

Resilience
HOW TO BOUNCE BACK
by Claudette Coombs

What is resilience? Resilience is our ability to face life, despite its trials, while still believing in the positive. There is no expectation that only good things will happen, but there is an understanding of how to handle the bad things when they come our way. Resilience requires a continuous and active process of resetting the compass. This is done as unexpected events and circumstances move us off our planned pathway or as we prepare for expected but unpleasant events. It is essential for us to constantly readjust.

Resilience is more than just survival. It is really being able to live. It does take into account the pain which exists in our personal worlds yet it allows us to move beyond the past and the unwanted parts of the present. We acknowledge our experiences and look for something better --; and we find it!!

Resilience means having faith: faith that things will improve; faith that we can learn from all difficulties; faith that we can take action to make a positive difference; and faith that there is more to life than our trials. It is an evolving process which develops and becomes more refined with regular practice. Unless we were/are blessed with near perfect environments, it takes consistent work to develop and maintain an attitude and atmosphere of resilience.

How resilient am I?

Check this out how do I react when faced with crises or daily irritants? how do I feel about my future and that of my family? what fears do I have about my health and ability to do the things in life that I want to do? what happens to me when things go wrongly? Do I believe:

- "things will improve" or, "look out there's more to come";
- "I don't know how I'll make it" or, "I'm glad I have friends (etc.)";
- "why me" or, "I can handle it";
- "what will I do if " or, "I have a plan".

You get the idea. If our view is one of gloom, then we could benefit from enhanced resiliency. We are alive therefore we will face a lot of things that we would rather not. It's our choice to face them with resignation or with resolve.

What threatens my resilience?

Being alive is the major risk factor for losing resilience. It is also the most significant factor in reviving resilience. Daily we are faced with misfortunes and decisions about personal, family and career concerns. If we can confront these immediately, take positive action and continue with "normal" life, then we are likely to maintain a balanced view of life's pros and cons. However, we are susceptible to serious personal impact:

- if the misfortunes become chronic, rather than episodic (eg. develop a chronic health problem); or
- when negatives are repeated (eg. not being with one school board long enough to receive tenure and having to leave your "new" school every year); or
- when consequences are significant (eg. becoming redundant after just renewing a mortgage and having a child go away to university); or
- if the effect is pervasive (eg. experiencing the end of a personal relationship which you thought would last forever).

Experiencing any of these risk factors makes us vulnerable to becoming more negative and losing our ability to bounce back. Our usual coping mechanisms are pushed to the limits --; and maybe beyond. Our ability to see the positive is clouded by the continuous reinforcement of negatives. Our mental and physical energy to search for something better is drained by the mental pain of losing what was most important to us.

When we predict, or recognize, our exposure to any of these threats, we must act quickly. There is too much at stake to delay or to have false confidence in our current abilities. The first need is to ensure that we can survive intact; the next is to guarantee that we still have enjoyment in life and future potential for pleasure.

How do I create my personal resilience?

There are many things we can do to ensure that we are in the best possible position to deal with whatever life delivers. Most days we are somewhere on the scale between the basement and Cloud 9. Of course, we would prefer to be as close to the top of the scale as possible but that isn't always the way life works! We can use the following guidelines to assist us in creating an attitude and lifestyle which promotes resilience:

- Stay as healthy as our bodies permit. Stay active; eat, sleep, relax and socialize appropriately; and, include mental and physical recreation.
- Protect our emotional and mental perspective. Keep a balanced view on what's happening and the expected "normal" response. Remember how we would view things if they were happening to someone else.
- Incorporate protective factors into our lives. Establish clear boundaries or limits on what we can realistically expect of ourselves and others. Recognize and respect the beliefs and behaviours of others, without feeling that we have to adopt or condone them. Celebrate our talents and acquired abilities/skills. Increase our capacity to tolerate change or undesired conditions, by being more flexible. Minimize criticism but maximize constructive responses. Avoid ascribing negative motives to others. Reserve judgement. Share responsibilities --; don't try to make ourselves indispensable everywhere.
- Learn skills which help to effectively deal with common stressors. These can include: communication; goal setting; decision-making; time management; priority recognition; assertiveness; positive thinking; conflict resolution; impulse control; values clarification; and emotional management.
- Prepare for potential future losses. This doesn't mean that we become fixated on them. Instead, put the necessary provisions in place and put the issue away until we have to face it immediately. Don't waste valuable current resources (time, energy) with worry and dread.
- Regularly ingest a diet of inspirational wisdom --; from friends, tapes, books, church.

Resilience can be seen as encompassing three phases of daily living. The first is in daily routines. We look for the good and live to share it while also recognizing personal vulnerabilities and carefully preparing for them. Next is adjusting our reactions (attitudes, physiology, behaviours) to survive through the difficult times. The final phase is incorporating long-term changes that enable us to move beyond just surviving to really living.

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