

Role Models

Some people seem more resilient than others in the face of difficulty. Think of three or four people in your life who you admire for the way they have handled themselves in challenging situations – either personal or professional. Breaking down the traits that make them resilient can help you identify traits you'd like to cultivate in yourself.

1. Identify people in your life who you admire for their resilience. List them below:

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- _____

2. List some personal characteristics or behaviors that these people display that help them through challenges:

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3. Place a checkmark next to the characteristics or behaviors you think you display as well.

4. Circle the characteristics or behaviors you might want to work on to develop your resilience.

What is Your Core Resilience?

People who are resilient adapt to change by adjusting their routines and processes while staying true to their core identities – mind, body, heart, and spirit. Recognizing your strengths in these areas can help you tap into them more readily in challenging situations.

Describe a stressful/change-filled situation that you have dealt with in the past.

What were your initial thoughts, emotions, and reactions?

How did you feel physically during this time?

What personal attributes and/or actions did you use to get through this experience?

How did you manage difficult thoughts and emotions?

How did you respond to any physical issues (for example, muscle tension or difficulty with sleep)?

Looking back on your experience, what things did not work very well?

What things seemed most helpful in navigating through the change or challenge?

What did you learn from this experience?

Can you see aspects of your core resilience and strengths that you can turn to in future challenges?

How would you rate your resilience on a scale from 1 - 10 (1 being the lowest and ten being the highest)?

Techniques and Tactics for Developing Resilience

Techniques for adjusting thought patterns

- **Reframe the situation:** When you can reframe your situation to give you a fresh and positive outlook on the changes you experience, they may not feel so bad. This isn't just thinking that things aren't as bad as they could be, but seeing the good in what's happening. Think of a tighter budget as a way to be creative within the limits you have. Most changes also create opportunities, so try to find those.
- **Remind yourself of strengths:** We all needed to be reminded of our strengths, especially when we face difficulties and challenges. Make note of your natural strengths, and how they've helped you cope before. You can keep a list of them in your wallet or phone, and review it when you need a boost.
- **Practice problem-solving:** Having good problem-solving skills and being able to think on your feet helps you to adapt readily in changing circumstances. Take note how the people around you solve problems, and put those methods into practice in your life. Consult with others to see how they have coped with similar challenges in their lives and obtain resources.
- **Improve your self-control:** Managing your emotions and impulses well can help change feel less overwhelming. Even when you're not facing changes, try to keep your emotions from going to extremes. Remove yourself from the challenging situation. Take a deep breath to calm intense emotions. Try a "time out" from intense conversations with others, and come back to it when you are both calm.
- **Fake it till you make it:** Even if you don't feel strong or resilient, practice the behaviors that characterize resilient people. Try a thought experiment where you imagine best case scenarios, not the worst thing that could happen. Verbalize the "silver linings" in the situation. Practice until resilient behaviors become real for you.
- **Grow in flexibility:** We can get stuck in routines of daily life, but change forces us to break free of those ruts. Flexibility enables you to bend painlessly with changing situations. Practice letting things go and letting others have their way. Think about things from others' points of view and try to work with them. Be willing to change your habits and routines to rise to your changing needs.
- **Focus on what you can control:** Thinking too much about factors that are outside of your control can weigh you down. Focusing on what you have control over gives you a starting point for action. Achieving small goals, one at a time, helps slowly build your resilience and ability to "bounce back" over time.
- **Rethink your worries:** If you are a natural worrier, compartmentalize your worries so that they don't snowball out of control. Set aside a certain time of day to worry, and don't allow yourself to think about them outside of your "worry time". Practice thought-stopping techniques to prevent those thoughts from taking over the rest of your day.
- **Let go of shame and blame:** Some negative changes can lead people to blame themselves and others. That can result in shame and anger. As you release the hard feelings you've held, you will feel more at peace as you face the future.

Tactics to prepare for change

- **Gather facts:** When you go through changes, you may not have all the information you need readily available. It helps to get more info about what is happening. Ask your supervisor about issues at work, or research health problems you're dealing with. Ensure you are using reputable sources of information.
- **Get perspective:** Try to see other sides of the story. Get some understanding of what is behind the change you see. Remember that you're not the only one affected. As you widen your perspective, you'll have a better base to understand and accept the changes.
- **Expand your skills:** Find out what you need to know to succeed, or look for ways that you can gain more knowledge and skills. If your job role is changing, are there skills that would help you be more successful? Can you take a class or obtain a mentor to help gain those skills ahead of time? Attempt to grow your knowledge base *before* it is required. This makes you ready for change when it happens.
- **Explore your options:** Change can actually open a door to a world of opportunities. Get in the habit of identifying all the options in front of you, instead of focusing only on the most obvious. Write them down. As you explore the different options, you can better grasp what's happening and use that information to develop short- and long-term plans to keep your options open moving forward.
- **Make a move:** Don't just think about being resilient, but commit to making a move in a positive direction each day, even if it is just a very small move.

