Strategies to Promote Emotional Resilience

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What is Resilience?

Dictionary definitions

• Originates from the Latin ‘resilire’ (to leap back)

  (i) 1. able to recoil or spring back into shape after bending, stretching, or being compressed;

  2. (of a person) able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions

  (ii) 1. (of a person) recovering easily and quickly from misfortune or illness;

  2. (of an object) capable of regaining its original shape or position after bending or stretching
What does resilience involve

• Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary
• People commonly demonstrate resilience, e.g. the response of many Americans to 11 September 2001 and individuals' efforts to rebuild their lives
• Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress
• Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives
• The road to resilience lies in working through the emotions and effects of stress and painful events

Source: www.apa.org
What is stress?

• Stress is our emotional and physical response to pressure

• A state of stress exists when there is a mismatch between how a person perceives the demands being placed on them and how they perceive their ability to cope with those demands

• Stress can arise from external factors including life events, work, illness, home, family, relationships, lack of some necessity, or the demands we place on ourselves

• Resilience is a fundamental quality that mediates the impact of stress and enables an individual to survive, thrive and flourish
The Cognitive and Behavioural Model of Stress
Common **thoughts** when feeling stressed

- This is too much - I can't cope!
- It's unfair. Someone should be helping me
- I haven't got enough time
- I'll never finish
- I must get this done...
Feelings/emotions and physical sensations when stressed

Feelings/emotions
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Tiredness/irritability
- Mood swings, emotional outbursts
- Anxiety
- Impatience
- Anger
- Hopelessness

Physical sensations
- Aches, pains, muscle tension
- Diarrhoea/constipation
- Nausea, dizziness, butterflies in the stomach
- Chest pain/rapid heartbeat
- Frequent colds
Behaviour

- Reduced quality of work
- Lots of unfinished things on the go
- Disputes with work colleagues
- Indecisiveness, poor concentration and poor judgement
- Poor timekeeping
- Reduced motivation, self determination, drive
- Sleep disturbance

- Increased sick leave
- Avoidance of difficult situations
- Working late, taking work home, missing deadlines
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Eating more (or less)
- Nervous habits (nail biting, pacing)
- Crying
The vicious cycle of stress

Too much work

Work late
  - Take work home
  - Sleep badly

I can’t cope!
  - I haven’t enough time

Feel overwhelmed

Headache
Irritability
Resentment
The body’s reaction to stress

• The brain is on the look out for anything that threatens to upset its equilibrium - if there are serious ‘stressors’ around, it triggers off an ‘alarm reaction’

• The alarm reaction prepares the body for action - known as the ‘fight or flight reaction’

• Stress hormones are released ...
Why is resilience important?

*Resilience is a core competency for stress management.* Resilient people:

- Have lower levels of depression
- Develop personally as a result of adversity
- Harness inner strength that helps them *rebound*
- Respond better to unfavourable feedback
- Make more positive judgements about others
- Are more productive
- Have happier work and home lives
- Have a better quality of life, health and longevity

*Source: Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005; Robertson & Cooper (2013)*
How resilient are you?

• Do you keep a positive attitude during difficult situations?
• Do you have skills to help you relax and manage stress?
• Do you have a network of people who offer you support?
• Do you take good care of yourself?
• Do you keep your eyes on the big picture even in challenging situations?
What the research tells us about resilience

- Resilience is not a fixed characteristic, it can be learnt.
- How we see things – our perception of events – is central to our level of resilience.
- We are not all alike; the different situations in which we find ourselves affect us in different ways.
- As individuals, we can build an awareness of the situations in which we are least resilient and focus our efforts on developing personal resilience there.
Strategies to improve resilience

- Business psychologists Robertson Cooper have developed a model of resilience built on the latest research evidence.
- Each component encompasses various aspects of personality, behaviours and skills:
  - Confidence
  - Social support
  - Purposefulness
  - Adaptability
Key characteristics of resilience 1

Confidence/Self-efficacy
Having a strong sense of self-worth, being self-reliant and having confidence in your ability to solve problems is important for resilience.
Knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are and that you can rely on your strengths to cope can provide a sense of mastery when things get difficult.

Adaptability
People who can deal with ambiguity, think flexibly, recognize thinking errors and ‘reframe’ unhelpful, negative or inaccurate thoughts are more resilient. As are those who face challenge reflectively rather than reactively.

Source: www.robertsoncooper.com
Key characteristics of resilience 2

Purposefulness

Having a sense of purpose involves healthy expectations, motivation, persisting in the face of difficulty and a sense of hopefulfulness about the future.

Research shows that having a sense of meaning and purpose in what we do and what we spend our time on provides us with a foundation that allows us to be more resilient in the face of stress and adversity.

It is associated with higher levels of happiness and satisfaction and lower rates of depressive symptoms.

Source: www.robertsoncooper.com
Social support

- High levels of social support are associated with good health.
- People with high emotional awareness who understand their own emotions tend also to be high on empathy - the ability to read and understand the emotions of others.
- **This is important for resilience because it helps us to build relationships with others - this then gives us social support.**
- High levels of social support are associated with good health and foster adaptive coping strategies. Practise asking for help and be receptive when it is offered.
- Maintain high-quality relationships by telling people how much you value their support.
- Return favors and thoughtfulness - the principle of reciprocity.
Perspective

• The ‘Oxford Bubble'
  • The pressure to be perfect
• All or nothing thinking
  • Undermining satisfaction and self-esteem
• Management of work / life balance
• Self agency
  • Need to take some degree of control
• Perspective of time
Managing negative thoughts

‘From thoughts come actions. From actions come all sorts of consequences. In which thoughts will we invest? Our great task is to see them clearly, so that we can choose which ones to act on and which simply to let be’ (Joseph Goldstein)

When you become aware of negative thoughts, pause and consider the following possibilities:

- Perhaps I am confusing thought with fact?
- Perhaps I am jumping to conclusions?
- Perhaps I am thinking in black-and-white terms?
- Perhaps I am blaming myself for something that isn't my fault?
- Perhaps I am judging myself?
- Perhaps I am setting unrealistically high standards for myself, so that I will fail?
- Perhaps I am expecting perfection?  (Source Fennell, 1989)
Self-Care

- There are many things we cannot change in our lives, but by becoming aware of those activities which nourish us, we can consciously use them as tools to help us balance our lives and reduce stress.

- The different activities that we engage in can have powerful effects on our mood and general well-being.

- Engaging in multiple enjoyable activities is associated with better psychological and physiological functioning.

- "One of the most promising ways to increase well-being is to engage in valued and enjoyable activities.”

Mazzucchelli et al (2010)
Bear in mind…

• Being resilient does not mean that you won’t experience difficulty or stress

• Resilience means that in dealing with challenging life demands you will cope better

• That when an adverse situation cannot be resolved you will be able to continue living with it more competently - and with less pain and stress
QUESTIONS