Student Wellness Services

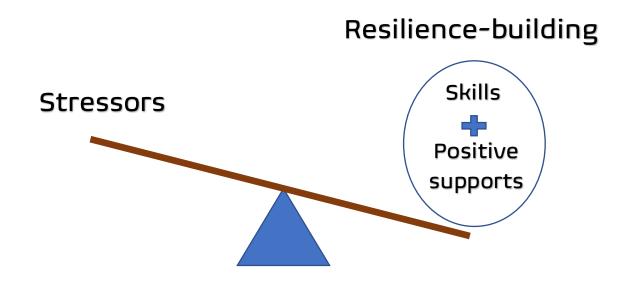
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Resilience Tips for Success

What is Resilience?

Resilience can be defined as a positive outcome in the face of adversity (i.e., challenge, change).

Let's consider for a moment that wellbeing is like a seesaw. In life, people are exposed to and experience a range of stressors, both positive and negative, that can influence wellbeing. We can think of resilience as the influence we can have over how easy it is to tilt the seesaw of wellbeing in one direction or the other. Stressors have the potential to decrease wellbeing and resilience serves to enhance wellbeing.



Resilience-building strategies include healthy coping skills, strategies, supports, and perspectives an individual can draw on as one responds to challenges and change. Resilience is partly a skill that can be developed and partly a product of the resources and supports available to an individual within one's community(ies).



Tips for Resilience-building:



1) Check your mindset. Mindset refers to the perspective we bring to our experiences that shape our actions and thoughts. So often when life is not going well, we can get stuck in zoom mode, only focusing on the bad things that are happening. It's helpful to remember to back up into panoramic mode, looking at the long term perspective, the bigger picture of one's life and experiences, and identifying opportunities for learning and growth. Bad times are only

temporary; having faith and trust in the future becomes essential.

2) Practice growth mindset. When some people face a setback, they give up because they believe it's a sign they never had "what it takes" or they might hold a fatalistic perspective. This is referred to as *fixed mindset* – the belief that people essentially are who they are and don't change. Science has shown us that our brains are highly adaptable. A *growth-mindset* means that you believe human beings have the capacity to change and grow. With effort and experience our brains change, and we change and grow! Remembering this might be what you need to stick to something even when the going gets tough.

Most of us already engage in growth mindset in some domain of our lives. Consider how you're already using growth mindset and how you might apply it in the current challenge you're facing. Reflect on a past challenge that you've overcome. What strengths, social supports, or perspectives did you use to help you get through this difficult experience? How might you use these now?

- 3) Invest in Connections. Humans have developed more than one stress response. Most people are familiar with the Fight or Flight response that kicks in if we encounter a bear in Kananaskis or perhaps while public speaking! Did you know that we also have another stress response called Tend & Befriend stress response? The Tend & Befriend stress response, from an evolutionary perspective, developed to make sure we protect our offspring. However, more recent research shows that when we care for others, it changes our biochemistry, activating systems of the brain that:
 - a. produce feelings of hope, courage, and prosocial tendencies including increased empathy, connection & trust;
 - b. increases motivation and optimism;
 - c. enhances perception, intuition, and selfcontrol;
 - d. inhibits fear; and
 - e. protects against harmful effects of chronic/traumatic stress

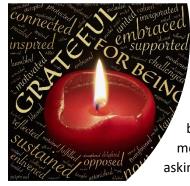


Choosing to be generous towards those around us allows one to access resilience and motivation. Good deeds for others are in fact good for our health.

4) Clarifying priorities and setting goals. Priorities contribute to our sense of meaning and purpose in life, which contribute to our overall sense of happiness and motivation. Priorities are also dynamic and will change as context changes. When we go through change or adversity, it is helpful to pause and reflect on our current priorities. Reassess if the priorities you had still hold true for the current context.

Consider asking yourself: If my life could focus on one thing and one thing only, what would it be? If I could add a second thing, what would that be? A third? A fourth? A fifth? Once you have a good sense of your current priorities, see if you can develop some SMART goals that will help you move forward with your priorities. Remember, SMART goals are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

5) Practice gratitude. Life inherently involves suffering. Being resilient does not mean being happy all the time or avoiding pain and sadness. These are normal human emotions that are normal reactions to suffering. We want to allow space for these emotions. Our resilience can be enhanced when we also find space alongside the suffering for gratitude. Thinking about those things we are grateful for re-orients our focus on the positives, improves mood, speeds coping, and enables faster meaning-making that supports healthy adaptation. Based on positive psychology research, purposefully looking for the good around us when there seems to be none is a useful tool for enhancing happiness.



Consider keeping a gratitude journal and when you identify what you are grateful for, also take a minute to think about what was so important or so great about that thing/experience? What we discover is that it isn't so much what happened that mattered, but it is the meaning we give to the experience that influences how the experience impacts us. We can further benefit from gratitude by sharing it with others. Next time you meet a friend for coffee, consider starting the conversation by asking your friend "What went well today?"

6) Mindful of emotions. All humans have emotions and they're there for a reason. Emotions are a normal part of our information-processing system: They bring colour to life and help us understand our experiences and social interactions. Sometimes we can become overly attached to a particular emotion, or try and avoid certain painful emotions. This just makes the emotions grow and can contribute to greater suffering.

Instead, see if you can acknowledge the emotion when it arises. You might try naming the emotion (e.g., "This is sadness" or "I'm feeling overwhelmed"). Then ask yourself what the emotion is trying to tell you about your current experience and what it might be asking you to do differently. For example, sadness may be seeking comfort; overwhelmed might be seeking calm and control. When you've identified what the emotion might be seeking, consider one step you might take to meet that need.