Fostering Resilience During Times of Chronic Stress

Strengthening Coping and Protecting the Most Vulnerable

Trauma Recovery Innovations
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Goals for today:

- **Define** resilience
- Explain *what you can do* to promote resilience
- Outline options for those who need more support

DEFINING RESILIENCE
We are living in a time of elevated **acute** AND **chronic** stressors.

Everyone is being exposed to **repeated** periods of acute distress.

Resilience is the process of **adapting well** in the face of **adversity**.

Resilience is the **most common outcome**.

We expect **most people to be resilient** during & following disasters.
But resilience is **variable** and **nonlinear**.

It *doesn’t* mean there’s no distress along the way.

Resilience requires **effort**, **persistence**, and **patience**.

It can be **acquired** and **learned**.
Those who are **most vulnerable** may need more support.

- Proximity to stressor
- Fewer resources
- Past trauma exposure
- Member of a marginalized group
- Severity of event
- Greater life stress
- Prior mental health concerns

Some of us are affected **more than others**.

Bolstering the community helps us all!
What it means to be **resilient**.

“It’s to be adapting and accommodating, rather than resistant to, the suffering. I think that’s what it is to live through hardship for sustained periods of time.”

- Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Columbia University

*New York Times, April 21, 2020*
Strategies to promote resilience focus on 3 A’s.

- Accepting
- Adapting
- Assessing

Regularly **assessing** one’s well-being & needs is crucial.

Do regular emotional and behavioral temperature checks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eating healthy?</th>
<th>Positive feelings?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping well?</td>
<td>Negative feelings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying active?</td>
<td>Negative thoughts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing friends/family?</td>
<td>Substance use?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Regularly assessing one’s well-being & needs is crucial.

Ask yourself regularly:

In what ways are my needs being met?

In what ways are my needs NOT being met?

Regularly assessing one’s well-being & needs is crucial.

Prioritize your needs.

In what ways are my needs being met?

In what ways are my needs NOT being met?
Acceptance means changing what we can and letting go of the rest.

Is this a problem you can do something about?
- YES
- NO

What are your options for solving the problem?
- Is there anything you can do right now?
  - YES
  - NO

- Do what you can, then let the problem go and focus on something else.
- Make a plan, then let the problem go and focus on something else.

Acceptance means acknowledging the new normal and your reactions to it.

Old reality → New reality

Notice where your reality has shifted and work to accept:
- Unavoidable changes
- Negative emotions
- Loss of control
Acceptance means acknowledging the new normal and your reactions to it.

Old reality  New reality  ?

Also notice:  
- How you coped
- Your strengths
- Your resources

Acceptance means acknowledging that this is hard!

Self-compassion  
Tolerance  
Patience  
Self care
Adapting to the new reality requires intention, planning, and flexibility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set a routine</th>
<th>Stay active</th>
<th>Don’t avoid</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sleep, eat, work, school, social, self-care</td>
<td>• Exercise, get out, get engaged</td>
<td>• Don’t isolate or withdraw, limit substance use</td>
</tr>
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Adapting involves promoting positive activities.

Review a list of activities.

- **Create**
  - Draw a picture
  - Paint a portrait
  - Take a photograph
  - Doodle / sketch
  - Organise photographs
  - Make a photograph album
  - Start a scrapbook
  - Finish a project
  - Do some sewing / knitting

- **Kindness**
  - Help a friend / neighbour / stranger
  - Make a gift for someone
  - Try a random act of kindness
  - Do someone a favour
  - Teach somebody a skill
  - Do something nice for someone
  - Plan a surprise for someone
  - Make a list of your good points
  - Make a list of things or people you are grateful for

- **Plan**
  - Set a goal
  - Create a budget
  - Make a 5 year plan
  - Make a ‘to do’ list
  - Make a bucket list
  - Make a shopping list

- **Write**
  - Write a letter with compliments
  - Write a letter to your politician
  - Write an angry letter
  - Write a grateful letter
  - Write a thank you card
  - Write a journal / diary
  - Write your CV
  - Start writing a book

- **Self care**
  - Take a bath
  - Take a shower
  - Wash your hair
  - Give yourself a facial
  - Trim your nails
  - Sunbathe (wear sunscreen)
  - Take a nap

Adapting in involves promoting positive activities.

