

UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

LESSON 6

Reflection

“The power to change is already within you, ready to be discovered. Find new methods to deal with old routines. It is up to you to make the conscious choices that bring a better future.”

- Lynn C. Tolson, Trauma Survivor and Author

BRITE IDEAS

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

The American Psychological Association reports that resilience is “adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress”. *

- Resilience means “bouncing back” from difficult and very stressful experiences in childhood or adulthood. It means being protected from the most harmful effects of trauma.
- Resilience also means how we handle and react to the day-to-day stresses that are just a part of life.
- Resilience varies among people:
 - Some people react to a traumatic event with an overwhelming flood of negative feelings of fear, dread, loss, and confusion that lasts a long time and affects day-to-day living.
 - Some people have had supportive people, places and things in their life that helps them be more confident, react more calmly and bounce back from difficult experiences with less harmful outcomes.

*<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>

- Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn’t experience difficulty or stress. Emotional distress is common in individuals who have suffered major trauma in their lives. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve facing upsetting situations and trying out new ways of coping.
- Resilience is not an all or nothing strength. A person may be resilient in one situation but not in others.

In this lesson you will learn about the personal and outside resources that may help a person build resilience.

The **GOOD NEWS** is that people can build resilience. It takes time, effort and a willingness to learn and seek out opportunities to address painful life experiences.

WAYS TO BUILD RESILIENCE THAT MAY WORK FOR YOU

- BRITE is designed to support your choices and to help build resilience so that less energy is used to manage stress and more energy is directed to enjoying life and pursuing goals.

- Developing resilience is a personal journey. What works for one person might not work for another. People may choose different strategies that take into account their cultural, religious and personal beliefs, values and preferences.

Resiliency building strategies include:

- **Making Informed Decisions**
 - Learning the facts about stress and trauma; how it may affect people and how to build resilience helps a person make decisions that are more likely to work.
- **Taking Care of You**
 - **Staying physical healthy:** Consider increasing your physical activity, improving healthy eating habits and taking care of medical needs and conditions (regular physical exams, dental health, OB/GYN visit, vision and hearing care)
 - **Regulating stress:** Engaging in activities that are enjoyable, stress reducing and relaxing will improve your overall health (e.g., yoga, meditation, sports, dance and other body movement activities).
- **Strengthening Social Support**
 - Many studies have found that an important way to build resilience is to have caring and supportive relationships.
 - Having caring and trusting relationships protects a person from some of the most harmful effects of traumatic experiences.
 - Making the best use of the BRITE program and getting to know others in the group may also be an opportunity to strengthen and build resilience.
- **Developing Community Connections**
 - Some people find that being active in their community or cultural groups, religious organizations, or other resources helps to organize time, avoid

boredom and strengthen social support.

- **Know What Activates Negative Responses**
 - It may be helpful to identify those people, places, and things that may lead to harmful activities or set off strong negative feelings. By knowing what activates upsetting experiences, you can make decisions to stay well that work for you.
- **Set Goals for Yourself that are Meaningful**
 - Choosing, getting and keeping goals that increase your success and satisfaction helps to organize your day to day activities, focus your energy, build hope and increase self-confidence.
- **Take Action**
 - Taking an active role in addressing the impact of trauma in your life may be more helpful than detaching from problems and stressors or wishing they would just go away. (The Action Plan outline after each lesson provides you with guidance on turning what you learn into action.)
- **Develop Realistic and Positive Thinking**
 - A person's beliefs and thoughts may get in the way of making informed decisions. Negative thinking may keep a person from taking charge of their life. Challenging negative thoughts and focusing on the positive helps a person move forward.
- **Recognize and Focus on Your Strengths**
 - People who experience many disappointments, mental health and/or substance use difficulties may focus on personal weaknesses and problems and ignore their strengths. This program emphasizes the importance of recognizing and using your strengths to build resilience.

