

# Building Resilience

A resource book



**Ingrid Poulson**

**STEADFAST  
TRAINING**

*“Life is not about how fast you run or how high you climb, but how well you bounce”*

*Unknown*

## **What is resilience?**

The term resilience has become more popular of late and continues to increase in line with the kinds of adversities that we are all facing. With factors such as the threat of global warming, the financial crisis and associated budget strains and job losses, wars and pandemics, we are being challenged by numerous stressors on both a global and local scale. In times like these, some people and some organisations will flounder and some will strive and survive. Those that continue are demonstrating their resilience. So what is this? And how can we get it?

One definition of resilience is this: “Resilience is the capacity to maintain competent function despite major life stressors” Masten, Best & Garnezy (1990). Note that it does not just talk about one-off stressors, but includes ongoing stressors. The word that is perhaps questionable in this definition is ‘major’ as we need the skill of resilience to cope with all of life’s stressors- not just the major ones.

Resilience is not just one thing, it is made up of a variety of factors and skills and strategies. What’s more, there is a lot of evidence indicating that we can learn to be more resilient. The American Psychological Association supports the argument that resilience is something that we can learn, stating that : “Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone” (2005)

Masten (2001) also coined the term “an ordinary magic” to describe resilience, referring to the idea that resilience is not something that takes great skills or talents that lie beyond our capacity. In fact, the majority of us can cope with life stressors and traumas very well. We do need to nurture and build our resilience on a daily basis through doing ongoing, ordinary, things- creating in the end, a ‘magic’ result.

## **Identified resilience skills/strategies/factors:**

There are many skills, strategies and factors that resilient people tend to have in common. That is, if someone is resilient, they also tend to have the following:

**Positive emotions:** Positive emotions include a large spectrum of ‘feel good’ feelings and emotions, such as pleasure, contentment, joy, amusement, fun-loving, awe and so on. People that experience these emotions more frequently tend to be more resilient. According to Barbara Fredrickson’s research (her book is called *Positivity* & was published in 2009), we need to have a daily diet of positive emotions that outweighs our diet of negative emotions in order to experience a good life. You can check out your ‘positivity ratio’ at [www.positivityratio.com/single.php](http://www.positivityratio.com/single.php)

**Optimism:** Optimism is our capacity to accentuate the positive in life, to see ‘the bright side’. Psychologists have generally believed that we tend to have an optimistic or pessimistic leaning in life that is ‘set’. However, this has been more recently challenged by researchers such as Martin Seligman who argues in his book *Learned Optimism* (1998) that we can increase our optimism.



**Humour:** Many survivors of difficult circumstances- those who have spent time in concentration camps, people who work in hospices for the dying and people going through complicated bereavements have cited humour as one of the tools that has helped them to 'get through'.

**Cognitive flexibility:** Cognitive flexibility (as opposed to physical flexibility) is our capacity to adapt our thinking to the situation at hand. Being able to take another's point of view, being able to see things from a different perspective, being able to see difficulties as challenges- these are all examples of cognitive flexibility.

**Explanatory style and reappraisal:** This refers to how we 'explain' events to ourselves and why we experience those events. People tend to have either a pessimistic or optimistic explanatory style. 'Reappraisal' refers to our capacity to re-assess the situation more positively or more realistically.

**Acceptance:** acceptance is the capacity for us to recognise that there are sometimes problems without solutions and events with no reason or no inherent meaning. Without acceptance, we can get stuck on the 'why' circle, questioning 'why me?'. Those that deal with events more successfully are able to accept that something has happened and ask instead "what do I do now?"

Some people find it useful to keep in mind the serenity prayer or something like the 'acceptance affirmation' poem (below).



***Acceptance Affirmation***

This is how it is.  
Not how it  
Was  
Might have been  
Should have been  
Not how  
I want it to be  
Hoped it would be  
Planned it would be  
I accept that this is how it is.  
Now I get on with my life  
In a positive way  
-Author Unknown

**Religion or spirituality:** People that have a religious or spiritual leaning tend to be more resilient. Some argue that it is the structures of religion- gratitude, social networks, charity and so on that create this phenomenon.

**Altruism:** this is defined as 'unselfish concern for the welfare for others' but can be more broadly taken to mean demonstrated charity and the act of giving to others.

**Social support:** Being able to call on social networks and having support available is a large factor for resilience. It is not the case that we need to be able to 'do it all ourselves'.



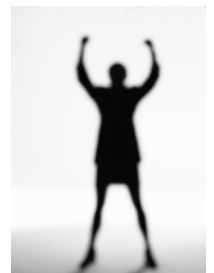
**Role models:** role models can be both positive and negative- we can be inspired by others to action by witnessing what they do. Alternatively, we can witness others and decide not to be like them or do what they do.

**Coping styles:** we all cope differently with stress. The most well known ways of dealing with stress are social support seeking, problem engagement (finding a practical solution) and problem avoidance. The first two coping strategies are more effective.

**Ability to recover from negative events:** This is one of the core skills of resilience- whether and how we recover from stressors and negative events. This involves more than just a 'soldier on' mentality and includes components such as acceptance, reappraisal and the ability to learn from the event.

