

9 Ways to Strengthen Your Resilience

Strategies for hard times.

When you think of the quality of resilience you usually think of one's ability to bounce back from difficult times and challenges. In fact, the origin of the word means "the act of rebounding" and is derived from 'resiliens' which means 'to recoil or rebound'. While some people have a seemingly natural capacity to bounce back from adversity, others do not. But resilience can be learned.

Resilience will serve you well throughout your life. Once mastered, you can always draw upon your past experiences, both physical and emotional, to manage and overcome difficult times. In fact, learning to be resilient can also help to make you stronger; with each challenge you encounter, you can develop new skills and new ways of dealing with life. Knowing you are resilient may help you develop the strength to pursue your life to the fullest without fear.

Along with resilience come flexibility and adaptability. The more possibilities you envision, especially during difficult times and challenges, the more you allow yourself to overcome and expand as a person.

So here are some way to help you improve and strengthen your resilience.

Embrace change. This is almost always at the top of my list. If you can accept that nothing stays the same, that there will always be flux, then you're starting with a leg up. All of us will be challenged many times in life by obstacles, both from within and without. In many instances, we are able to overcome what tries to stop us or thwart us by one means or another. Wouldn't it be so much better if we believed/knew that we have the

capability to be resilient and that these challenges will be met with determination and confidence.

Don't dwell on negative thinking. Did I just hear a bunch of you say, "Oh, yeah. Right." I know this is much easier to say than do but it's true that if we can gain a handle on our thoughts, especially our negative ones, we can actually take some positive action. Not only do we think negative thoughts that keep us worried and anxious but we fear the negative outcome. We fear the worst. Somehow we believe that dwelling on all that can go wrong will somehow help us find a solution. It doesn't. Often we get so caught up in negative thinking that is about all we're doing, we're thinking about it, not doing anything about it. Don't determine what the outcome will be especially if you think the worst. The best can just as well happen. Thinking the worst can increase your stress and wear you down.

So how do we break this cycle? We shift our thinking to something positive, something to look forward to, something that is calming, or at least neutral. How do we do that? We go for a walk, we exercise, we meditate, we pray, we engage in something creative. In other words, we change our "state" and give our brains a break from repetitive negative thinking (like a record stuck in a groove playing the same thing over and over again). If nothing else, it's very empowering to know we can do this if we want to, that our thoughts are within our control.

Know thyself. Take an inventory of yourself. Aside from what you fear you can't do or handle, and what your weaknesses are, fully acknowledge your strengths and accomplishments. These are never to be taken for granted. This is who you are and you can expect that they will stand you in good stead through difficulties and challenges. When you believe that "you can" you increase your ability to rise to the occasion, to deal with and resolve your conflicts and crises.

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Become a problem-solver!

In addition, learn how to put specific situations in perspective. Although seemingly extremely important at a particular time, life events/difficulties/crises need to be seen in relation to the bigger picture of life. How will the situation you're preoccupied with, the one that is consuming much of your time and energy, figure into the broader perspective of your life? Will it remain prominent in your thinking or will it pale with the passing of time, until you can barely remember that it ever happened?

Create goals. You can do this on various levels. Set reasonable goals that you can accomplish on a regular basis, perhaps things that you can easily do in the short term. These can be creative projects, things you do for pleasure and fun, or they can be projects around your home, or projects around your health routine, or things to do to give back to the community. There is immediate gratification in the doing and in the completing. Helping others often makes you feel good as well.

Setting life goals may be more complex. What do you want to accomplish in your life. Reaping the rewards for these may take much planning, doing, and time over the long haul. But creating a life plan may help you to stay focused on the bigger picture, especially when you are going through hard times and dealing with challenges that take you off track. Setting life goals keeps you rooted in your life and creates resilience by giving you something to look forward to no matter how hard life seems to be treating you at any given time.

Take action. This applies as much to the goals you create for yourself as well as to taking decisive action to deal with issues you wish weren't there. Dealing with problems and issues head on lets you know you are in charge and in control of even the most difficult situation, regardless of the outcome. By taking action you know you are capable of doing something to mitigate the problem. Moving forward action-wise lets you accomplish even the smallest task, and eventually, each of these small tasks adds up to accomplishing the much bigger task at hand.

The alternative is sitting around worrying which accomplishes little, if anything.

Be optimistic. Everything changes. The pendulum swings back and forth. There are times when things look gray and bleak and other times when things look sunny and rosy. Even in the midst of difficult times, there are things that are good and things to look forward to. Remaining hopeful keeps you moving in a positive direction. Some things will work in your favor while others will not. But even when things are not going your way, when you have the opportunity to look back on a hard time in your life you may find that what didn't work out the way you wanted it to brought you to a different place. Maybe a better one, and just maybe you learned something about yourself you didn't know

Have a sense of humor. Not everything has to be taken so seriously even when it's serious. You don't have to walk around in a mood that you think should match the challenges you're going through. Humor helps us lighten

up, sometimes forgetting for a while what bothers us so much. Humor also provides a necessary counterbalance to the seriousness of circumstances.

Develop strong personal connections. A committed social network allows you to get the support you need to get you through life's challenges. Having reliable, caring people around you who will listen and perhaps, advise you, helps take the burden off your shoulders so that you don't feel alone. People who are your supporters and advocates, people who cheerlead for you, help raise you up, give you reassurance and strength, help you increase your resilience, especially during rough times.

Take care of yourself. When we're stressed, worried, and anxious the tendency to neglect yourself might easily be the case. To the contrary, it's essential that you continue to care for yourself and your own well-being as best you can. Taking care of your body and mind keep you strong and better able to handle difficult times and challenges. Anything that nurtures you should be practiced on a regular basis. Take time to do the things to support and feed your body and soul.

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