

Resilience-Building Strategies for Families Dealing with a Mental Illness

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Resilience means adapting in the face of adversity by building strengths and coping skills. For many, having a family member develop a mental illness is a very distressing occurrence and requires developing resilience.

Resilience is something everyone can strengthen, but it is also highly individual. What helps one person cope, such as creative expression or spirituality, may not be helpful for another person. Here are a few key facts about resilience:

- Building resilience can help you deal with life's unexpected challenges.
- Developing resilience helps protect against stress.
- You can learn to be resilient by becoming aware of your strengths and developing strategies to cope with stresses.

Common components of resilience include:

- Problem-solving skills
- Flexibility
- Sense of purpose
- Sense of humor
- Remaining calm under pressure
- Optimizing strengths in difficult situations
- Hope
- Using healthy coping skills
- Maximizing positive emotions
- Maximizing positive experiences
- Putting things in perspective
- Taking opportunities to grow and change

ASK YOURSELF ...

- What qualities of resilient people do you already have?
- What strengths have you shown in dealing with life challenges?
- What does resilience mean to you personally?

SUPPORTING RECOVERY FROM A MENTAL ILLNESS THROUGH RESILIENCE

Resilience will help you:

- Build your strengths.
- Feel more hopeful about the future.
- Feel more confident using stress-management techniques.
- Have backup strength when things look bleak.
- Look forward to a time when no one in the family is consumed with managing a psychiatric illness.

As a relative of someone with a mental illness, you can build your resilience by:

- Learning more effective coping strategies for stressful situations, like talking to a friend or taking a break.
- Practicing stress management techniques so you feel more comfortable using them under stress.
- Developing your support system by starting or resuming activities such as religious meetings or team sports.

In addition, you can do the following to help your family member with a mental illness build their own resilience:

- Reinforce their resilient qualities.
- Practice effective coping strategies with them.
- Support them as they take steps toward their goals.
- Learn strategies to help them cope more effectively with stress.
- Provide encouragement when it is difficult for them to see themselves as resilient.

ASK YOURSELF ...

- What would help you strengthen your resilience?
- Who could provide you with support?
- What form would that support take?

One way of shoring up resilience is by emphasizing personal strengths. Personal strengths are traits such as:

- Appreciation
- Civic-mindedness
- Curiosity
- Emotional intelligence
- Fairness
- Forgiveness
- Gratitude
- Honesty
- Hope
- Humility
- Humor
- Ingenuity
- Integrity
- Judgment
- Kindness
- Leadership
- Love of learning
- Love
- Passion
- Perseverance
- Perspective
- Prudence
- Self-control
- Spirituality
- Valor
- Zest

ASK YOURSELF ...

- Which of these personal strengths do you have?
- Which personal strengths do you see in other members of your family?

RESILIENCE STORIES

When confronted with new challenges, people often find it helpful to think about when they have been resilient in the past as a first step to building more resilience. Think back to stressful situations or events that you managed successfully. Resilience played an important role in those instances.

By telling yourself “resilience stories” and analyzing the process of overcoming adversity in your life, you can begin to discover the qualities and strengths that will help you be resilient in the future. Resilience stories:

- Reflect on a difficult experience in your life that you were able to overcome.
- Help you remember or discover resilient qualities within yourself.
- Provide hope so you can find ways to be resilient in your current situation.

To recall a resilience story, begin by thinking about an event in your life that challenged you.

ASK YOURSELF ...

- What happened in that event?
- Why was it difficult for you?
- How did you face the challenge?
- What do you admire about yourself for facing that challenge?
- What impact did the event have on your life?
- What were some of the first signs that you would overcome the challenge?
- What did you learn about yourself through the experience?
- How have you used this new information about yourself?

SUMMARY

- You can learn to be resilient by recognizing your strengths and using them and by developing additional strategies to cope with stress.
- Building resilience can help you feel more hopeful and confident about the future. You can build resilience by learning more effective coping strategies and using supportive resources that can help you achieve life goals.
- A resilience story is a recollection of a challenging experience that you had to face. Telling yourself and others this story can help you rediscover your strengths.