Review a list of activities.
Adapting involves managing distressing reactions as they occur.

Breathing
Get comfortable
Breathe in through your nose for 5, expanding your belly
Hold for 5
Exhale slowly for 7 while you say a soothing word

Adapting involves feeling and tolerating distress, not eliminating it.

Writing Exercise
Set aside 30 minutes
Write about whatever is distressing you
Give yourself space to feel your emotions
Consider the things you did to help yourself or others
Repeat, building in new helpful thoughts
Adapting involves noticing **negative thoughts**.

**Situation** → **Distressing Emotions**

**Notice:**
What thoughts go along with the situation & emotions?

**Situation** → **Thoughts** → **Distressing Emotions**

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Adapting involves **challenging negative thoughts**, not treating them as facts.

*Ask yourself:* What would be more helpful thoughts? What would I **say to a friend** in this situation?

I might feel bad for a while, but I’ll probably feel better with time.

Even if I don’t feel better, I know I can get help if I need it.
Adapting involves distinguishing between normal and excessive worry.

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<th>NORMAL WORRY</th>
<th>EXCESSIVE WORRY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps you to get what you want</td>
<td>Leaves you feeling demoralized, upset, or exhausted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps you to solve problems in your life</td>
<td>Gets in the way of living the life you want to lead</td>
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Adapting involves increasing social and community connections.

- Who are your most important connections?
- With whom can you share your feelings?
- With whom do you want to be in touch?
- Who might need your help or support right now?
- Consider what is missing or needs to be changed.

We can play a role in helping those who depend on us adapt.

- **Communicate** calm, compassion, and respect
- **Listen** to concerns while maintaining appropriate boundaries
- **Share** information openly and honestly
- **Help** troubleshoot challenges

Assessing, accepting, and adapting can promote long-term resilience.

Remember that resilience is the most common outcome.

**Working** to cope effectively with crises will promote future resilience.
FOR THOSE WHO NEED MORE SUPPORT

Specific approaches delivered by a support person can help the more heavily impacted.

- Psychological First Aid
- Skills for Psychological Recovery
- CBT for mental health disorders
Psychological First Aid (PFA) is used to respond to initial distress.

PFA's goals include increasing...

- Sense of safety, connection, calm, & hope
- Access to social, physical, and emotional support
- Self-efficacy

Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) is a more intensive approach.

SPR's goals include...

- Protecting mental health
- Enhancing ability to address one's own needs
- Teaching skills to promote recovery
- Preventing maladaptive behaviors
CBT for *mental health disorders* following trauma is *effective at reducing symptoms*.

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- Time limited
- Present focused
- Structured and skills oriented
- Practice outside session
- Delivered by a trained professional

We can play a role in **connecting those who depend on us to resources** as appropriate.

- **Normalize** the need for support
- Know your **limits**
- Respect personal **boundaries**
- Know what’s available and **who to ask** for help
LAST THOUGHTS...

To increase resilience in your community, **look for the helpers and be a helper.**

- What you do for yourself and those around you **makes a difference.**
- Finding ways to **make meaning, engage others,** and **foster compassion** is important.
RESOURCES

COVID Support Program (page includes handouts and guides)
https://psychiatry.uw.edu/clinical-care-consultation/
covid-19-resources-for-mental-well-being/

Peer to Peer Program: https://faculty.uwmedicine.org/p2p/

UW Care Link (EAP): https://hr.uw.edu/benefits/uw-carelink/

COVID Coach App:

WA Listens (online resources & non-clinical support line):
www.walistens.org  1-833-681-0211

Contact Michele & Kristen: TRIHEAL@uw.edu