BUILDING RESILIENCE

WayAhead
Mental Health Association NSW
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Questions
What is resilience?
What are the key characteristics of resilient individuals?
Why some are more resilient than others?
What factors impact upon resilience?
What is the connection between resilience and mental health?
What is community resilience?
How to build resilience?

Where do I go for help?
WayAhead Information Line
Transcultural Mental Health Centre
Your local doctor (GP)
Other useful websites
“The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.”

Ernest Hemingway

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” from stressful or challenging experiences. It involves being able to adapt to changes and approach negative events, sources of stress and traumatic events as constructively as possible. Being resilient doesn’t mean that a person doesn’t experience difficult life events, but rather that they are better able to cope with them when they do occur.

Often resilience is built through the experience of difficult life events. It is not necessarily a fixed trait, but something all people have the potential to develop.¹ Developing a greater level of resilience won’t stop negative or stressful things from occurring, however it can reduce the level of disruption a stressor has on the individual and the time it takes for them to recover from it.²

Key characteristics of resilience

Resilient individuals:

- Have positive self-perceptions
- Have a high level of emotional intelligence and effectively manage their emotions
- Are aware of situations, their own reactions and the behaviour of others
- Understand and accept that life is full of challenges
- Believe that they have control over the outcome of their lives
- Identify as survivors, rather than victims
- Exhibit strong problem-solving skills
- Are skilled communicators
- Develop strong social supports
- Are able to ask for help³
Why are some people more resilient than others?

An individual’s resilience depends upon the balance of risk and protective factors that they have in their lives. Risk factors include poor self-esteem and lack of social support, while protective factors include positive self-esteem and strong social networks.

Some factors which impact upon resilience include:
- Individual health and wellbeing
- Sense of self and sense of purpose in life
- Individual factors such as genetics, personality, ethnicity and economic background
- Degree of social and community connectedness
- Life history and past experiences
- The magnitude of the stressor

Due to different life situations resilience varies from person to person and can fluctuate throughout the lifespan due to changes in experience and circumstance.

Some of these factors are outside our control. But a great many are things we can do something about, both for ourselves and for those around us. Have another look through the list. What are some of the areas you could work on to build your own resilience and those around you?

Resilience and mental health

Building our resilience can buffer us from developing mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder. It does so by helping offset certain risk factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing a mental illness. Risk factors include lack of social support, being bullied, experiencing trauma, socioeconomic disadvantage and social or cultural discrimination. By building your resilience, you can protect your mental health and wellbeing from negative stressors like those above.

For people who already live with mental illness, resilience can help with the experience of setbacks and challenges, while promoting the development of confidence for the effective management of illness and for recovery. With resilience these developments are possible despite the limitations imposed by a mental health condition.

Community resilience

Resilience is something we can all develop by drawing on individual strengths and abilities as well as the connections and support from others around us. The sense of cohesion derived from belonging to a community can build a great sense of optimism and morale within us. A strong community can benefit each member of the community in times of stress.

Community resilience is built by strengthening social networks, offering support to members of the community in times of need, working together on common goals as well as ensuring safety and promoting healthy lifestyles. By building a supportive community individual resilience is improved as well.
10 Ways to build resilience

1. Have the courage to be imperfect
2. Take time for yourself
3. Sign up for that course, join that club
4. Be active every day in as many ways as you can
5. Spend time with people who make you feel good
6. Laugh out loud each day
7. Invite your neighbour over for a cup of tea
8. Do one thing now that you’ve been putting off
9. Focus more on things you can control
10. Remember, this too shall pass

(Adapted from the Mental Health Association NSW’s "10 Tips to Stress Less" 2009)

What else?

- Positive thinking – embrace a positive attitude.
- Mindsets – adopt a “growth” mindset.
- Optimism – be optimistic! Optimism not only facilitates psychological resilience, but can increase physical resilience by increasing immunity.
- Coping skills - work on developing positive coping skills
- Capacity building – increase your ability to face challenges by increasing your abilities and confidence.
- Psychological techniques – experiment with cognitive behaviour therapy, positive psychology or mindfulness.

References

Where do I go for help?

The WayAhead Directory is an online resource providing a comprehensive list of mental health related services in NSW. directory.wayahead.org.au

Mental Health Information Service
1300 794 991

Transcultural Mental Health Centre
1800 648 911

WayAhead-Mental Health Association
www.wayahead.org.au

Transcultural Mental Health Centre

Stress Less Tips
www.stresslesstips.org.au

“ I found people who understood exactly what I was going through ”

Disclaimer

This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed.

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The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.

This factsheet was last reviewed by Sanna Elversson, 2015

Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS) 131 450
Please call the Mental Health Information Line through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). Free to Australian citizens or permanent residents.