

Resilience

Washington State Employee Assistance Program

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When something goes wrong, do you bounce back or do you fall apart? Resilient people use inner strengths and tend to rebound more quickly from a setback or challenge, whether it is a job loss, an illness or the death of a loved one. In contrast, those less resilient may dwell on the problem, feel victimized, become overwhelmed and turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse or development of mental health problems. Resilience doesn't make your problems go away but can give you the ability to see past them, find enjoyment in life, and better handle future stressors. If you aren't as resilient as you'd like, you can teach yourself to become more resilient.

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- Resilience is a learned process of adapting well in the face of adversity, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress, such as family and relationship problems, health problems, workplace stress, and financial stress. Resilience is “bouncing back” from difficult experiences.
- If you are resilient, you may experience temporary disruptions to your life when faced with challenges. But you are able to continue on with daily tasks, remain generally optimistic about life and bounce back quickly.
- Resilience isn't about “toughing it out” or living by clichés such as “making lemonade out of lemons.” It is not ignoring your feelings of sadness over a loss. It does not mean that you always have to be strong and can't ask others for support. In fact, reaching out to others is a key component of developing resilience in yourself.
- Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

Factors that promote Resilience

- Caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family, relationships that create love and trust, provide role models and offer encouragement and reassurance to help bolster one's resilience.
- The ability to make realistic plans and act to carry them out.
- Positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.
- Skills in communication and problem solving.
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Tips to help you become more resilient

- **Get connected.** Build strong, positive relationships with family and friends, who can listen to your concerns and offer support. Get involved in civic groups, faith groups or volunteer organizations that give you an opportunity to help others. Relationships like these can also fulfill your need for a sense of belonging and help banish loneliness. "A sense of connectedness can sustain you in more difficult times.
- **Use humor and laughter.** Remaining positive or finding humor in distressing or stressful situations doesn't mean you're in denial. Humor is a helpful coping mechanism. If you simply can't

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find humor in your situation, turn to other sources for a laugh, such as a funny book or movie.

- **Learn from your experiences.** Recall how you've coped with hardships in the past, either in healthy or unhealthy ways. Build on what helped you through those rough times and don't repeat actions that didn't help. Figure out what lessons you learned and how you'll apply them when faced with similar situations.
- **Remain hopeful and optimistic.** When you're in the middle of a crisis, it may seem as though things will never get better. While you can't change the events, look toward the future, even if it's just a glimmer of how things might improve. Find something in each day that signals a change for the better. Expect good results. Believing things happen for a reason may help sustain you.
- **Take care of yourself.** Tend to your own needs and feelings, both physically and emotionally. This includes participating in activities and hobbies you enjoy, exercising regularly, getting plenty of sleep, and eating a well-balanced diet.
- **Accept and anticipate change.** Be flexible. Change and uncertainty are part of life. Try not to be so rigid that even minor changes upset you or that you become anxious in the face of uncertainty. Expecting changes to occur makes it easier to adapt to them, tolerate them, and even welcome them.
- **Work toward goals.** Do something every day that gives you a sense of accomplishment. It doesn't have to be a major goal, such as getting the college degree you've been meaning to pursue. Even small, everyday goals are important, such as finishing a work project or making a difficult phone call. Having goals helps direct you toward the future.
- **Take action.** Don't just wish your problems would go away or try to ignore them. Chances are, they won't disappear on their own. Instead, figure out what needs to be done, make a plan to do it, and then take action to resolve your problems.
- **Learn new things about yourself.** Look back on past experiences and think about how you've changed as a result. You may be stronger than you thought. You may have gained a new appreciation for life. If you feel worse as a result of your experiences, think about what changes could help. Also explore new interests, such as taking a cooking class or visiting a museum.
- **Think better of yourself.** Congratulate yourself for enduring hard times, loss or stress. Be proud of yourself. Trust yourself to solve problems and make sound decisions. Think positive thoughts about yourself. Nurture your self-confidence and self-esteem so that you feel you're a strong, capable and self-reliant person who can withstand hardships and criticism. This will give you a sense of control over events and situations in your life and confidence in your ability to manage them well.
- **Maintain perspective.** This doesn't mean comparing your situation to that of somebody you think may be worse off. Comparing yourself to someone else may only make you feel worse or feel guilty. Rather, look at your situation in the larger context of your own life, and of the world. Keep a long-term perspective and know that your situation can improve if you actively work to make it better.

Becoming resilient is an individual experience. Adapt these tips for your own situation, keeping in mind what has and has not worked for you in the past.

If you don't feel you're making the kind of progress you'd like or you just don't know where to start, consider talking with the EAP to discuss the issues and to help develop resilience.

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Rate your resilience quotient

Would you consider yourself resilient or not resilient? Or maybe you fall somewhere in between?

People with resilience tend to possess certain characteristics. To get a general idea of how resilient you are, rate yourself on these characteristics, using this scale:

- 0 = Not at all accurate
- 1 = Somewhat accurate
- 2 = Moderately accurate
- 3 = Very accurate
- 4 = Extremely accurate

Characteristics of resilient people	
Your rating	Statement
	I'm able to adapt to change easily.
	I feel in control of my life.
	I tend to bounce back after a hardship or illness.
	I have close, dependable relationships.
	I remain optimistic and don't give up, even if things seem hopeless.
	I work at maintaining friendships.
	I can think clearly and logically under pressure.
	I see the humor in situations, even under stress.
	I am self-confident and feel strong as a person.
	I believe things happen for a reason.
	I have some form of exercise in my life.
	I take action rather than procrastinate.
	I can handle uncertainty or unpleasant feelings.
	I like challenges and feel comfortable taking the lead.
	I know where to turn for help.

This is not a test that you pass or fail. It's simply a test to use as a general gauge of how resilient you may be based on some of the characteristics that people with more resilience tend to have. The higher your score, the more resilient you are.

Don't worry if your resilience ratings weren't as high as you'd hoped or expected. It's not too late to nurture resilience in yourself.