



A Guide to Building Resilience

As isolation and disruption to normal daily routines continues, you can expect shifting emotions, negative thinking, feelings of irritability, feelings of disconnection, and other signs of stress and anxiety. Building coping skills and resilience will help you work through the emotional upheaval triggered by COVID-19.

Resilience is the process of adapting in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, or other significant sources of stress. Becoming resilient helps you work through difficult events, but it also helps you grow and improve your life even in the absence of adversity.

Some people refer to resilience as “bouncing back,” but it’s more than that. Being resilient includes learning from past experiences and developing new coping strategies moving forward.

Key Steps to Building Resilience

Like building a muscle, increasing your resilience requires time and dedication. If you don’t put in the work, it might atrophy. People are conditioned to think of resilience as a personality trait (either you have it or you don’t), but this isn’t the case. With intention and practice, you can become more resilient, no matter your age.

There isn’t one specific strategy to use to build resilience. It’s a process of establishing connections, coping with stress, adjusting your thought process, and fostering physical wellness.

Step 1: Adjust Your Thought Process

During times of crisis, such as those we are living through now, there is a tendency for the mind to wander and get trapped into patterns and negative thinking. This tendency is exacerbated, and the mind can become even more hooked by obsessive thinking, as well as feelings of fear and helplessness. When your mind gets stuck in this state, a chain reaction begins. Fear begins to narrow your field of vision, and it becomes harder to see the bigger picture and the positive, creative possibilities in front of you.

It’s difficult to maintain an optimistic outlook when the future feels so uncertain, but positive thinking will help you focus on hope and visualize better times ahead. When you feel flooded with negative thoughts, own them. When you say your thoughts out loud and talk through them, they lose their power.

State your negative thought, think about where it stems from, and offer three positive alternative thoughts.

Step 2: Learn Coping Skills

We all need to hone our coping skills during this crisis so that we can work through the emotional shifts we are likely to experience in an adaptive way. There are a few coping strategies that tend to work across age groups.

- Deep breathing or mindful breathing - helps calm the central nervous system and works whether you’re experiencing symptoms of panic or general discomfort. [Click here](#) for a 5 minute mindful breathing exercise.

- Meditation – there are many apps available that can assist with getting into the habit of clearing your mind of stress and visualizing positive outcomes. [Click here](#) to view some useful apps.
- Exercise Daily - exercise is a natural stress reliever. Get out for walks or try a livestream exercise class.

Step 3: Build Your Connections

We all need support in life, not just in a crisis. While the exhaustion of stress might trick you into thinking that isolating yourself is best, feeling supported by others will help you through this difficult time.

Building a healthy social support network of empathetic and compassionate people helps you feel less alone in times of need. Focus on resilient role models, people who lift you up rather than those who may be inflexible, fatalistic or who tend to catastrophize.

Whilst social distancing and ‘lock down’ has made physically connecting with others more challenging, technology provides us with many opportunities to stay connected with our social support networks. Here are a few ideas:

- Video chats with friends and family
- Virtual meetups/meetings with colleagues – particularly important for those working from home
- Joining book groups or other social clubs, many of which use online platforms
- Churches, synagogues, and other religious houses of worship are livestreaming services

Step 4: Focus on Physical Wellness

Stress can hobble your immune system and make you more susceptible to illness. This can, in turn, negatively affect your emotional state. Maintaining your physical wellness plays an important role in building resilience.

When you take a whole-person approach to self-care, you care for both your body and your mind. Get back to basics to get into the habit of self-care:

- Prioritise sleep - Be sure to maintain a consistent sleep schedule during this time.
- Focus on healthy eating - If you crave salty or sweet foods when you're under stress, you're not alone. Many people want comfort food in times of crisis; but balanced, healthy eating is best for your physical health. Plan ahead for a steady rotation of nutritious meals.
- Maintain hydration - Believe it or not, dehydration can exacerbate symptoms of stress. Be sure to drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Remain active - In addition to daily exercise, do fun or mentally stimulating activities to enrich your mind and spirit. Play an online card game with a friend or family member, work on a puzzle, spend time gardening, or find another hobby or skill that engages your whole self.

You can take small steps each day to build your resilience muscles, and this will help you through this crisis as well as any future adversity.