

Bouncing Back



Staying resilient
through
the challenges
of life

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How resilient



Synonyms:

adaptable, buoyant, elastic,
flexible, optimistic, proactive, resilient,
responsive, take-charge.

ent are you?

Every day, we face challenges that test our resilience. You may face challenges at work or in your personal relationships. You may face the challenge of raising young children or teenagers. Maybe you are caring for an aging family member. You may have financial worries or be going through a divorce. You may be taking on the challenge of a bigger job with more responsibilities. You may have lost a relative recently or be in a time of transition in your life, with friends moving away or a child leaving home.

Through all of these challenges and transitions—both positive and negative—you still have to stay focused at work and at home and take care of yourself and the people you love. That's easier to do the stronger and more resilient you feel.

According to the National Centenarian Awareness Project, which studies people in the U.S. who have made it to their 100th birthday, there are key characteristics that stand out among men and women this age. They have a positive yet realistic attitude, an adventurous love of life, a strong will, spiritual beliefs, an ability to renegotiate life when necessary, and a sense of humor. They are resilient.

How can you develop some or all of these attributes? How can you learn to adopt a positive attitude and be more hopeful and resilient? How can you develop coping skills that will see you through life's ups and downs? The purpose of this booklet is to help you find answers to these and other questions.

First, take a moment to answer the questions below.



HOW RESILIENT ARE YOU?

The first step in becoming more resilient is to look at your life and how you handle stress, problems, and hardship. Where do you feel weak and where do you feel strong in your life? Check the answer that best describes you.

1.

I feel a sense of purpose in my work or personal life.

YES NO NOT SURE

2. My view of the world is pretty positive.

YES NO NOT SURE

3. I have time for things I enjoy, like being outdoors or being with people I care about.

YES NO NOT SURE

4. When I'm faced with a big problem, I usually come up with a solution.

YES NO NOT SURE

5. When I need help from a friend, relative, or co-worker, I ask for it.

YES NO NOT SURE

6. I take care of myself. I get enough rest and exercise and I eat balanced meals.

YES NO NOT SURE

7. I feel like I'm growing. I'm learning new things and facing new challenges.

YES NO NOT SURE

8. I adapt pretty well to change.

YES NO NOT SURE

9. My life feels busy and active in a good way.

YES NO NOT SURE

10. When I'm stressed, I have things I do to help reduce my stress.

YES NO NOT SURE

See the next page for an explanation of what your answers mean.

How resilient you feel on any given day is a sum of all that's going on in your life—the pressures and responsibilities you face at work and at home, and how you handle all of those demands. Do you take care of yourself? Are you able to put things in perspective? Do you have the support you need so that you are able to cope well with the challenges you face?

IF YOU ANSWERED “YES” TO NINE OR TEN OF THE QUESTIONS ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE, YOU’RE PROBABLY A VERY RESILIENT PERSON. You probably deal well with challenge and adversity. (Chances are, you’ll keep reading, since resilient people tend to be curious. Who knows what you might learn?)

IF YOU ANSWERED “YES” TO SEVEN OR EIGHT OF THE QUESTIONS, YOU’RE PROBABLY A PRETTY RESILIENT PERSON. But there may be parts of your life where you could become more resilient. On the pages that follow you’ll find positive steps you can take and skills you can acquire to help you feel stronger and more in control of things.

IF YOU ANSWERED “YES” TO SIX OR FEWER OF THE QUESTIONS, YOU MAY BE FEELING OVERWHELMED OR UNDER A LOT OF STRESS, AND THESE FEELINGS MAY BE AFFECTING YOUR ABILITY TO BOUNCE BACK. On the pages that follow you’ll find positive steps you can take and skills you can acquire to help you feel more resilient and to help you handle the challenges you are facing. You might also benefit from talking with a professional about what’s going on in your life.

As you read through this booklet and begin to try out some of its suggestions, you should start to see improvement in your resilience. Answer these questions again a month from now to see how you are doing.

Ten ways to b



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Staying resilient is like staying in shape—some are born lucky, but most of us have to work at it. Look back to the quiz on page four. After which statements did you answer “No” or “Not sure”? These are the areas in your life where you may be more or less resilient and where you’ll want to focus your efforts. For example, how well do you handle change (question eight)? Do you take care of yourself (question six)? Do you call on others when you need support (question five)?

On the following pages you’ll find tips and advice to help you work on your outlook and attitude, and on your coping and problem-solving skills—all the areas covered in the quiz.

