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Becoming Resilient

RESILIENCE

Resilience Is Key to Mitigating Mental Health Challenges

Strategies to boost your resiliency skills.

Posted February 3, 2022 | Reviewed by Vanessa Lancaster



THE BASICS

What Is Resilience?

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KEY POINTS

- According to recent studies, three out of four adults report that the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health.
- In recognizing a mental disorder, it is essential to assess the level of disruption in various areas of one's life.
- Biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors can be protective factors for someone experiencing a mental health challenge.

Approximately 52 million people ages 18 and older experience mental health or substance abuse disorder each year. Mental health challenges are the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada.

Unfortunately, as the COVID-19 pandemic lingers, the risk of mental health-related disorders is more likely to increase, with recent studies revealing that three out of four adults reporting the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health.

It could be difficult to identify someone going through a mental health-related disorder since we might see it as a normal response to tough or traumatic life events. Although this might be a reality, it is also crucial to monitor frequent periods of anxiety and depression since it may indicate a more complex problem.

"A mental health disorder may be present when patterns or changes in thinking, feeling and behaving causes significant distress or disrupts the person's ability to work" (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

In recognizing a mental disorder, it is important to assess the level of disrup-

tion in various areas of one's life, such as the ability to work, study, care for oneself or others, and maintain successful relationships with friends and families. Nevertheless, identifying a mental disorder is not always an easy task, leading to a resulting delay in diagnosis.

Mental health challenges don't occur in a vacuum. Often, interacting factors can affect a person's mental health, such as biological, psychological, social, and environmental, all of which can also act as protective factors for someone experiencing a mental health challenge. These protective factors, along with coping skills, could boost a person's level of resilience, helping mitigate mental health challenges.

What is resilience? Some think of it as an abundance of optimism or simply a sunny disposition. But resilience is more than that. It is the process of adapting to a higher point than before the hardship (APA, 2020). Resilience is a trait crucial to survival—not just our ability to bounce back but to empower us to continue growing and even improving our lives along the way.

Being resilient does not keep someone from experiencing difficult times or distress. Emotional distress and sadness are common in individuals who have endured major adversities or trauma, and the journey to resilience is prone to the involvement of significant emotional pain. The combination of strong protective factors and the ability to handle emotional distress in a healthy way contributes to long-term resilience.



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How You Can Increase Your Resilience

While certain factors might make some individuals more resilient than others, resilience should not be seen as a personality trait that only some people have. On the contrary, resilience entails behaviors, thoughts, and actions that anyone can learn and develop over time. Like developing a muscle, increasing your resilience takes time, motivation, and intentionality.

By understanding what protective factors are essential in building resilience, you can actively support yourself or someone in your life who might be experiencing a mental health or even a substance abuse challenge.

To become more resilient, it is crucial to focus on four main protective factors: connection, wellness, healthy thinking, and meaning, all while empowering others to withstand and learn from tough times.

The following strategies might help boost your resilience skills:

- **Build connections.** It is important to prioritize relationships, especially with empathetic and understanding people, to provide a reminder you are not alone amid difficulties. Surround yourself with trustworthy and compassionate people who validate your feelings.
- **Join a group.** People who have suffered traumatic events tend to isolate themselves, but it is important to accept help and support from those who care about you or might have similar experiences. Some people have benefited tremendously from joining groups, whether it is a support group, civic groups, faith-based communities, or any other type of local organization that provides social support.
- **Take care of your body.** The approach to overcoming a mental health challenge and building resilience must follow a holistic approach. That's because stress is just as physical as it is emotional. Thus, self-care in all areas is fundamental. For example, proper nutrition, ample sleep, hydration, and regular exercise can support your body to adapt to stress and reduce emotions like anxiety and depression.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Mindful journaling, yoga, and other spiritual practices like prayer or meditation can also assist you with building connections and re-establishing hope. In turn, this can prime you to deal with situations that require resilience. When you engage in these practices, it is important to reflect on the positive aspects of your life and recall all the things you are grateful for, even during the most demanding times of your life.

- **Avoid negative outlets.** It may be alluring to try to alleviate your emotional pain by using alcohol or other substances, but this is like putting a bandage on a deep wound. Instead, focus on giving your body the resources it needs to manage stress.
- **Help others.** Helping others can garner a sense of purpose, foster self-worth, connect with other people and empower you to grow resilient.
- **Be proactive.** Sometimes we become overwhelmed by just reflecting on the negative and the dimensions of a problem at hand. Thus, if the problem seems too big to tackle, break it down into manageable pieces.
- **Move toward your goals.** Set realistic goals and do something towards achieving them regularly. Even if it seems like you're only taking baby steps that will enable you to move toward what you wish to accomplish, instead of putting energy into goals that seem unachievable, ask yourself, what is one thing I can accomplish today that will help me move in the direction I want to go? For example, if you have been recently diagnosed with chronic illness, join a support group in your area and access as much as possible educational resources about your condition.
- **Keep things in perspective.** It is important to monitor the quality of our self-talk. How you think can play a significant role in how you feel and act. Remember the thinking, feeling, and behaving model. Try to monitor your thinking patterns and identify any irrational thinking, such as the tendency to catastrophize obstacles or assume the world is out to get you. You may not be able to change a highly stressful situation, but you can change how you perceive it and respond to it.
- **Accept change.** Acceptance plays an important role in building resilience. We have to accept that change is part of life. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed presently can help you focus on situations you may be able to alter later.
- **Learn from your past.** By reflecting on what was effective in dealing with a stressful event from the past, we may be able to respond more effectively to new difficult situations. Remind yourself you had the strength to overcome it before and reach for those learning experiences.

References

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