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# Flipping over the coin: The truth about resilience

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The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it significant anxiety and fear about our health and the future. Many have experienced loss of jobs, loss of loved ones, loss of activities, loss of connections and loss of celebrations of achievements or rights of passage. Dr. Mark Horwitz of Westfield State University reminds us that on the other side of loss and trauma is resilience. In his words, resilience and trauma are “flip sides of a coin.” Here are a few reminders to help us flip the coin and move from trauma to resilience.

## **RECOGNIZE THE CHOICE**

Moving from trauma to resilience begins with an awareness that we have a choice. In the midst of loss, it is common to lose sight that we have a choice to flip over the coin. Viktor Frankl said, “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.” We always have the power to choose. When under threat; however, a part of the brain called the amygdala takes charge and propels us into automatic reactions designed to keep us safe.

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We must continually remind ourselves that we truly have a choice. When we remain aware of our ability to choose, we can respond in the space and slow down the automatic fight-or-flight reactions that come from the amygdala.

## **BUILD RESILIENCE THROUGH YOUR INNER VOICE**

Resilience comes from within us and the single most important factor in developing our capacity for resilience are the words we use inside our own heads. When we are under stress and forget that we have a choice in how we respond, our inner voice often talks to us as if we are a victim. We might think things like, “I’m powerless” or “I have to look out for myself because no one else will.” This results in behaviors based on fear, like isolation or hoarding, that are not helpful to overcoming trauma. In contrast, when we are aware of our ability to choose we can shift our words; “I have the power to make a difference,” “I

have been successful before and can be again,” “I am able to overcome.” Writing down and repeating positive “I am” or “I have” statements is one way to begin to train your inner voice.

## **STAY CONNECTED**

Another important factor in building resilience is our connections with others. Fear grows in isolation. Resilience grows within our relationships and connections with others. Trying to tackle significant challenges alone is a set up for failure. Being with others who have our best interests in mind, help us grow, and remind us we have choice, can help us develop a more accurate inner voice. If you do not have current relationships with family or friends, do not believe a victim inner voice that might tell you that you are alone. Instead, remember to reach out and find others to build connection with. Helpful places to begin include within a faith community, peer support groups, or therapy.



### **EXPRESS FEELINGS**

Many people mistakenly believe that being resilient means not experiencing negative feelings. When we experience loss and stress, it is a normal reaction to have feelings of grief and anxiety. Being resilient involves being aware of and giving ourselves permission to feel our feelings. We can start by acknowledging our feelings. You might say to yourself, "This situation scares me," or "I miss having my friends over for dinner, or going to the gym, or visiting my grandparents." It might help to think of your emotions as clouds passing through the sky—some of your emotional clouds will be dark and stormy, others will be like puffs of cotton candy. Both types of clouds can co-exist in the same sky at the same time. Likewise, we can grieve and celebrate in the same day. Use your positive inner voice to remind yourself that feelings are normal and temporary. Like clouds, they will be different tomorrow. If the dark clouds stay around too long or are impacting your ability to do your daily activities, be sure to reach out to someone for help.

### **HAVE COMPASSION FOR YOURSELF**

Being resilient does

not mean being perfect. Research shows self-compassion has the power to improve our daily life satisfaction, boost our physical health, and help us cope with stressful life events with greater resilience. Compassion is like fertilizer that allows us to grow and learn from our mistakes. Compassion for a "bad day" prevents it from becoming a "bad week." Practice self-compassion by having a conversation with yourself using the same words and tone you would use with a close friend or writing a short note of encouragement to yourself. Focus on what you can learn from a mistake or challenge rather than making assumptions or conclusions about what it means. Imagine how your mental health and self-image might improve if you had more self-compassion.

### **REMEMBER THE BASICS**

Another tool for remaining resilient goes back to the old advice we have all heard: get enough sleep, eat a balanced, healthful variety of food, and get exercise. These are all still relevant because a healthy body is connected to a healthy mind. Although some of these things may seem more difficult under the current situa-

tion we are all living in, this is an opportunity to be creative and try new things. Deep breathing and meditation are extremely helpful for reducing stress and allowing for refreshing, peaceful sleep. Despite the pandemic, good food is available from a number of resources including grocery stores, food pantries, and many nonprofit organizations, who have stepped up to make sure that our community is not going without food and other necessities. Taking a walk when the weather is nice and even turning on some music and dancing are all great ways to exercise and decrease anxiety. All of these lead to a stronger immune system, and that is the best defense against illness.

By practicing these steps, you can flip the coin and build resilience from within. We are creative, we are adaptable, and we can be resilient. Should you need assistance in the process, we are still open and are accepting new clients, keeping the health and safety of you and our staff as our top priority. Please call us at (603) 889-6147. We also have 24/7 Emergency Services available by calling 1-800-762-8191. For more information about any of our programs, you can also visit [www.gnmh.org](http://www.gnmh.org).

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