

BUILDING RESILIENCE

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**“The world
breaks
everyone,
& afterward,
some are
strong in the
broken places”**

Ernest Hemmingway

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.

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.

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 help

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.

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 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

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.⁶

Community resilience

By building a supportive community, individual resilience is improved as well as that of the whole community.

10 Ways to build resilience

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

(Adapted from WayAhead's "10 Tips to Stress Less" 2009)

What else?

- Positive thinking – Try to look at things with an open and positive mind instead of looking at what's wrong.
- Mindsets – adopt a "growth" mindset.
- Optimism – be optimistic! Optimism not only facilitates psychological resilience, but can increase physical resilience by increasing immunity.
- Coping skills – Believe in yourself and that you can manage. Look for solutions that are going to be beneficial. If you can change something, then do so. If you can't change it, let go until the right solution comes along.
- 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.[9>About Education. (2015). Benefits of positive thinking. Retrieved from <http://psychology.about.com/od/PositivePsychology/a/benefits-of-positive-thinking.htm>

Where do I go for help?

The WayAhead Directory

is an online resource providing a comprehensive list of mental health related services in NSW.

www.WayAhead.org.au

Phone Lines

WayAhead Mental Health
Information Line

1300 794 991

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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.

Disclaimer

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

Last reviewed by Jamie Saltoon 2018

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