**Stress inoculation:** The studies around this has largely grown from the research of Donald Meichenbaum. Meichenbaum's (1985) program trains people in stress responses prior to going into stressful situations. His programs have been shown to be successful and rely on the kinds of factors that are listed here.

**Emotional regulation:** This is the capacity to deal with our emotions as they arise- being able to 'self-soothe' for example. Emotional regulation contains components of emotional intelligence as we need to be able to recognise emotions in our self and others and use this information to manage our emotions.



## Stressors

As our resilience lies in our ability to cope with stress, it is worth understanding a little about stressors- those things that can cause us to feel stressed. First, it is important to note that not all stress is bad. We need at least a little stress in order to motivate us, to call ourselves to action. The feeling of being stressed also warns us that we are threatened which is invaluable to our survival.

A stressor is a stimulus that causes an adverse physical or mental response. Note that the stimulus can vary. It can, for example:

- Be a physical stimulus (a spider, a loud noise)
  - Be a thought (a worrying intrusion) or emotion (a feeling of anxiety)
  - Be relatively large (the loss of a job or relationship) or relatively small (forgetting something)
  - Be long-term (ongoing job dissatisfaction, an impending event) or,
  - Be time –bound (an unexpected shock)
- Chronic stress
    - “this involves ongoing disparities between what you want and what you get” (Maddi & Khoshiba 2005)

Although some stressors are common to us all, we vary on exactly what makes us stressed and to what degree. Some of us, for example, are terrified of public speaking, whilst some of us are not concerned at all about speaking in front of others. Further, what stresses us out can change over time (as we do more public speaking, we may find it less stressful) and can depend on how we are feeling on any given day (a car horn can make us react much more strongly after a night of no sleep, for example). What this indicates is that stress has a subjective element to it- it is not just what is out there but how we interpret and respond to the stress that is important.



### Activity

Try keeping a ‘stress’ diary to monitor your stress. Note down what happened, how you are feeling and what you did. Over time you may find that you have a typical response to different kinds of stresses (for example, you may have a stomach upset after an emotional discussion).

### Stress Awareness Diary

Date \_\_\_\_\_

| Time  | Stressful event | Symptom |
|-------|-----------------|---------|
| _____ | _____           | _____   |
| _____ | _____           | _____   |

(Davis, Eshelman, McKay 2000 *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook*)

## Responses

There are two ways of meeting difficulties. You alter the difficulties or you alter yourself to meet them."  
-Phyllis Bottome



It is how we respond to the stress that is the crux of the issue, and the crux of resilient thinking. Often in a stressful situation there is an immediate physical response (hormonal changes, sweating, raising of heart beat and so on) and then a behavioural response. Although our physical responses may vary at different times, there is not much that we can do about them besides attempting to dissipate them once they arrive (through calming ourselves down, for example). What we can focus on, and control is our behavioural response. Some behavioural responses are 'in the moment' whilst others are things that we can do later.



Whilst in the stressful moment, we can practice saying a short phrase to ourselves that will help to break the emotion and help us relax. Some things to say include:

### "In the moment" things to say

Not my problem

Whatever happens, I will cope

Wait and see

I have the right to make mistakes

It's a pain in the neck, but not a disaster

Will this matter in five year's time?

How bad is this on the 'awfulness scale'?

Relax!

(from *Change your thinking* Sarah Edelman 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2007 ABC pg 128)

## Strategies for dealing with stressors

Away from the situation, we can develop different sets of responses. These will vary according to whether the stress is something that we can do something about (make a plan of action) or something that we need to regulate our emotions about (dealing with a difficult person). What you do is up to you and should fit with how you choose to relax. Just be aware that some coping responses (such as overeating, getting aggressive and drinking) have negative consequences that may then become a stressor in themselves.

Our responses generally fall into two categories- active coping strategies and avoidance strategies. As mentioned earlier, active coping strategies are more effective. They include:

### Personal active coping strategies

- a. Change the source of the stress
  - b. Confront the source of the stress
  - c. Adopt a positive attitude
2. Indirect active strategies
- a. Talk about the source of the stress
  - b. Change the way you perceive the stress
  - c. Get involved in other activities
  - d. Change your diet (less caffeine and sugar, more water and fresh foods)

*From Coping with Stress in the Special Education Classroom: Can Individual Teachers More Effectively Manage Stress?. ERIC Digest #E545. Author: Brownell, Mary*

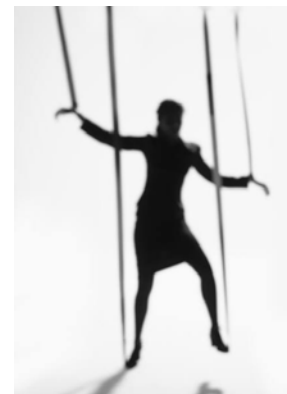
Some positive coping responses include:

- ✓ Distract yourself doing something you enjoy
- ✓ Take a break- either a relaxation break or a holiday
- ✓ Exercise- even just walking has enormous benefits
- ✓ Spend time with friends and family
- ✓ Watch a comedy movie
- ✓ Go out into nature
- ✓ Talk it over with someone you trust
- ✓ If it's work that's stressing you, use some separation strategies
- ✓ Write it down- this seems to help us manage our stress.



