

# Yes, you can Build Resilience. Here's How

*You've probably heard a lot lately about the importance of resilience, especially during the personal, social, and work-related challenges of the pandemic. While resilience is essential during a crisis, it's also vital for coping with everyday stressors like rush hour traffic, misunderstandings between friends, or a spilled glass of red wine.*

*Leigh Miller, LCSW, a psychiatric social worker at Kaiser Permanente in Southern California, shares what you need to know to build more resilience.*

## What is resilience, and why is it important?

Most people have heard the word resilience, but it's often misunderstood. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from challenging thoughts or experiences, but it's not about thinking positive or avoiding stress.

*"Being resilient means staying present during challenging moments and managing whatever emotions come up," Miller says. "It's not avoiding your feelings. It's leaning into them and confronting situations skillfully."*

Resilience is also a component of mental health. People who are less resilient have a harder time rebounding from challenges, worry, or anxiety, Miller says. They may shut down, become irritable, or turn to alcohol, smoking, or drugs to avoid their feelings.

A lack of resilience can also have physical effects, like insomnia, stomach problems, headaches, and muscle tension.

## Can you build resilience?

We're all born with some resilience, but everyone's level of resilience is different due to things like genetics and economic or social backgrounds. However, people can strengthen their resilience through coping tools and strategies they can turn to during challenging times.

*"Your resilience toolkit can help you manage the intensity of depression, anxiety, stress, or worry so it's more manageable" says Miller.*

## How to build resilience

### 1. Check in with your feelings

The first step in building resilience is learning what your different emotions look like — good and bad.

Throughout the day, ask yourself, "How am I feeling right now?" Follow up with, "What do I need?"

If you have a hard time describing your feelings, you're not alone.

*"People struggle to know how they're feeling because we're not taught how," says Miller.*

She recommends using a "feeling faces" chart, which shows different emotions. You can find a variety of styles for free online. Choose one that you connect with and save the image to your phone or computer. You can also print it out and put it where you'll see it often, like near your desk or on the refrigerator.

### 2. Ask for help

Resilience doesn't mean facing challenges alone. Know that it's OK to ask others for help when you're struggling.

It's easier to ask for help when you've nurtured relationships with family, friends, co-workers, or spiritual/religious leaders who can be your support system. But be wary of people who want to fix the situation without supporting you emotionally.

### 3. Make a list of your strengths

When you write down your strengths, you may discover traits you've overlooked. This list can be helpful when you're feeling down, dealing with a challenge, or focused on the negative.

This list could include things like:

I have a great sense of humor.  
I'm dependable.  
I take risks.

#### 4. Make a list of things that make you feel better

Sometimes stress makes you forget about all the external resources that can help you. Write them down so you can reference them when you need them.

Your resources could include:

- Meditation
- Going for a walk
- Journaling
- Doing laundry
- Cooking
- Affirmations
- Reading
- Listening to music

#### 5. Practice mindfulness

When our minds are in the past, we tend to become depressed and remorseful. And when we're thinking about the future, we tend to have more anxiety and fear, says Miller. Practicing mindfulness can help us stay in the present moment.

While mindfulness includes meditation, it can also be as simple as listening to the sound of water and noticing the feeling of soap as you wash your hands.

#### 6. Avoid comparisons to others

It's unfair to compare yourself to others, especially when it comes to social media.

*"With social media, it's the compare-and-despair trap," Miller says. "Our brain doesn't look for similarities; it looks for differences. So, if you're feeling down and see what people are sharing about their lives, you'll often see the things about your life that you don't like."*

If you're feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed, limit or avoid social media. Also be selective about who you follow. Choose people who mirror your values and reflect your strengths. And remember that what people post on social media isn't always an accurate picture of reality.

#### 7. Help others

Doing things for others helps us see that we're not the only ones who experience difficulties, so we can go through those times with more self-compassion. Also, studies show that helping others can reduce stress and increase happiness.<sup>2</sup>

Acts of kindness include things like volunteering at a homeless shelter or simply holding a door open for someone. Just try to show someone you care.

### **Resilience takes practice**

Resilience is hygiene for your emotional and mental health, Miller says.

*"Sometimes there's this idea that resilience is attained and then you're done," she adds. "But it's something we need to work on consistently."*

And part of that work is reminding yourself how strong you already are.

*"You've survived difficult things before," Miller says. "You can persevere. Even if it takes time, you will."*