

Resilience helps you adapt to change and recover quickly when things don't go well. How can we become more resilient?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. challenging
2. to strengthen
3. threatening
4. awareness
5. your emotional state
6. a perspective
7. expressive
8. sympathetic

Definition

- a. knowledge or understanding of a particular thing
- b. used to describe someone who shows that they understand and care about your problems
- c. to make something stronger or better
- d. the way you are feeling at a particular time
- e. difficult, in a way that tests your ability or determination
- f. likely to hurt you or do something bad to you
- g. a particular way of seeing or thinking about something
- h. showing what someone thinks or feels

Resilience

Raul never seems to let difficulties in life worry him. When someone disagrees with him, he sees it as a chance to understand things from a different point of view. When he had too much work, he learnt to improve his time management skills. When he lost his job, he took an online course so he could apply for better jobs. To Raul's friends, he's the best example of resilience.

What is resilience? One definition of resilience is the ability to be happy or successful again after difficulties. But resilience isn't just that. It is also the ability to adapt to challenging situations without feeling like it's all too much for you. It means using difficult situations to grow and improve.

Some people might say Raul's just lucky. They might think he never gets stressed and that things just don't bother him. But they're wrong. Resilient people do feel stress, emotional pain, disappointment and other negative emotions. But it's what they do with those feelings that helps make them resilient. Resilience involves thoughts, behaviour and actions that we all can develop and strengthen. People are not born resilient – they learn resilience.

So what can we do to build resilience? Here are three tips.

1. Be aware of your reactions

When we think something is difficult or threatening, negative feelings and thoughts can lead to negative actions. By being aware of our feelings, we can learn to accept them and to deal with them better. Mindfulness activities like meditation can increase our awareness of our emotional state and help us calm negative thoughts.

Our brains often try to make sense of negative events by creating a story around the situation. For example, if Stella openly disagrees with us in a meeting, we might tell ourselves that she doesn't like us and was looking for the opportunity to make us feel uncomfortable in front of the boss. We tell ourselves this story until it feels real, even though it's likely that the reality is quite different.

Being aware that everybody has a tendency to create stories around events is the first step to managing our reactions. When we realise that our version of events is just one interpretation of things, the situation becomes less painful and we are more open to seeing things from different perspectives.

2. Use writing techniques to gain different perspectives

It is not easy to recognise and change the stories we tell ourselves but there are techniques that can help us. *Greater Good Magazine* from Berkeley, the University of California, suggests expressive writing – writing freely about an issue for 20 minutes, putting your deepest thoughts and feelings on paper. As we write, the process forces us to face our thoughts honestly and helps us find new understanding.

Writing can also help us think more positively about difficult experiences. Once we have explored the negative side of something, another technique involves making a list of the positive aspects of the situation. For example, maybe Stella's comments in the meeting forced you to make your original idea much better. Or what she said might have helped you understand her point of view. A study found that people who did this 'list the positives' activity every day for three weeks felt more positive, particularly the negative thinkers, who reported feeling less depressed.

3. Be kind to yourself

It is important that we don't judge ourselves for the negative feelings and thoughts that we have, and that we forgive ourselves for the mistakes we make. Talking to other kind and sympathetic individuals can help support us when we are experiencing difficulty. Sharing experiences with other people can help us become more aware of our feelings and offer us different perspectives. Whether these are our colleagues, our friends or people in other social groups we belong to, forming strong relationships helps us feel less alone.

Being kind to yourself is also about looking after your physical health. Making sure you get enough sleep, plenty of exercise and healthy food can help reduce the stress you're feeling.

The stress, worry and emotional pain that life brings can be challenging. But if we work on building our resilience and getting the support we need to do so, we can gradually learn to deal with these difficult circumstances and, in the process, become stronger.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. Resilient people see difficult situations and mistakes as a chance to learn and grow.	True	False
2. Resilient people never worry about anything.	True	False
3. When we feel stressed, disappointed or upset, we should try to ignore those feelings.	True	False
4. Meditation is a way of helping us recognise how we're feeling.	True	False
5. By telling ourselves the same story again and again, we can become more resilient.	True	False
6. When writing about an issue, we should focus only on our negative thoughts and feelings about it.	True	False
7. Talking about your problems to friends can help you feel less alone, but it can also help you become more aware of your feelings and the different ways of looking at things.	True	False
8. Getting physically healthier can make you more resilient and better able to deal with difficult situations.	True	False

Task 2

Write the correct form of the word in brackets.

- Resilience is the to recover quickly when things don't go well. (able)
- A resilient person is capable of adapting to situations. (challenge)
- Resilient people do feel stress, emotional pain and (disappoint)
- People are not born resilient – they learn (resilient)
- Meditation can help us calm negative thoughts and increase our of our feelings. (aware)
- When we experience, talking to people close to us helps us see things from different perspectives. (difficult)
- Forming strong with friends and colleagues helps us feel less alone. (relate)
- Getting enough sleep, exercise and food can help reduce stress. (health)

Discussion

Do you have any tips for building resilience?