



Building Resiliency & Post Traumatic Growth

Resiliency is defined as the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. It is the flexible adaptation to the changing demands of stressful experiences.

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. Resilience can be developed. Resilient people tend to be optimistic, energetic, curious, open to new experiences; show high positive emotionality; and elicit positive emotions through humor and relaxation.

Posttraumatic growth is defined as a positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. It is important to note that posttraumatic growth and resiliency are distinct concepts. The presence of resiliency seems to be a predictor of posttraumatic growth.

Here are a few ways to build resiliency both before and after a traumatic event:

- **Take care of yourself.** Listen to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Rest, eat well, and exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.
- **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.
- **Adopt an active coping style.** Having coping tools in your toolbox to draw upon that work, and can be added when the usual coping skills are not enough is key to resiliency. Active coping, such as problem-focused coping and reinterpretation of events consistently correlate to post-traumatic growth and tend to be more effective than passive coping styles. Cognitive processing focusing on an individual making sense of the trauma and creating a new worldview is an important part of active coping.
- **Work toward acceptance.** Acceptance coping leads to better outcomes in situations where the person has no control over the event/environment. Those who can accept that the traumatic event happened and that it cannot be changed can then focus their energy on what they can control. It allows an individual to focus forward rather than getting stuck in the past.
- **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. Not making a decision IS making a decision. With decision making, one can see the results and adjust accordingly.
- **Surround yourself with positive social support and make meaningful connections.** This support can be from family, friends, and even strangers in a support network. Accepting help and support from others can strengthen 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.
- **Foster spirituality.** Those who have intrinsic spiritual beliefs tend to experience more resiliency and growth. The social support that they receive from others who share similar beliefs can be helpful. Spiritual beliefs can also help restructure our worldview in a way that makes sense. Meditation and spiritual practices can help build connections and restore hope.
- **Practice positive self-talk and imagery.** Keep track of your self-talk and be vigilant about mentally responding in a positive way. Set some future goals and visualize yourself accomplishing them. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life.
- **Move toward your goals.** Visualize what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. 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, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"