

# RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF STRESS

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Stress can come from relationships, money or health issues, or even from within ourselves. Work is a common source of stress for many people. Living with ongoing stress at work can start to feel overwhelming. Sometimes stress from one source isn't over before another stressful event occurs. Because we may not be able to avoid this stress, it's important to have strategies for managing it.

## Some examples of work situations that may cause ongoing stress:

- > Organizational change (such as restructuring, new procedures)
- > Working with difficult clients/people on an ongoing basis
- > Working in a high-risk job (such as being a police officer, firefighter, or ER staff)
- > Dealing with publicity (highly public situations that involve your company)
- > Accidents or unforeseen events
- > Feeling a lack of support and resources needed to do your job

Situations such as these require you to cope with ongoing, sometimes growing stress. Building your resilience can help you manage this challenge. Resilience is the ability to adapt well to difficulty, change, or other sources of stress. Being resilient doesn't mean that you will not feel stress or anxiety. It does make it more likely that you'll be able to manage that stress and feelings of anxiety or uncertainty.

## How can you adjust the way you think to encourage resilience?

**Seek out the positive.** When faced with difficulties, push yourself to see what remains good and manageable in your world. You may still struggle, but this balanced perspective can help you feel stronger. Doing this repeatedly can create new brain connections that make it easier to see things in a balanced way. (Hölzel et al, 2011)

**Focus on what you can control.** There are many things you can't control in difficult situations. Thinking too much about those things can weigh you down. If you turn your focus to the things you can control – your thoughts and actions – you can reclaim a sense of power over what happens next. Taking active steps to manage the challenges can also help you'll feel more resilient.

“That person is so frustrating to deal with!



I know I can't change her behavior. What I can do is focus on my work instead of her actions. I will try to give her the benefit of the doubt and make sure to react in a respectful way.”

**Learn from experience.** Identify what has worked in the past when you have faced challenges. Remind yourself of your strengths. Trust that your natural strengths will help you cope. You may want to keep a list of your strengths or success nearby. Turn to them when you need a reminder.

**Be mindful and aware.** Focusing on the present moment without judging what you're experiencing as good or bad can help build resilience. Take brief opportunities during the day to stop and take a few deep breaths. As you do, bring your attention to the present. Notice and appreciate the world around you using all your senses. Let stressful thoughts of the past or future pass like clouds moving across the sky.

"I feel really overwhelmed right now. I need to take my break and get outside for a walk to clear my head. I know that really helps me calm down."



**Improve your self-control.** Managing your emotions can help stress or change feel less overwhelming. Get in the habit of checking in with yourself when you start feeling overwhelmed. Try rethinking your worries when this happens. Ask yourself, "What is the worst that could happen?" Think through the possibilities. Then imagine how you might prepare for them or perhaps make changes to avoid these outcomes. It may help to set aside time in your day to focus on what is worrying you, instead of letting those thoughts take over your day.

### Action steps to prepare for change and practice resilience:

**Build a support network.** Staying connected to others can help you feel more resilient. Having a strong support network is like a safety net that helps to cushion the extreme effects of stress. The encouragement of friends and family can also make you feel stronger and more prepared when stress hits.

**Try to see other sides of the story.** Remember that others may be feeling this stress too. Reach out to learn from their viewpoint. They may help you see things in a different light. Having a broader perspective may give you a better base from which to understand and manage what's happening. Be sure to focus on useful conversations and avoid gossip and negativity.

**Focus on healthy self-care.** It may be easier to be resilient when you're well, strong, and energized. (APA, 2015) This means eating nutritious foods regularly throughout the day. It includes staying hydrated, exercising regularly, and getting restful sleep on a regular basis. Make time for activities that are enjoyable whenever possible.

**Explore your options.** Challenges can open a door to a world of opportunities, but it doesn't always feel like that. Try to see all the options in front of you. Push yourself to identify and explore different options. This can help you develop short and long term plans, which can give you a way forward instead of feeling stuck.

#### References

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