can value and use them more in your daily work.

Investigate your beliefs and replace the maladaptive ones. Think of a past adverse event and write down your beliefs and views about the situation and the consequences (emotions and behaviour). How helpful were your beliefs? What needs to change? (Child and Family Partnership, 2006)

It is important to also be prepared for situations that could be problematic. Here are six questions (Seligman, 1995):

What is the worst thing that could happen?

What is the one thing I can do to help stop the worst thing happening?

What is the best thing that can happen?

What one thing can I do to make the best thing happen?

What is the most likely thing that will happen?

What can I do to handle the most likely thing if it happens?

5. Problem solving skills

Ensure that you have learned and use a wide variety of problem solving skills so you can be adaptable. Learn more about decision-making and how to make better decisions. Have a goal while solving problems.

6. Looking after yourself

Eating and drinking in a healthy manner and getting a good night's sleep are important and contribute positively to your wellbeing and resilience. Make sure that you get regular health checks and that you exercise regularly. Look after yourself first, as some-one said, 'You can't look after anyone else unless you look after yourself'.

Learning to breathe slowly and deeply in all situations is vital as this will help to regulate your body functions.



For further information or a confidential discussion, please contact Staff Welfare at swo@iom.int Thank you!

Reference: Resilience Course, Coursera, Positive Psychology Centre, University of Pennsylvania, 2018