

RESILIENCE

Resilience - the capacity to deal with any stress and bounce back from any adversity—to be able to cope with anything that is sent our way.

Learning to live a more resilient life has numerous benefits including:

- Decreased depressive symptoms & increased emotional well-being
- Improved working memory
- Improved sleep
- Improved immune system function
- Improved relationships
- Improved coping when we experience emotional disruptions

Resilience is made up of five pillars: self awareness, mindfulness, self care, positive relationships & purpose.

By strengthening these pillars, we in turn, become more resilient. Instead of experiencing an overwhelming downwards spiral when we encounter stress in our lives, these five pillars work together to lift us up out of the chaos we are feeling.

1. Skills and strategies of resilience are learnable and trainable.

Our brain learns from experience. We learn resilience from the experiences of dealing with hard stuff, and learning that we can. The neuroplasticity innate in every human brain ensures that we can learn and change and grow even from—especially from—experiences of adversity.

“Based upon everything we know about the brain in neuroscience, change is not only possible, but is actually the rule rather than the exception. And because we have a choice about what experiences we want to use to shape our brain, we have a responsibility to choose the experiences that will shape the brain toward the wise and the wholesome.”

- Richard J. Davidson, PhD, founder-director, Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison

2. The core of resilience is response flexibility. People who are resilient tend to be flexible in the way they think about challenges and flexible in the way they react emotionally to stress. And that is true for any stressor, for any level of disruption.

“How you respond to the issue ... is the issue.” - Frankie Perez, psychologist

3. Choosing how we respond is essential to resilience. We strengthen our resilience by repeatedly practicing the tools and techniques that will install new behaviours, new patterns of response in our neural circuitry, so that we can choose to cope in ways that are skilful and effective. Over time, these new patterns help us develop a resilience mindset. We expect to be able to meet any difficulty, any disaster, because we have learned that we can.

“Mishaps are like knives, that either cut us or serve us, as we grasp them by the blade or the handle.” - James Russell Lowell

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What you can do to help build resilience.

Breathing Practices:

- conscious breathing - just sitting for 5 mins and being aware of each breath
- Samavritti - box or square breath - imagine the square on the front of the body and breathe around it. Start without holding the breath, but then work to holding the inhalation in down one side and holding the exhalation out as you close the square.
- Sighing it really useful...allow the shoulders to take part and really let go as you exhale.

Power of Touch:

- Wrap your arms around yourself or the person who is struggling. Touch is one of the things that helps us to calm down almost immediately.
- Safe touch releases oxytocin so do some gentle tapping practices along the arms and legs. And then around the chest and lower back.
- If you have a pet, stroke it.

Movement:

Use movement to shift your emotions and your mood. Here are four ways to use movement in this way.

1. Bring your awareness to your hands, and slowly tense your hands into fists. Then release the tension as you open your palms...repeat a few times. Then shake the lower arms...feel.
2. This movement of tension-relaxation is the basis of progressive muscle relaxation: Tense a muscle group, counting up to seven. Then relax that muscle group, counting to 15. Relaxing twice as long as tensing helps the body relax, a wonderful tool to use when going to sleep at night.
3. Place a pencil between your nose and upper lip; this makes you frown a little. Then place the pencil between your teeth; that makes you smile a bit. When you practice this sequence slowly enough, you can notice a change in the state of your body and emotions. Neuroscientists have found that smiling for even 20 seconds shifts the functioning of the brain.
4. You may already be familiar with the technique of power posing, used to shift the state of the body-brain from one of anxiety or tension to strength and calm. [Amy Cuddy's TED Talk on power posing](#) is the second most-watched talk in the history of TED. Power poses for us yogis could be Tadasna, Warrior 1 or even Goddess pose. As you stand in any of these, allow yourself to feel strength and energy in your body and mind. With frequent practice, your power pose becomes a natural way to develop and tap into your inner strength, courage, and resilience.

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Meditation/Mindfulness:

Try to practice at least ten minutes a day meditation...doesn't matter what...sit with the breath...whatever works for you. Start and end the day in a meditation practice and during the day do a mindful practice...when you are out walking - walk mindfully for ten minutes. It will all help!

References:

Kripalu Yoga Centre - Linda Graham
Bounce Back Project