

NEWSLETTER 5: NOTES ON 'RESILIENCE'

What is 'resilience'?

Resilience is the human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by experiences of adversity. However, defining resilience is a continuing problem (Kaufman, Cook, Arny, Jones & Pittinsky, 1994). Some languages do not yet have an equivalent word in the behavioral sciences (Kotliarenco, 1993). Spanish, for example, has no word for resilience in the psychological literature but, instead, used the term "la defensa ante la adversidad (defense in face of adversity).

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.

Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience. Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress. Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

A combination of factors contributes to resilience. Many studies show that the **primary factor in resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family**. Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance help bolster a person's resilience.

Several additional factors are associated with resilience, including:

1. The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.
2. A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.
3. Skills in communication and problem solving.
4. The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Developing resilience is a personal journey. People do not all react the same to traumatic and stressful life events. An approach to building resilience that works for one person might not work for another.

Building Resilience:

1. Make connections. Good relationships with close family members, friends or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations, or other local groups provides social

support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.

2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

3. Accept that change is a part of living. Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

4. Move toward your goals. Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

5. Take decisive actions. Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

6. Look for opportunities for self-discovery. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

7. Nurture a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

8. Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

9. Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

10. Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful. For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope

Resilience is promoted by factors *provided* around the individual (I HAVE), by factors promoted and *developed* within the individual (I AM), and by factors *acquired* by the individual (I CAN). **The facing of adversity requires a dynamic and balanced interaction of these factors; i.e., no one factor, one source or one way, is sufficient.**

Resilient teachers feel 'called' to the profession. Sense of vocation. Resilient teachers mentor others.

Further Reading:

See <http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/grotb98a.html> for information relating to The Resilience Project (research)

Patterson, Janice H.; Collins, Loucrecia; Abbott, Gypsy (2004) A Study of Teacher Resilience in Urban Schools, *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, Vol. 31,

Gu, Q., and Day, C. (2007) Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 23, Issue 8, 1302–1316

A series of 'Ease the Load' videos available for download from www.schoolsworld.tv

See in particular:

- I've been a Head for 5 years
- Calm exterior, stressed interior
- My planning rules my life
- I'm tired of 12 hour days
- I don't want to work through my breaks
- No time to spend with my partner
- Time management

Online resilience questionnaire available for £32.40:

<http://www.adc.uk.com/development/products/resilience/>

Emotional resilience toolkit:

<http://www.bitc.org.uk/our-resources/report/emotional-resilience>

The American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>

The International Resilience Project

<http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/grotb98a.html>