



BUILDING RESILIENCE

By Linda Fentress, M.Ed., Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor

All of us experience major disruptions at certain points in our lives. When we move from childhood to adolescence, everything we had previously known about the world goes through a jarring transformation. Similar stages of disruption occur when an adolescent moves into young adulthood, young adults move into permanent relationships, we become parents, or we experience middle age, retirement or aging. Unexpected life events can turn life upside down like an automobile accident, an illness, the death of a loved one, a divorce.....all can challenge our ability to cope.

What is resilience? Clinical psychologist Ryan Howes, Ph.D., cites resilience researcher Galen Buckwalter's definition: "Resilience determines how quickly we get back to our 'steady state' after the air has been knocked out of us, when we must push through life circumstances that challenge our very being." Howes likens resilience to playing the guitar. Many potential guitarists stop playing after their first lesson because their fingertips hurt. But others persevere. "People who are really interested in guitar push through this initial discomfort and realize after a week or two the strings don't hurt anymore because their fingertips have grown tougher. In other words, their fingers have become more resilient and better able to tolerate the string tension, stronger as they push down the strings, and more competent at finger placement." This metaphor fits for most areas that require resilience. Resilience helps us get to the other side of difficulties and challenges.



How can we build more resiliency into our lives?

A Sense of Hope and Trust

Those who are resilient seem to believe in the basic goodness of the world and trust that things will turn out OK in the end. This positive attitude allows them to weather times when everything seems bleak and to hope for a better future. From a spiritual standpoint, we can lean into the idea that God cares for us and meets us in the darkness of our circumstances. Psalms 30:5 says *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and mountains crumble into the sea."*

Interpret Experiences In a New Light

Sometimes we look at situations in a way that keeps us stuck in a negative thinking pattern. Those who are resilient have the ability to look at the situation in a new way (this is called "reframing") that can minimize the impact of the change/disruption in their thought process. For instance, be on the lookout for unhelpful thinking styles such as catastrophizing, personalizing, projecting, emotional reasoning, or comparing. The Bible encourages us to "take every thought captive" in 2 Corinthians 10:5. Resilient people often take a creative approach toward solving a problem, reinterpreting old definitions in new ways and adopting more helpful thinking styles.

Know Your Strengths

Sometimes, we make tough times even tougher by questioning whether we have the strength to manage these stressors. A key to building resilience is to know your strengths, then you can lean into them during difficult times. Knowing your strengths gives you the faith and confidence to endure hard times. Sometimes going through difficult times reveals strengths we never even knew we had. These strengths become a reservoir to draw upon in difficult situations. If you were asked to make a list of your top 5 strengths for coping with challenge, what would be on the

Exercise Good Self-Care

Get enough sleep, eat well, exercise, and take time for yourself. Often, transition and life change drain us of energy. It's much like the gas that is needed to keep your car moving along the road. In life's journey when our gas tank goes to empty we can't move forward. Putting gas in our tank with time for ourselves like hiking, taking a bath, or talking to a friend can replenish our energy store so that we can keep moving through difficult times.

Bouncing back from a difficult time can seem overwhelming. Fortunately, resilience is something that we can build through steps and habits, one day at a time!

RESILIENCE

