

Resilient Trait #1 - Realistic Optimism:

Create realistic goals for life – SMART goals are (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time Bound). The goal “Become a better person and leader” is much less specific, measurable and realistic than a goal like “Read one chapter in my favorite self-improvement or leadership book and implement 1 idea from that book every month by the 15th of each month.”

Become skilled at noticing positive outcomes and satisfying experiences - Very often, people tend to overlook the small improvements in their lives while looking for the “big, miraculous changes.” This can result in two major blocks to realistic optimism: (a) decreased motivation to continue to work on the small changes that so often are the reason for eventually large changes (b) an inability to notice that it normally takes hundreds small changes to create big changes that we desire (which can result in a basic ignorance of how big changes actually come about). Noticing and celebrating the small changes can be a big step toward optimism based in realism.

Develop ways to reframe “failure” as just another step toward positive outcomes and/or satisfying experiences - Many people who are both optimistic and realistic realize that failure can be used to help promote success. Instead of looking at failure as a disappointment, people with more realistic optimism tend to see it as a signal to improve their plan or that what they are currently doing will not get them the outcomes they desire. Instead of feeling like a failure, they simply adjust their plans or their outlook on what it means to have not accomplished their desired outcomes.

Resilient Trait #2 - Purpose:

The following are a list of questions that can assist you in discovering your purpose. They are meant as a guide to help you get into a frame of mind that will be conducive to defining your personal mission.

1. What makes you smile? (Activities, people, events, hobbies, projects, etc.)
2. What are your favorite things to do in the past? What about now?
3. What activities make you lose track of time?
4. What makes you feel great about yourself?
5. Who inspires you most? (Anyone you know or do not know. Family, friends, authors, artists, leaders, etc.) Which qualities inspire you, in each person?
6. What are you naturally good at? (Skills, abilities, gifts etc.)
7. What do people typically ask you for help in?
8. If you had to teach something, what would you teach?
9. What would you regret not fully doing, being or having in your life?
10. What are your deepest values?

Resilient Trait #3 - Thought Awareness:

Toxic thinking consists of thoughts that habitually forecast disaster, perpetuate worry, instill doubt, obsess on perfection, describe self (or another) as a victim, or point fingers at others. Thought stopping is the most common technique used to introduce positive thoughts and eliminating negative.

1. **Become aware of your internal conversations** - The first step toward improving our thoughts is to REALLY listen to our self-talk. Are your thoughts positive or negative? Do they lift you up or do they bring you down? Do they inspire or do they impede? Keep a log of thoughts that you have during difficult situations if it's helpful.
2. **Take Control of Your Thinking** - If you catch yourself thinking negatively, you can stop your thought process mid-stream by literally saying to yourself "STOP!" Saying this aloud will be powerful and will make you more aware of the frequency and circumstances of these negative internal conversations. Another trick is to walk around with a rubber band around your wrist. As you notice negative self-talk, pull the band away and let it snap back. It'll hurt a little and serve as a slightly negative consequence that will both make you more aware of your thoughts and help put a stop to them!
3. **Replace Negative Influences with Positive Ones** - It is important that you identify external negative factors in your life which may be holding your thoughts hostage. For instance, your mental state can become toxic by being around friends who are negative. If you are not vigilant enough, you will start to adopt their thoughts as your own. Hence, be alert to what your negative influences are.
4. **Confront Fears** - Fear is often what holds you back from your success. You are scared of taking chances because you fear losing the security that you enjoy now. You try to convince yourself that you are happy in your current state when in fact, you are not. Your self-talk may sound positive in your attempt to lie to yourself. But somehow, there is an inner knowing that you are short changing yourself. Ask yourself what you are afraid of. What can be the worst that can happen? Take a step-by-step approach in breaking down your fears and see if there is any way round to looking at things more positively. When you confront your fears, you will often realize that the worst case scenario is not as bad as you think. In fact, the benefits of change are worth the risk. Your inner talk begins to change at this point.
5. **Focus on Enjoyable Experiences** - It is much easier to have a positive attitude if you focus on the enjoyable moments in life rather than the difficult ones. While there will inevitably be challenges, you need to remember that life consists of ups and downs and the good times are forged through the bad. So choose to fill your mind with positive images and thoughts. Make it a conscious habit. Simply bring your mind back every time it goes astray in its thoughts. For a start, if you can be grateful for what you have presently, your self-talk will also change to be in alignment with one of joy. A state of gratitude does wonders to your psyche.