## Control

One of the most important issues is in working out who has control of our lives. Masses of research (and our own intuition) supports the idea that we need to feel that we have control – over our decisions, our environment, our career and so on. Feeling that other people or life events are controlling us can contribute to great life dissatisfaction and stress.



Research based specifically on where we place control in our lives was initially conducted by Rotter in the 1970s, with his work replicated and refined over the years since. Through giving subjects the choice of a series of two sentences such as “Promotions are earned through hard work” and “People who are liked are promoted”, he was able to determine whether people believed they had control over their life (internal locus of control) or whether control was centred externally to themselves (external locus of control). What’s more, he was able to demonstrate that both of these beliefs are self-validating; that is, what you believe you will find evidence for in the world.

To be more resilient, we need to build our internal locus of control- to feel that we are in control of our lives. And to do this, we can recognise what we have control over- the way we respond to stressors in our lives.

A powerful summary of this is in the words of Viktor Frankl- a man that spent a lot of time in concentration camps during the second world war. He states:

***Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom-*** Viktor E Frankl

In the RISE model, this kernel is summarised under Resolve. We take responsibility for our responses. There are three other parts that are equally important:

### ***The RISE Model- Four ingredients for resilience***

|          |          |   |
|----------|----------|---|
| <b>R</b> | Resolve  | An assertion to yourself that you will be resilient/take responsibility |
| <b>I</b> | Identity | A strong sense of who you are, developed individual capabilities        |
| <b>S</b> | Support  | An ability to give and receive support                                  |
| <b>E</b> | Everyday | An everyday plan that keeps you in good condition                       |



“Resilience is about rising-you rise above it, you rise to the occasion, you rise to the challenge. Rising is an active choice”

(RISE – Ingrid Poulson 2008)



## Identity

One part of the RISE model is Identity which covers the traits and characteristics that we can work on in ourselves in order to become more resilient.

Perhaps the most important resilience strategy involves adaptability or flexibility of response. Given that change is constant, we cannot afford to have rigid ideas or strategies that we try to impose on every situation. Although this may make us feel that we are more in control, it is actually a maladaptive response. We need to be able to respond suitably to the situation at hand. As Darwin states:

**“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change” Darwin**

There are ways that we can become more flexible. For example:

- ✓ Get rid of those words ‘always’ and ‘never’. They indicate that you are locking yourself into some kind of character or behaviour that is inflexible. Instead of “I’m always happy”, use “I’m usually happy”, instead of “I never get lost” use “I rarely get lost.” Just in changing your language, you’ll be giving yourself a lot more scope for exploration.
- ✓ Embrace the kinds of conflicting traits that you see in yourself. Situations change, so why wouldn’t you? This isn’t encouraging you to fritter away time or be wildly moody. The idea is to be purposeful in your choice of trait. If, for example, you are habitually mature, why not try being playful and see how it feels?
- ✓ Try not to be entrenched in your views. Practice the art of compassion (seeing things from another point of view) rather than dogmatism.
- ✓ Travel. Visiting different places on weekends is a good start, but if you can possibly swing it, try a trip where you can’t speak the language. You’ll be amazed at how adaptable you become when you’re hungry!
- ✓ Do things differently from the way you usually do them. This needn’t be radical. Walk instead of driving, go a different route, watch a different kind of movie, read different books.
- ✓ Try something new, especially if you are really bad at it. When you get stuck, frustrated or annoyed, remind yourself that you are developing your ability to be flexible, not attempting to master the challenge.
- ✓ Explore possibilities, instead of saying “I do it this way” or “Because I said so, and that’s final” try “Okay, maybe we’ll try something different”.
- ✓ Recognise that change is the only constant. As much as we crave the security of having things stay the same, the irony is that everything changes. Sometimes this is a curse, but sometimes it’s a blessing.
- ✓ Take an experimental attitude. I often do things “for a while” or “at the moment”. Now, more than ever, we live in a society where things are temporary, transitory and transforming at an incredible rate. We can try out a few things without buying into the whole deal. I’m not talking about taking drugs, here. I’m talking about trying out a new course or living somewhere else. We can house swap, rent in a different suburb, study on-line. Take advantage of some of the choices out there.
- ✓ Learn to be self-assured. When you know who you are and where you are coming from, you can afford to play a little with how you do things.

## Values

Our values are another important part of our identity. Values are ongoing actions. They are different from goals in that values are like the directions we keep moving in, whereas goals are what we want to achieve along the way.

Sometimes it is difficult to hold onto our values under the assaults of temptation, peer pressure cultural or social pressure and so on. However, the more we can live our lives closer to our values, the happier we become.