Strategies for Coping with Uncertainty

During times of uncertainty and change, it may seem like you have no time to prioritize self-care. Challenging times like this are when it is especially important to focus on taking good care of yourself physically, mentally and emotionally. You can make the choice to “act” – prioritizing your well-being and choosing effective coping strategies – rather than simply “reacting” to what is happening. Below are some ideas to do that.

Physical Coping Strategies

- **Adequate rest** is the foundation of stress management. Establish a regular bedtime routine to ensure you get enough rest. Sleep helps your body renew its resources for the next challenge.
- **Exercise** is an effective way to reduce stress. It can also help you sleep better if you complete it no later than three hours before bedtime. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise routine.
- **Be mindful about what you're eating.** Stress encourages you to reach for unhealthy foods (such as chips or cookies) because they trigger comforting brain chemicals. Try to resist cravings by planning meals ahead of time and staying well-stocked in healthy snack items (fruits, vegetables).
- **Nurture yourself by doing something calming and relaxing in your free time.** Maybe it's a hot bath, reading a book, or sitting outside in the sunshine. Make time for these activities to recharge your batteries.
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope, unless your doctor gives you a needed prescription.

Mental Coping Strategies

- **Get facts from reliable sources** to learn more about the problem, rather than relying on the rumor mill or social media to provide accurate information. Staying informed is a good way to feel “in control” of the situation.
- **Write it out, taking a problem-solving approach.** For example if you are having difficulty finding childcare, write out the hours you need help, people you know who might be able to assist, and other resources, such as your EAP. Set a goal to send emails or make phone calls to those people or organizations to get started. This will give you a fact-based look at the situation, and also gives you a greater sense of control.
- **Take time to form a plan** in the event of the “worst case scenario” or emergency. Know that you may never have to activate it.
- **Talk it out.** Brainstorm your problem-solving ideas with your loved ones to get their input and ideas. Consult social media or post to public forums to get ideas from others on how they've handled similar challenges.
- **Shift your focus** to the here-and-now needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy, and the things you need to get done. Give your thoughts a break from constantly thinking about the “what if” that scares you.

- **Structure your time.** Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most, and in doing this, your interpretation of what's happening will become more alarming and less objective.
- **Remind yourself of your abilities and strengths.** Self-statements such as "I have always figured out some way to land on my feet" get you back in touch with the fact that you're steering your own ship – you're not a bottle tossing and turning on life's seas.
- **Read inspirational writings to find meaning** in what is happening. The context in which we see our life experience makes all the difference.
- **Set short-term goals.** What are some things that you want to accomplish in the next hour, the next day, the next week? Take it day by day. Start small and build from there.
- **Recognize anger as a secondary emotion.** Anger is often a surface emotion that covers up a deeper emotion, such as fear, hurt, or feeling of powerlessness. When you find yourself feeling anger, search for the deeper emotion, and work with it instead. Write about it. Talk about it.
- **Be cautious not to take out your anger on friends and relatives.** It'll be much harder for them to be emotionally supportive if they're feeling attacked. Talk with them about the emotions which underlie your anger, and ask for their cooperation and support.
- **Know that difficulty can sometimes bring growth and meaning to our lives.** It can be hard to imagine that anything valuable could come from this experience when you're struggling, but at some point you may notice that this hardship brought something into your life that could be considered meaningful. It might impact your relationships for the better or help you find creative solutions to problems. You may develop a deeper spirituality. It may just be the gift of discovering that you could survive this.

Emotional Coping Strategies

- **Reach out to people who care.** Identify and talk out your thoughts, feelings and fears with loved ones.
- **Write out your feelings.** You're dealing with an abstract but very powerful loss – the loss of expectations and assumptions. There's a grief process that comes along with loss. We form expectations for the future based on that. When our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, we lose our balance, and our worlds are shaken. You know from previous crises in your life, however, that you will eventually regain your balance.