

FINDING RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

These are stressful times. We're navigating impactful, ongoing stressors, such as the pandemic, on a daily basis. When events that trigger deep emotions – anxiety, grief, outrage – occur against this backdrop, it can challenge our coping abilities. The most recent incidents of racial injustice that have unfolded over the past year are an example of this. Now we face multiple trials being held to determine the accountability of the police officers involved in one of the incidents, the death of George Floyd. These events, and the uncertainty of how they will play out and impact life going forward, can trigger an intense mix of thoughts and feelings.

In times of uncertainty, it's especially important to have strategies for managing stress. Finding and building your natural resilience can help you manage on a day-to-day basis. Resilience is the ability to adapt in the face of difficulty. Being resilient doesn't mean you don't feel stress. It does make it more likely that you'll be able to manage that stress and find balanced ways to respond. How can you encourage a resilient mindset?

Honor your emotions

There's no right or wrong way to feel, nor is there one right or wrong way to feel better. There are rarely easy answers to our many tough questions. The stress you feel tells you that this matters to you. It can feel necessary to hold onto anger. You may need to grieve, cry or vent. You may feel apprehensive about outcomes, and yet you may also have some hopeful feelings. Everyone will have their own experience. It's okay to be where you are right now.

Acknowledge, allow, and express your feelings.

Holding emotions in doesn't allow us to process and manage them. They can become overwhelming. Journaling your thoughts, feelings, and concerns or talking about them with others can be a useful way to reflect on what you're feeling and why. You may have a creative outlet that can help you express your feelings.

Give yourself permission to take an emotional time out.

If you notice that your emotions are becoming unmanageable, the technique of intentionally shifting to a neutral focus for a time may be of help. This may be doing a physical activity, reading words of inspiration, connecting with others, or something else that works for you. Taking time out doesn't mean you don't care, nor will it change your personal experience, it's simply a way to bring stress levels down.

Shift your mindset

Give yourself support with structure. Large blocks of unstructured time can tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around things that are not within your control. This can make what's happening feel even more upsetting. Routines and a normal schedule can help you feel more balanced.

Focus on what you can control. The information we take in, along with our own thoughts and experiences, can trigger a hard-wired stress response and feelings of powerlessness. Focusing on what's within your control is a cognitive behavioral approach that can help you feel more grounded. Ask yourself, "What's within my control today?" It may be a move you can make related to the events that are unfolding. Or it may just be a small, intentional action you can do in this moment... turning off the newsfeed, doing the dishes, taking a calming walk outdoors.

Bring thoughts to the present. In uncertain times, it's easy to dwell on "what if" thoughts. These tend to highlight worst case scenarios and increase worry. Being able to reset to the "here and now," a mindfulness technique, can help you feel more resilient. Take time in the day to stop and take a few slow, deep breaths. As you do, bring your attention to the present. Notice the world around you using all your senses. Allow yourself to just be in the grace of this moment.

Practice resilient actions

Monitor media use. The repetition of alarming details and images can be emotionally exhausting and re-traumatizing. Notice how you are impacted by news coverage and limit viewing as needed. You might try setting a timer to put boundaries around social media scrolling. Be sure to use multiple sources to gather information and vet them carefully to get information that's accurate and complete. Continue to be aware of directives from state and local authorities related to safety in your area.

Consider how you could respond in a meaningful way. Finding ways to address challenges can give you a way forward instead of feeling at the mercy of the situation. Learning what's possible can be empowering. You might take this time to explore the history of systemic racism and the movements and organizations that have and continue to work for change. This may offer ideas for what could make a positive difference in this moment. Supporting others can also be a meaningful way forward. That may be lending a hand to an individual or joining a public show of solidarity.

Lean in to your support network. Being connected with others can create a safety net that helps to cushion the stress of uncertainty. Understanding and encouragement from friends, family and the community can make you feel stronger and more prepared to manage what comes. Others also bring different perspectives to the issues, giving you a broader base from which to navigate what's happening. Asking for help or support is a sign of strength.

Use the mind/body connection to reduce anxiety.

Anticipating and imagining difficulty ahead can hold us in a constant state of tense worry. Releasing tension in your body can help reduce this mental tension. Relaxation techniques, such as slow, deep breathing or meditation may be helpful. These gentle techniques can help you get control over the physical symptoms of anxiety and calm your thoughts.

Take care of yourself. Make sure you get enough rest, eat a healthy diet, and have some type of physical activity in your day. It can be easy to forget that these are essential ways to feel more resilient. Avoid overuse of alcohol and/or the use of substances for coping.

Remember your strength

During times of uncertainty and challenge it can be hard to know how we will manage. Keep reminding yourself of the strength that is within you that has helped you go on when life has been difficult.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help.

If you're struggling with your thoughts and feelings, you may want to seek help or support services. Your EAP can help you get connected. We're available 24/7.

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