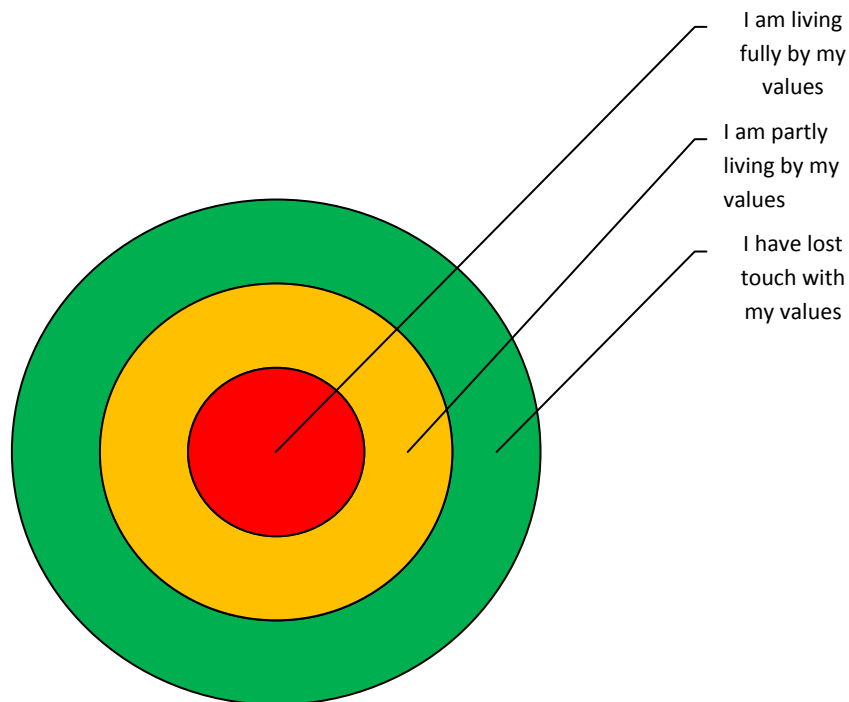
To clarify what your values are, ask yourself these questions: "What do I want my life to stand for?" "What sort of qualities do I want to cultivate as a person?" "What do I admire in others?" "How do I want to be in relationship to other people?"



There is a list of values on the following page that can help you to identify your values as well.

Tobias Lundgren is a Swedish therapist who has developed an exercise called The Bull's Eye to help you work out how closely you are living to your values. To do this exercise, write down what your values are in four areas Work/education, Leisure, Personal growth/health, and Relationships.

Then identify how closely you are living your values on the Bull's Eye. Chances are that the closer you are living to your values, the more content you will feel with your life.