Resilient Trait #4 - Build Social Support:

A social support network is made up of friends, family and peers. A social support network is different from a support group, which is generally a structured meeting run by a mental health professional. Although both can play an important role in times of stress, a social support network is something you can develop when you're not under stress. It provides the comfort of knowing that your friends are there for you if you need them. A support systems benefits you in the following ways:

- **Sense of belonging.** Spending time with people helps ward off loneliness and allow you to gain a fresh perspective during times of change and difficulty. Just knowing you're not alone can go a long way toward coping with stress.
- **Increased sense of self-worth.** Having people who call you a friend reinforces the idea that you're a good person to be around.
- **Feeling of security.** Your social network gives you access to information, advice, guidance and other types of assistance should you need them. It's comforting to know that you have people you can turn to in a time of need.

What to know about growing your support network:

- **Everyone's support system will look different:** Remember this is about what you need to feel fully supported at your current life stage.
- **Your support system will change:** Life is always changing and evolving, as will your needs for a support system depending on your life stage, current needs and the ages of your children and parents (if you're involved in their care).
- **Choose friends or colleagues you admire:** Enlist the support of those whose lives reflect the values and beliefs you admire.
- **Your support system may or may not include your family:** It's not uncommon for people to find it difficult, even undesirable to enlist their family as part of their support network. There's nothing to feel guilty about if this is the case for you; after all this is your support system.
- **Determine how you will connect with your support system on a regular basis:** Start by keeping a list of phone numbers you keep in your purse, by your computer, on a bulletin board at home, etc. It is often reassuring to have these names/numbers at arm's reach.

Resilient Trait #5 - Self Regulation:

"Regulation" in human beings is a fancy way of describing the way the nervous system handles stress, emotions and more generally, the way it manages energy. Think of the analogy of an RPM gauge in a car. **If you spend too much time in the high RPM zones and not enough time in the healing zone, you wear out and break down.** If you run into the red zone, you'll wear out and break down quickly. To repair the devastation of catabolic metabolism, you have to spend time in your healing zone. Ways to move from high zones to low zones includes:

- Being aware of emotional arousal levels from moment to moment
- Practicing stress management techniques to go from high to low arousal states including, imagery, using other sensory inputs for relaxation, practice progressing stretching, use deep breathing for in the moment stress relief.
- Practice these skills in day-to-day irritations and stressful events to be prepared for a major life event.

Resilient Trait #6 - Assertiveness:

Being assertive means that you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view, while also respecting the rights and beliefs of others. Being assertive can also help boost your self-esteem and earn others' respect. This can help with stress management, especially if you tend to take on too many responsibilities because you have a hard time saying no.

- Anticipate things you will need to know or learn new skills before you need them.
- Develop a mindset that looks to solve problems instead of dwelling on them.
- Communicate your feelings and needs in a manner that respects others.
- React to positive and negative emotions without aggression or resorting to passivity.
- Stay organized. A life of disorganization gets worse when times are tough. (Bills, household, chores, clutter, etc.).

If your style is passive, you may seem to be shy or overly easygoing. You may routinely say things such as, "I'll just go with whatever the group decides." You tend to avoid conflict. Why is that a problem? Because the message you're sending is that your thoughts and feelings aren't as important as those of other people. In essence, when you're too passive, you give others the license to disregard your wants and needs.

Consider this example: You say yes when a colleague asks you to take over a project, even though your plate is full and the extra works means you'll have to work overtime and miss your daughter's soccer game. Your intention may be to keep the peace. But always saying yes can poison your relationships. And worse, it may cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family always come second.

The internal conflict that can be created by passive behavior can lead to:

- Stress
- Resentment
- Seething anger
- Feelings of victimization
- Desire to exact revenge

Where Do You Start?

Most of the strategies above can help change how you think and react to life's circumstances. When we encounter "A Situation"; a problem, event or difficult situation the following areas are affected: Thoughts, Emotions, Physical feelings, Actions... Each of these areas can affect the others. How you think about a problem can affect how you feel physically and emotionally.

It took time for you to learn to behave or respond in ways that are not product and therefore make you less resilient. So it's expected that to change your behavior will take time. So begin small. Look at one of these 6 areas to see where you can make improvement. If you're feeling overwhelmed and feel you just can't do this on your own contact the professionals at your EAP to connect with a qualified professional who can get you started on the right track in developing skills for resiliency.