Building Resilience: Bouncing Back

How do people deal with difficult events that change their lives? What helps them to do so?

Many people react to such circumstances with a flood of strong emotions and a sense of not knowing what to do. Yet people generally adapt well over time to life-changing situations and stressful conditions. It involves resilience, an ongoing process that requires time and effort and engages people in taking a number of steps.

Resilience is the process of adapting well to the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or family and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences.

This handout is intended to help you take your own road to resilience. The information below describes some ways that you might find helpful when developing your own personal resilience strategy. Developing resilience is a personal journey. People do not all react the same to traumatic and stressful life events. An approach to building resilience that works for one person might not work for another. People use varying strategies.

- **Make connections.** Good relationships with close family members, friends or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations, or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.

- **Avoid seeing crises as overwhelming problems, impossible to overcome.** You can’t change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

- **Accept that change is a part of living.** Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

- **Move toward your goals.** Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

- **Take decisive actions.** Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

- **Look for opportunities for self-discovery.** People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

- **Maintain flexibility and balance in your life.** This happens in several ways, including:
  - Letting yourself experience strong emotions, and also realizing when you may need to avoid experiencing them at times in order to continue functioning.
  - Stepping forward and taking action to deal with your problems and meet the demands of daily living, and also stepping back to rest and reenergize yourself.
Nurture a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Focus on past experiences and sources of personal strength. This can help you learn about what strategies for building resilience might work for you. By exploring answers to the following questions about yourself and your reactions to challenging life events, you may discover how you can respond effectively to difficult situations in your life.

- What kinds of events have been most stressful for me? How have they typically affected me?
- What did I find helpful?
- To whom have I reached out for support in working through a traumatic/stressful experience?
- What have I learned about myself and my interactions with others during difficult times?
- Has it been helpful for me to help someone else going through a similar experience?
- Have I been able to overcome obstacles, and if so, how?
- What has helped make me feel more hopeful about the future?

Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful. For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope.

Consider seeking professional help. Getting help when you need it is crucial in building your resilience. Beyond caring family members and friends, people often find psychological counseling to be helpful. The University Counseling Center offers individual counseling, consultation, and support groups. “Let’s Talk”, our consultation service, is another option to speak with a Counseling Center staff on campus. All services are free and confidential.

You are not alone. The University Counseling Center is here for you, supporting you through life’s ups and downs.

Contact us or Just Stop by:

University Counseling Center
400 Patroon Creek Blvd., Suite 104
between the hours of 9AM and 4:30PM, Monday through Friday.
518.442.5800
consultation@albany.edu

We are located near the downtown campus.
Free Shuttle Bus service from 2 locations:
Social Sciences and Collins Circle.
Look at our website for more information:
albany.edu/counseling_center

Let’s Talk

Speak with Counseling Center Staff.
On-campus Locations.
No appointments Necessary.

Locations and Times on our website
albany.edu/counseling_center

You can also call the
Middle Earth Peer Assistance Hotline.
A Peer Resource: “Students Helping Students”
518.442.5777
M-Th: 1PM-12AM, Fridays & Weekends: 24 hours