**LIST OF VALUES: Taken from- <http://www.stevepavlina.com/articles/list-of-values.htm>**

|                 |                        |                     |                 |                |                |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Abundance       | Acceptance             | Accessibility       | Accomplishment  | Accuracy       | Vision         |
| Achievement     | Acknowledgement        | Activeness          | Adaptability    | Adoration      | Wealth         |
| Adroitness      | Adventure              | Affection           | Affluence       | Aggressiveness | Wittiness      |
| Agility         | Alertness              | Altruism            | Ambition        | Amusement      | Vitality       |
| Anticipation    | Appreciation           | Approachability     | Articulacy      | Assertiveness  | Wilfulness     |
| Assurance       | Attentiveness          | Attractiveness      | Audacity        | Availability   | Wonder         |
| Awareness       | Awe                    | Balance             | Beauty          | Being the best | Vivacity       |
| Belonging       | Benevolence            | Bliss               | Boldness        | Bravery        | Willingness    |
| Brilliance      | Buoyancy               | Calmness            | Camraderie      | Candor         | Youthfulness   |
| Capability      | Care                   | Carefulness         | Celebrity       | Certainty      | Warmth         |
| Challenge       | Charity                | Charm               | Chastity        | Cheerfulness   | Winning        |
| Clarity         | Cleanliness            | Clear-mindedness    | Cleverness      | Closeness      | Zeal           |
| Comfort         | Commitment             | Compassion          | Completion      | Composure      | Watchfulness   |
| Concentration   | Confidence             | Conformity          | Congruency      | Connection     | Wisdom         |
| Consciousness   | Consistency            | Contentment         | Continuity      | Contribution   | Valour         |
| Control         | Conviction             | Conviviality        | Coolness        | Cooperation    | Variety        |
| Cordiality      | Correctness            | Courage             | Courtesy        | Craftiness     | Victory        |
| Creativity      | Credibility            | Cunning             | Curiosity       | Daring         | Vigor          |
| Decisiveness    | Decorum                | Deference           | Delight         | Dependability  | Virtue         |
| Depth           | Desire                 | Determination       | Devotion        | Devoutness     | Unflappability |
| Dexterity       | Dignity                | Diligence           | Direction       | Directness     | Uniqueness     |
| Discipline      | Discovery              | Discretion          | Diversity       | Dominance      | Unity          |
| Dreaming        | Drive                  | Duty                | Dynamism        | Eagerness      | Usefulness     |
| Economy         | Ecstasy                | Education           | Effectiveness   | Efficiency     | Utility        |
| Elation         | Elegance               | Empathy             | Encouragement   | Endurance      | Transcendence  |
| Energy          | Enjoyment              | Entertainment       | Enthusiasm      | Excellence     | Truth          |
| Excitement      | Exhilaration           | Expectancy          | Expediency      | Experience     | Trust          |
| Expertise       | Exploration            | Expressiveness      | Extravagance    | Extroversion   | Understanding  |
| Exuberance      | Fairness               | Faith               | Fame            | Family         |                |
| Fascination     | Fashion                | Fearlessness        | Ferocity        | Fidelity       |                |
| Fierceness      | Financial independence | Firmness            | Fitness         | Flexibility    |                |
| Flow            | Fluency                | Focus               | Fortitude       | Frankness      |                |
| Freedom         | Friendliness           | Frugality           | Fun             | Gallantry      |                |
| Generosity      | Gentility              | Giving              | Grace           | Gratitude      |                |
| Gregariousness  | Growth                 | Guidance            | Happiness       | Harmony        |                |
| Health          | Heart                  | Helpfulness         | Heroism         | Holiness       |                |
| Honesty         | Honor                  | Hopefulness         | Hospitality     | Humility       |                |
| Humor           | Hygiene                | Imagination         | Impact          | Impartiality   |                |
| Independence    | Industry               | Ingenuity           | Inquisitiveness | Insightfulness |                |
| Inspiration     | Integrity              | Intelligence        | Intensity       | Intimacy       |                |
| Intrepidness    | Introversion           | Intuition           | Intuitiveness   | Inventiveness  |                |
| Investing       | Joy                    | Judiciousness       | Justice         | Keenness       |                |
| Kindness        | Knowledge              | Leadership          | Learning        | Liberation     |                |
| Liberty         | Liveliness             | Logic               | Longevity       | Love           |                |
| Loyalty         | Majesty                | Making a difference | Mastery         | Maturity       |                |
| Meekness        | Mellowness             | Meticulousness      | Mindfulness     | Modesty        |                |
| Motivation      | Mysteriousness         | Neatness            | Nerve           | Obedience      |                |
| Open-mindedness | Openness               | Optimism            | Order           | Organization   |                |
| Originality     | Outlandishness         | Outrageousness      | Passion         | Peace          |                |
| Perceptiveness  | Perfection             | Perkiness           | Perseverance    | Persistence    |                |
| Persuasiveness  | Philanthropy           | Piety               | Playfulness     | Pleasantness   |                |
| Pleasure        | Poise                  | Polish              | Popularity      | Potency        |                |
| Power           | Practicality           | Pragmatism          | Precision       | Preparedness   |                |
| Presence        | Privacy                | Proactivity         | Professionalism | Prosperity     |                |
| Prudence        | Punctuality            | Purity              | Realism         | Reason         |                |
| Reasonableness  | Recognition            | Recreation          | Refinement      | Reflection     |                |
| Relaxation      | Reliability            | Religiosity         | Resilience      | Resolution     |                |
| Resolve         | Resourcefulness        | Respect             | Rest            | Restraint      |                |
| Reverence       | Richness               | Rigor               | Sacredness      | Sacrifice      |                |
| Sagacity        | Saintliness            | Sanguinity          | Satisfaction    | Security       |                |
| Self-control    | Selflessness           | Self-reliance       | Sensitivity     | Sensuality     |                |
| Serenity        | Service                | Sexuality           | Sharing         | Shrewdness     |                |
| Significance    | Silliness              | Silence             | Simplicity      | Sincerity      |                |
| Skillfulness    | Solidarity             | Solitude            | Soundness       | Speed          |                |
| Spirit          | Spirituality           | Spontaneity         | Spunk           | Stability      |                |
| Stealth         | Stillness              | Strength            | Structure       | Success        |                |
| Support         | Supremacy              | Surprise            | Sympathy        | Synergy        |                |
| Teamwork        | Temperance             | Thankfulness        | Thoroughness    | Thoughtfulness |                |
| Thrift          | Tidiness               | Timeliness          | Traditionalism  | Tranquility    |                |

## Support

It is important to recognise that we don't have to deal with everything ourselves- we can access support networks when we feel stressed.

As with all components of resilience, we are building our support networks constantly. This is not a chore, but is one of the most enjoyable aspects of building our resilience.

Our relationships are what colour our lives, giving it depth, breadth and meaning. As the old adage goes, no one on their death bed ever said "I wish I'd spent more time at the office".

Communication is one key to how successful our relationships are. We can improve our communication by learning some key skills. This might involve learning how to talk about problem behaviours rather than seeing the person as the problem.



For example, saying to someone "You dominate all our conversations" will immediately make the other person feel defensive. If, however, we focus on the behaviour and how we feel about it, we can work together to resolve the issue "I notice that when we talk, I don't get to say much and that makes me feel frustrated. Should we try something different?".

Along with personal relationships, we should be aware of what support networks are available to us. This can be informal, such as a chat room, or more formal such as counselling or therapy.

Consider who you can call on in different situations. It may help you to list them out.

