



Building Core Resilience in Times of Despair: A Guide to Moving Forward

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Abstract

Mental health encompasses far more than the mere absence of disorders. There are a number of dimensions when it comes to positive mental health, one of which is resilience. Resilience is the ability to bounce back when things don't go as planned. Developing resilience can help cope adaptively and bounce back after changes, challenges, setbacks, disappointments, and failures. This paper gives an insight into the main factors contributing to resilience, traits, qualities, and characteristics of the resilient person, skills to develop to become more resilient and strategies to boost resilience. This paper revisits how building core resilience in times of despair would help individual bounce back and cope.

Key Words: Resilience, Coping, Traits

Introduction

Resilience is the process of being able to adapt well and bounce back quickly in times of stress. This stress may manifest as family or relationship problems, serious health problems, problems in the workplace or even financial problems to name a few. The three main elements that resilient people possess are **challenge, commitment, and control**. Ginsburg & Jablow (2020) proposes that there are 7 integral and interrelated components that make up being resilient – **competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control**. Being able to adapt to new circumstances, keep pushing forward through hard times and living through challenges will help you become more resilient as you get older.

Resilience is composed of particular factors attributed to an individual. There are numerous factors, which cumulatively contribute to a person's resilience. The primary factor in resilience is having positive relationships inside or outside one's family. It is the single most critical means of handling both ordinary and extraordinary levels of stress. These positive relationships include traits such as mutual, reciprocal support and caring. Such relationships aid in bolstering a person's resilience. Studies show that there are several other factors which develop and sustain a person's resilience.

Resilience is the ability to roll with the punches because if one is brittle one will break. Resilience allows us to adapt to stress and maintain one's equilibrium when faced with adversity. When resilient people are confronted with a crisis that takes away their ability to control their lives, they find something they can control. At the start of the pandemic, many people turned into home cooking and cleaning as something they could control. These are functional coping mechanisms. Although resilience is often viewed as an inherent personality trait that people either have or lack, studies have shown it is a characteristic that can be acquired. People can adopt behaviours, thoughts and actions that help to build resilience, at any age.

Even as cities reopen and we emerge from the pandemic, many of us remain crippled with despair over the death of loved ones., lost jobs, businesses, housing, income and even sleep. How, so many of us wonder, are we supposed to cope with so many obstacles blocking our way forward? This paper gives an insight into the main factors contributing to resilience, traits, qualities, and characteristics of the resilient person, skills to develop to become more resilient and strategies to boost resilience.

Review of Literature

There is significant research found in the literature on the relationship between positive emotions and resilience. Studies show that maintaining positive emotions whilst facing adversity promote flexibility in thinking and problem solving. Positive emotions serve an important function in their ability to help an individual recover from stressful experiences and encounters. That being said, maintaining a positive emotionality aids in counteracting the physiological effects of negative emotions. It also facilitates adaptive coping, builds enduring social resources, and increases personal well-being.

While some research indicates that psychological resilience is a relatively stable personality trait, new research suggests that positive emotions are critical to trait resilience. This is not to say that positive emotions are merely a by-product of resilience, but rather that feeling positive emotions during stressful experiences may have adaptive benefits in the coping process of the individual. Empirical evidence for this prediction arises from research on resilient individuals who have a propensity for coping strategies that concretely elicit positive emotions, such as benefit-finding and cognitive reappraisal, humour, optimism, and goal-directed problem-focused coping. Individuals who tend to approach problems with these methods of coping may strengthen their resistance to stress by allocating more access to these positive emotional resources.

Positive emotions not only have physical outcomes but also physiological ones. Some physiological outcomes caused by humour include improvements in immune system functioning and increases in levels of salivary immunoglobulin A, a vital system antibody, which serves as the body's first line of defence in respiratory illnesses. Moreover, other health outcomes include faster injury recovery rate and lower readmission rates to hospitals for the elderly, and reductions in a patient's stay in the hospital, among many other benefits. A study was done on positive emotions in trait-resilient individuals and the cardiovascular recovery rate following negative emotions felt by those individuals. The results of the study showed that

trait-resilient individuals experiencing positive emotions had an acceleration in the speed in rebounding from cardiovascular activation initially generated by negative emotional arousal, i.e. heart rate and the like.

There are four types of resilience. Resilience can come in different forms. They include **physical resilience, mental resilience, emotional resilience, and social resilience**. There are three main underlying pillars of operational resilience - **people, technology, and compliance**: People - leaders must acknowledge that the future lies in an elastic workforce.

Resilience build skills to endure hardship. It also means being able to adapt to life's misfortunes and setbacks. When one has resilience, he/she harnesses the inner strength that helps to rebound from a setback or challenge, such as a job loss, an illness, a disaster or a loved one's death. If ones lack resilience, might dwell on problems, feel victimized, become overwhelmed or turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, eating disorders or risky behaviours. Resilience won't make one's problems go away — but resilience can give a person the ability to see past them, find enjoyment in life and better handle stress. If one is not as resilient as one would like to be, you can develop and learn skills to become more resilient.

Main Factors Contributing to Resilience

There are many ways to increase resilience. Some of those include having a good support system, maintaining positive relationships, having a good self-image and having a positive attitude.

- Having the capacity to make realistic plans.
- Being able to carry out those plans.
- Being able to effectively manage your feelings and impulses in a healthy manner.
- Having good communication skills.
- Having confidence in your strengths and abilities.
- Having good problem-solving skills.

