

The 7 Areas of Resilience

(based on Reivich and Shatte, 2002)

Emotional Awareness and Regulation

One of the myths surrounding resilience suggests that resilient people are tough and do not express emotions. They appear to be very straight-faced, especially when facing adversity. This is not accurate. Resilient people experience a broad range of emotions, from happiness and joy, to fear, anger and sadness. Resilient individuals have a good understanding of their own emotions and feel comfortable talking about what they are feeling with those they trust and respect. When going through a difficult time resilient people feel a range of emotions and are able to label those emotions, and manage the more difficult ones. Because of this they tend to work with the reality of the adversity or challenge.

Impulse Control

This involves the ability to control actions, behaviours and emotions in a realistic way during an adversity. It can be difficult for some of us to sit with uncertainty. We may go into overdrive and act in ways which are not helpful. Highly resilient individuals are able to tolerate ambiguity, which reduces the risk of making impulsive decisions. We all have the impulse to do and say things that are not in our best interest. This is quite normal. Resilience is not about dismissing our impulses, but it does require you to think before you act upon an impulse. This is something that can be learned over time.

Realistic Optimism and Thinking Style

Realistic optimism is another key ingredient of resilience. The research on optimism is clear: optimistic people are happier, healthier, and more productive. They have better relationships, succeed more, are better problem solvers and are less likely to suffer from depression. This is in comparison to pessimistic individuals. This is because individuals who are more focused on some positive element of an adversity are able to manage the negative parts of the adversity. It is important not to confuse realistic optimism

with optimism per se. Some individuals are fantastical in their optimism and may go around with their heads in the sky, skipping whilst singing “the hills are alive with the sound of music.” However nice it is to sing lyrics from *The Sound of Music* that is not realistic optimism. In my opinion a large dollop of denial may very well be taking place when people think they’re being optimistic, when in fact they are avoiding being responsible for making decisions, and possibly living in a fantasy.

Flexible Thinking to Problem Solve

Resilience absolutely requires you to be able to think flexibly, which allows you to view a problem from many different perspectives. It allows you to think of many different solutions to a problem so that if your first solution does not work, you will have a plan B ready.

Self-Efficacy and Self -Accountability

A basic ingredient in resilience is the belief that you are accountable for the choices and decisions you make. If you are high in your everyday resilience you will have a tendency to take personal responsibility for your actions and have a belief that you are effective in the world. You will generally not be waiting for fate to intervene to decide for you so you don’t have to do anything. You will be confident in the decisions you make as well as confident in the success of your decisions. You will know most of your strengths and weaknesses and will rely on your strengths to navigate life’s challenges. For one person this might mean using your sense of humour to deal with stress. For another it might mean using your creativity to come up with new ways to handle problems.

“Having the confidence and knowing how to master what life throws in your path, self-esteem will follow.” (Reivich, 2002)

Empathy

Those high in everyday resilience are connected with others. You are able to see a situation from another person’s perspective even if you do not agree with it. The more you are able to empathise with another person, the fewer mistakes you will make about them. Empathy is the glue of relationships and is an important component when building strong social relationships and friendships. Empathy helps nurture strong social networks, which helps during times of adversity.

Reaching Out

Reaching out is the degree to which an individual is able to confide in others and ask for support when required. This includes the ability to delegate work and authority, as well as take calculated risks. Reaching out also involves stimulating your overall curiosity about many areas of your life. If you are curious about different areas of your life it will certainly help deepen relationships with others. You will be more inclined to take on new challenges whilst learning from experience.

References

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