When I have a work problem that I want a solution to, I can call on \_\_\_\_\_

When I have a personal problem I want a solution to, I can call on \_\_\_\_\_

When I have an issue that does not need a solution, I can call on \_\_\_\_\_

When I have a problem at home that needs a solution, I can call on \_\_\_\_\_

Different support structures may be appropriate at different times and for different circumstances. Don't forget that there are phone numbers available, too. Some are listed below but there are others available.

|                        |              |   |
|------------------------|--------------|---|
| Lifeline               | 13 11 14     | 24 hour phone counselling offered by trained volunteers                     |
| NSW Rape Crisis Centre | 1800 424 017 | 24 hour phone counselling and support for victims of rape or sexual assault |
| Mensline               | 1300 78 9978 | 24 hour phone counselling for men in crisis                                 |

## Everyday Resilience Strategies

It is vital that we keep in mind that we are building our resilience every day in all areas of our lives. One area is in looking after the basics of sleep, nutrition and exercise. This allows us to be physically robust and less liable to succumb to illness if and when stressors arise. Did you know, for example, if 'happy' people and 'unhappy' people are exposed to the cold virus, unhappy people are more likely to catch the cold? (Cohen et al 2003, Psychosomatic)

Good food and plenty of water are all part of the resilience diet.



There is mounting evidence for the importance of exercise to our mental, as well as our physical well-being. A brief walk everyday has been shown to be protective against many stressors. More structured exercise, especially with others, is also highly indicative of well-being.



Sleep is an often ignored, yet vital ingredient to our resilience as well. Just think about how you cope after a good night's sleep compared to a bad night's sleep. The Dalia Lama, when asked what the secret of happiness is, quipped "9 hours sleep a night".

Our thinking patterns and what we say to ourselves in any stressful situation are also very important. If what we say to ourselves is distorted, negative or irrational, then we will feel less able to cope.

### Common irrational thinking patterns

Personalising- *it's all about me*

*Example: You are walking down the hallway when a usually friendly colleague appears to snub you off. You think "What have I done wrong?"*

Awfulising/catastrophising- *it's worse than we think*

*Example: You have forgotten to complete an important report for your boss. You think "This is terrible, I'll be fired, I won't be able to meet my mortgage payments, we'll all be out on the street"*

Generalising- *this is just one example of a general trend (always, never...)*

*Example: You accidentally break a vase. You think "I always break things. I'm clumsy"*

Black and white thinking- *it's all good or it's all bad*

*Example: You burn the cake you are making. You think "It's a complete disaster. I'll have to throw it out".*

Negative filtering- Everything is bad

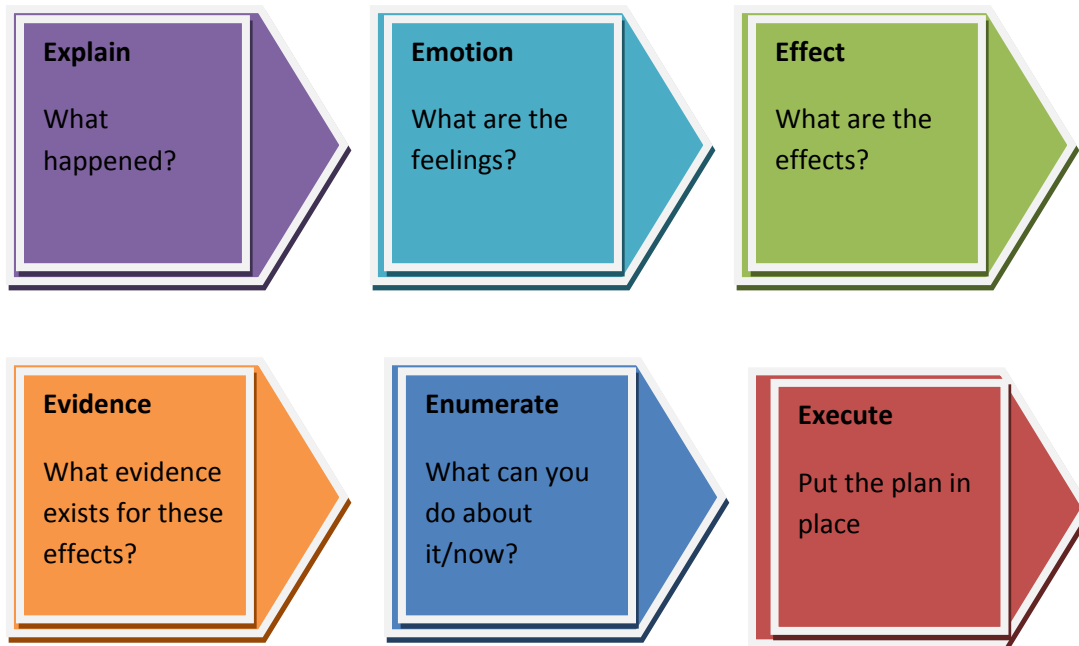
*Example: On any given day a number of events will occur. You think "Everything is hopeless/sad/everyone is rude" and so on.*