- **Recognize Insights and Self-Discovery Related to Trauma**

- People who have experienced trauma may find that they have developed a sensitivity to and empathy for the suffering and needs of others.
- Some people may begin to explore their spiritual side and develop a philosophy of life that makes it easier to let the past go and focus on the future.
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Some may decide to use their insights to

- help and advocate for others who are struggling
- educate the public and healthcare professionals
- select a career and job goal related to helping others
- Join advocacy organizations as a way of influencing policies affecting children and adults who have experienced traumatic life events.
- Some people find meaning in their traumatic experiences and demonstrate the power of self-healing and express it through creative activities in the form of art, dance, music, literature, poetry or drama.

It's very important to keep in mind that resilience is not just about the person's inner strengths but also about the person's environment- the people, places and things in a person's life that builds and supports their ability to cope with difficult situations. The BRITE program believes people are doing the best they can under the conditions and circumstances of their lives. No self-blame and no shame is the message in BRITE.

LET'S GET PERSONAL: As you read down the list, identify those actions and approaches that are true for you. These are your strengths! Your strengths form the foundation of self-healing. You may also use this worksheet to decide which resilience-building approaches you'd like to develop further.

WAYS TO BUILD RESILIENCE	True for me	I need to do more of this
Making Informed Decisions: Before I make important decisions I gather information through written materials and talking to people I trust.		
Staying physically healthy: I engage in healthy eating habits and taking care of medical needs and conditions (regular physical exams, dental health, OB/GYN visit, vision and hearing care)		
Regulating Stress: I engage in calming, recreational and/or physical activities that I enjoy and find relaxing that reduces my stress (e.g., meditation and breathing exercises, yoga, dance, body movement and other activities involving physical activities)		
Developing Realistic and Positive Thinking: I challenge my negative thinking and focus on positive thoughts and what's going right in my life (e.g., I remind myself that bad times will pass and that I can handle it)		
Taking Action: I usually take action to solve problems in my life (e.g., seek help when needed, gather information to make decisions, having confidence that time and effort will usually solve problems)		
Increasing Social Support: I work on developing good relationships with family members, friends and others that I trust and feel safe around. I have people in my life I can rely on during tough times.		
Establishing Community Connections- I get involved in my community (e.g., cultural groups, religious organizations, clubs, volunteer organizations or other resources).		
Knowing What Activates Upsetting Experiences: I understand what people, places and things set off strong negative feelings or increase my risk for engaging in harmful activities.		
Setting Goals for Myself that are Meaningful: I am able to choose, get and keep goals that are important to me.		
Recognizing and Focusing on My Strengths: I recognize and use my strengths to manage difficult and very stressful experiences.		
Recognizing Insights and Self-Discovery Related to Trauma: I try to find meaning and purpose in the what's happened to me such as having more empathy for others and expressing my feelings through creative activities such as art, dance, music, literature, poetry, drama or other creative efforts.		

LET'S DISCUSS:

- ◆ Who would like to share one way of building resilience that is true for you and/or one way of building resilience that you would like to develop further?

LET'S TAKE ACTION!

Consider taking one or more Action Steps to support your personal progress in areas that are important to you. The following action steps give you the opportunity to learn more about the topic, apply what you have learned, or take steps towards goals that are important to you. You may choose to use the outline below to keep track of your Action Step. Choosing to take an Action Step is completely up to you.

A. I plan to take the following Action Steps - Check all that apply.

- Re-reading the lesson on my own or with others
- Gather more information on the topic (internet, library, healthcare professional)
- Discussing this topic with my counselor/therapist/doctor
- Discussing this topic with a another group member/peer/friend/family member
- Write down my thoughts and feelings about this topic in a diary or journal

B. Apply what I learned from the 'Let's Get Personal' Worksheet:

- I want to improve: _____
 - My first step is to: _____
 - When _____ Where _____ With whom _____

C. This topic motivated me to work on one of my important life goals:

- My goal: _____
 - My first step is to: _____
 - When _____ Where _____ With whom _____

Affirmation

I can learn about resilience and begin to use that knowledge to build my ability to handle past and current difficulties. I have the opportunity, support and ability to gain knowledge about resilience and take steps to improve the quality of my life! I deserve to enjoy life and live it to its fullest!