Developing resiliency can help you maintain caring relationships with others and help you maintain a positive and easy-going disposition. It can also help you develop good coping skills and improve cognitive thinking skills. Those who develop resilience tend to cope much better with life than those who aren't resilient and they may even be happier. Some people are naturally more resilient; however, you can work to enhance your level of resilience. One can learn how to bounce back from adversity in a healthy manner.

According to Shing (2016), one major factor that contributes to resilience is the experience of harnessing positive emotions, even in the midst of an especially trying or stressful time. Positivity improves resilience in a number of ways according to Shing. First, positive emotions help you build up social, psychological, and physical resources over time, which could help you develop coping skills during future times of stress. According to Compas, Banez, Malcarne, & Worsham (1991) positive emotions can help broaden your momentary thoughts, actions, and attention to your surroundings. One example of this is the emotions of

joy and interest, which help encourage you to approach loved ones and forge stronger bonds and interpersonal connections. Positive emotions help build personal resources, which can act as a buffer from psychological distress in stressful situations. Positive emotions may even undo the harmful effects of negative emotions when experienced in the midst of a stressful situation. Beyond positive emotions, resilience is also associated with the experience of autonomy, mastery, and vitality (Shing, 2016) This can help you be more effective at managing challenging tasks and help you live life with more energy and vitality.

Decades of research in well-being suggest that satisfaction in life may not solely be derived from positive emotions alone, but also through feeling a sense of independence and competence, as it pertains to personal goals and values. This tendency is known as eudemonic well-being and it has to do with your individual perception of fulfilment in life. This eudemonic perspective on resilience is coupled with other psychological constructs as well, such as hardiness. Those who are hardy tend to possess a greater sense of control over their surroundings and event outcomes. As a result, they view stressors as less distressing overall. Those who are hardy also tend to believe they have more personal resources at their disposal, which helps them feel more resilient.

Traits, Qualities, and Characteristics of the Resilient Person

According to Conner and Davidson (2003), resilient people have certain characteristics. These characteristics may include:

- Viewing change as a challenge or opportunity
- Commitment
- Recognition of limits to control
- Engaging the support of others
- Self-efficacy
- Strengthening effect of stress
- Sense of humour
- Action-oriented approach
- Tolerance of negative affect
- Adaptability to change
- Optimism
- Faith

Having a positive outlook on the future and developing a growth mindset can be very helpful. A resilient person understands that success or failure in one area of life often affects all the other areas of life as well.

Having a positive outlook of the future and developing a growth mindset is probably one of the simplest things you can do to build resilience. Cultivating a growth mindset involves the desire to be open and adaptable and learning to change.

Skills to Develop to Become More Resilient

- **Adapting to adversity**

Resilience is the ability to adapt to difficult situations. When stress, adversity or trauma strikes, you still experience anger, grief and pain, but you're able to keep functioning — both physically and psychologically. However, resilience isn't about putting up with something difficult, being stoic or figuring it out on your own. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key part of being resilient.

- **Resilience and mental health**

Resilience can help protect you from various mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. Resilience can also help offset factors that increase the risk of mental health conditions, such as being bullied or previous trauma. If you have an existing mental health condition, being resilient can improve your coping ability.

Tips to become more resilient:

Get connected. Building strong, positive relationships with loved ones and friends can provide you with needed support, guidance and acceptance in good and bad times. Establish other important connections by volunteering or joining a faith or spiritual community.

Make every day meaningful. Do something that gives you a sense of accomplishment and purpose every day. Set clear, achievable goals to help you look toward the future with meaning.

Learn from experience. Think of how you've coped with hardships in the past. Consider the skills and strategies that helped you through difficult times. You might even write about past experiences in a journal to help you identify positive and negative behaviour patterns — and guide your future behaviour.

Remain hopeful. You can't change the past, but you can always look toward the future. Accepting and even anticipating change makes it easier to adapt and view new challenges with less anxiety.

Take care of yourself. Tend to your own needs and feelings. Participate in activities and hobbies you enjoy. Include physical activity in your daily routine. Get plenty of sleep and create consistent bedtime rituals. Eat a healthy diet. Practice stress management and relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing or prayer.

Be proactive. Don't ignore your problems. Instead, figure out what needs to be done, make a plan and take action. Although it can take time to recover from a major setback, traumatic event or loss, know that your situation can improve if you work at it.

Conclusion

Resilience is a dynamic process whereby individuals exhibit positive behavioural adaptation when they encounter significant adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress. It is different from strengths or developmental assets which are a characteristic of an entire population, regardless of the level of adversity they face. Under adversity, assets function differently (a good school, or parental monitoring, for example, have a great deal more influence in the life of a child from a poorly resourced background than one from a wealthy home with other options for support, recreation, and self-esteem

There are many ways to build resilience so that it becomes one's natural tendency. Try some of these strategies the next time you feel your resilience needs a boost.

- Turn off the news and seek other sources of inspiration.
- Allow yourself to express and feel your emotions. Sometimes having a good cry can be emotionally cleansing.
- Remember a time when you felt resilient in the past. Tap into what allowed you to find a sense of courage, strength, and hardiness.
- Talk with someone you love and trust. Have a meaningful and honest conversation. Think of someone who exudes resiliency and model his or her behaviour.
- Go within and connect with your higher power through meditation or prayer. Write it down.
- Writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you feel better about where you are on this journey.
- Reconnect with others and help build their resiliency. Be kind to yourself. Have some compassion and ease up on your expectations. Take some inspired action. When you're feeling overwhelmed, doing one small thing can help you move forward.
- Practice mindfulness in your day-to-day life. The more you practice being in the moment the happier and more joyful you will feel.

The moment one starts believing that he/she can bounce back is the same moment things will start going your way. One's belief is everything. One can learn to be more resilient.

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