## Challenging our negative thinking

Instead, we can challenge our thinking and 'check in' that it accurately reflects reality. If you find that you are falling into a negative thinking pattern:

- ✓ Say to yourself "Stop". You may want to visualise a stop sign. This is very simple and very powerful
- ✓ Set aside time to worry (say between 5:30 and 6:00pm). When you start to ruminate or worry about something, remind yourself that you've set time aside and can get to that later.
- ✓ Similarly, you can imagine or use a real box. When you start to think about something, imagine yourself putting it in the box or write it down and put it in the box. I call this the "box of all fears".
- ✓ Distract yourself- do something physical or mentally engaging that literally 'takes your mind off' the issue.
- ✓ Logically dispute your beliefs and thoughts using, for example, the 6E plan.



**Explain:** Briefly outline what the problem is.

**Effect:** What are the imagined effects of the problem. This is what you fear is happening or will happen.

**Enumerate:** List out some possible solutions. You may want to ask others to help you

**Emotions:** It's important to list these because often we are not completely sure what we are feeling and writing it down helps.

**Evidence:** List any evidence that the effect is occurring. This is to help challenge any unrealistic thinking or beliefs about the situation.

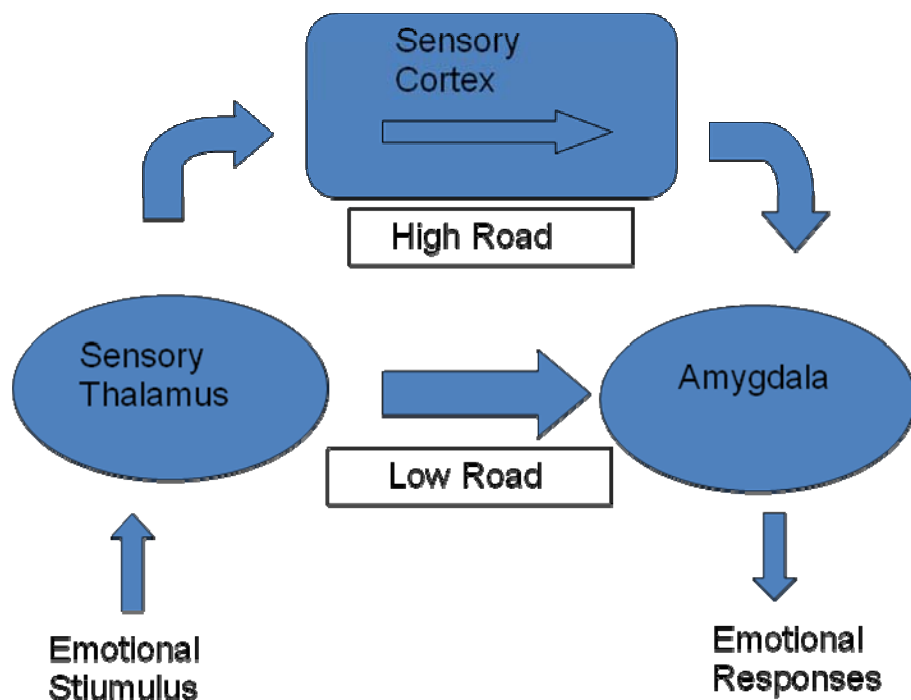
**Execute:** Do what you need to enact the plan.

## Emotional regulation

*We either make ourselves miserable or make ourselves happy; the amount of work is the same*

Carlos Casteneda

Time and again, researchers have demonstrated that our ability to recognise and regulate our emotional responses are essential for maintaining our well-being. In the mid 1990s, a researcher called Le doux did some work on emotions. Although he was using mice as subjects, it appears that a lot of what he discovered can apply to humans. What he was able to demonstrate is that when we see/hear/feel an emotional stimulus, the information goes through two neural pathways. One goes straight from the sensory thalamus to the Amygdala, which is the seat of our emotions. The other goes from the Sensory Thalamus, up through the Upper Cortex (where our thinking resides) and then to the Amygdala. The first path is known as the 'low road' and the interesting finding is that this pathway is quicker than the second pathway or 'high road'. What this means, essentially, is that we feel before we think.



### Le doux (1996)

Knowing this, it is important that when we become aware of an emotion, we need to 'think' before we decide what to do with that emotion. Is it appropriate? Do we need to express it? Can we control it? This in essence is emotional regulation. To help regulate emotions:

- ✓ Separate your 'self' from the emotion; I feel angry rather than I am angry.
- ✓ Study the physiology of the emotion. Why are you feeling this way?
- ✓ Use a ritual – like "Let it go" to cue you to relax.

## Quiet times & relaxation

If you feel overwhelmed, take time out and consciously relax yourself. You can do this through

- Removing yourself from the situation. If safe, go for a walk. If not, consider other alternatives (go to another room, have a shower).
- Trying the following relaxation exercises:



### Quick relaxation

1. Hunch your shoulders up, squeezing tight and then let them drop. Enjoy the feeling of release.
2. Close your eyes, smooth out the space between your eyebrows and let your face relax.
3. Take a deep breath in saying to yourself “Be”

Pause. Then as you breathe out say to yourself “Here”

Pause. Then say to yourself “Now”.

Repeat 3 times

### Longer relaxation

Sit quietly in a comfortable chair or lie down flat. Take a moment to become aware of your breathing. Slow down your breathing, right down. Repeat the word ‘relax’ each time you breathe out. Now visualise your whole body relaxing, starting with your head and moving through each body part down through to your feet. Allow your mind to drift to a peaceful and relaxing place. If anxious thoughts intrude just observe them and let them go. When calmed, bring yourself back to the room by listening to external sounds, then sounds inside the room including your own breathing. Gently move fingers and toes, then stretch and yawn.





## Self- Esteem, Self-confidence & Self-efficacy

“No-one can make you feel inferior without your consent” Eleanor Roosevelt

An important aspect of building our resilience is in building ourselves- our self-esteem and self confidence and our self efficacy. Self esteem is our emotional opinion about ourselves, how good we feel. Our self confidence is how we feel about how we will present ourselves, how we come across. Our self-efficacy is how we feel we will perform at a specific task.

We can build our self esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy through numerous ways each day. Some ways we can do this include;

**Challenge the bully within:** Often, the voice that is in our head can be very negative about our abilities. It helps to be aware of this voice and challenge it. Get the voice on side.

**Set and maintain boundaries:** The feeling that we are being used or disrespected eats away at our esteem and confidence. Knowing what our rights are, setting boundaries around those rights and then maintaining them is an important way to build esteem and confidence.

**Recognise wins, celebrate successes:** Take the time to acknowledge achievements throughout the day, even if they are small ones. Remember to celebrate meeting goals before we set up more.

**Don't disappoint yourself:** Transgressing your own moral boundaries, honouring bad habits, blaming others for not achieving- these all erode our esteem.

**Use helper's high-** helping others makes us feel better about ourselves.

**Keep an esteem file:** It takes one criticism to obliterate five compliments, so we need to keep a file of all the good things that people say about us or what we've done. Keep building it.

**GLOW:** Our minds are effected by the expression we have on our faces and the way we hold our body. If we are slumped or stooped, it tells our mind that we are feeling low and in need of protection. Instead, use the GLOW principles:

**Gaze-** keep your eyes up

**Lengthen-** stretch our your limbs and lengthen your height

**Other-** imagine there is another 'you' next to you. This gives you presence

**Winner-** adopt the facial expression of a winner.

**Build your self efficacy for coping:** Every time you choose your response to a stressor, you are building your self-efficacy for coping. If you know that you can cope with whatever life throws at you, you will be empowered and resilient. Keep in mind the wonderful Edelman quote:

**Whatever Happens, I will Cope**



## Books and resources

There are lots of materials, books and resources about resilience as well as general well-being.

Have a look at:

**The Hardiness Institute** *The institute is directed by Dr Maddi - a world leader on hardiness. He has co-authored a book "Resilience at Work" with Deborah Khoshaba.*

**The Happiness Institute** : *Led by Dr. Timothy Sharp, this institute focuses on personal happiness and wellbeing in the workplace.*

**ResilienceNet** : *This resource site brings together research on resilience from around the world, focusing mainly on resilience in children and youth.*

**Dr Robert Brooks & Dr Sam Goldstein** : *Dr Brooks & Goldstein collaborated to produce "The Power of Resilience", a book that offers practical resilience tips, particularly when dealing with ADHD sufferers.*

**APA Help Center:** *Hosted by the American Psychological society, this site offers tips and brochures about mental health, including resilience.*

**Authentic Happiness:** *Dr Martin Seligmann, former leader of the APA offers ideas and information for creating authentic happiness in your life.*

Books:

| <b>Author</b>                                  | <b>Title</b>                                 | <b>Date</b>                             | <b>Publisher</b>      |
|--|--|---|-----------------------|
| Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein                | The Power of Resilience                      | 2004                                    | Contemporary Books    |
| Antonio Damasio                                | Descartes' Error                             | 1994                                    | Quill                 |
| Martha Davis, Elizabeth Eshelman, Mathew McKay | The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook | 2000                                    | New Harbringer        |
| Sarah Edelman                                  | Change Your Thinking                         | 2002, 2006                              | ABC Books             |
| Viktor Frankl                                  | Man's Search for Meaning                     | First published 1946. This version 1984 | Pocket Books New York |
| Sonja Lyubomirsky                              | The How of Happiness                         | 2007                                    | Sphere                |
| Stephen Post & Jill Neimark                    | Why Good Things Happen to Good People        | 2007                                    | Broadway Books        |
| Ingrid Poulson                                 | RISE   | 2008                                    | Pan Macmillan         |
| Karen Reivich & Andrew Shatte                  | The Resilience Factor                        | 2002                                    | Broadway Books        |
| Martin Seligman                                | Learned Optimism                             | 1990                                    | Random House          |
| Al Siebert                                     | The Survivor Personality                     | 1996                                    | Perigee               |