I. Find a sense of purpose and commitment.

Studies show that resilient people have a passion or purpose that nourishes and sustains them. Look back to how you responded to the first statement on page four, “*I feel a sense of purpose in my work or personal life.*” Do you feel committed to your family, work, friendships, and activities you are involved in outside of work? Here are some ways to build a sense of purpose and commitment into your life:

USE CHALLENGING LIFE EVENTS TO STOP AND THINK ABOUT YOUR CHOICES AND TO ASK FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS. Sometimes it takes a major life event like an illness to make us stop and think about our choices and priorities. Smaller challenges are a time to stop and think, too—about career and family priorities, how you spend your time, how your life could feel better, richer, or more meaningful.

IDENTIFY YOUR FOCUS FOR THE NEXT WEEK OR MONTH. Purpose and commitment sound like lofty words, but they don’t have to be. Your focus for the next week or so could be something as basic as, “I’m going to spend more time with my father because he’s ill.”

DO VOLUNTEER WORK. Help in a soup kitchen. Join a committee at school. Become a Big Brother or Big Sister. Eleanor Roosevelt said that most of the good work in the world is done by people who weren’t feeling all that good at the time. Volunteer work can give you a sense of purpose and make you feel stronger.

COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE: “If money were no object and I had all the time in the world, I would . . . Travel more? Paint? Work with disabled children?” Figure out how to translate your big dreams into action. A big trip may not be possible, but you could take a weekend trip to a place you’ve never been. You could enroll in a painting class at night, or help out at a school for disabled children.

LOOK FOR ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF WORK THAT BRING YOU A SENSE OF PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT, SATISFACTION, OR FULFILLMENT. Those activities can sustain you, especially during periods when your work may not feel as fulfilling or satisfying as you might like.

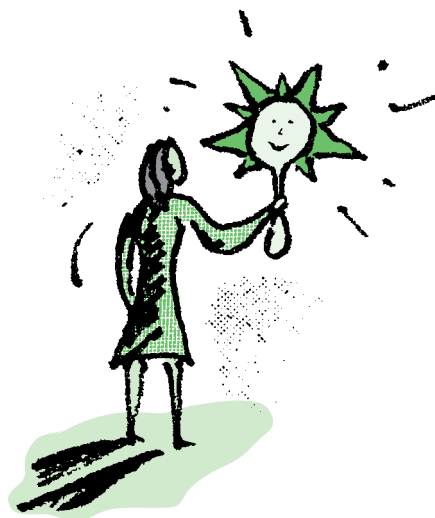
2. Have a positive outlook.

Look back to page four to see how you responded to the statement, “*My view of the world is pretty positive.*” Resilient people tend to have a positive outlook and to see life as filled with challenges rather than defeats. They see difficulties as temporary. Optimism is a skill you can learn.

TELL YOURSELF, “I’M GOING TO FEEL BETTER.” Tell yourself, “Things are going to get better.”

FOCUS ON THE PART OF YOUR LIFE THAT FEELS GOOD TODAY. One day, things may not be going well at work, but something wonderful may be happening with your relationship. Focus on your relationship that day. Another day, things may not be going well at home, but you may feel good about your work. What is going well? Focus on that.

LIMIT NEGATIVE AND SELF-DEFEATING THOUGHTS. Thoughts like, “It’s terrible and I can’t do anything about it,” or “I’m trapped in a bad situation,” wear down your resilience. Instead, ask yourself, “What would make things better? What can I do *today* to improve my outlook? What’s my first step?” Focus on the positive—on an upcoming visit with a close friend or on the things that your relative with a chronic illness can still do rather than the things that he can no longer do. “You probably cannot simply will yourself to be an optimist,” writes Dr. Michael Craig Miller, editor of *The Harvard Mental Health Letter*. “But you can achieve a sunnier disposition if you recognize your gloomy mood, seek help when you need it, and make meaningful physical and mental activity a more prominent part of your life.”



AVOID WASTING ANGER OR NEGATIVE ENERGY ON TRIVIAL THINGS. Try not to let small annoyances affect your mood. In the broader scheme of things, how important is that small dent in the fender, the argument you had with a friend, or a recent disappointment at work?

SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE YOU LIKE AND DOING THINGS YOU LIKE TO DO. Plan something today that you can look forward to.

USE HUMOR TO HELP YOU SEE THE POSITIVE. Look for what's funny and amusing in a situation. Laugh more. Spend time with funny people.

DEPRESSION AND RESILIENCE

About 10 percent of people suffer from depression. Depression is an illness that in many ways feels like the opposite of resilience. Its symptoms include

- *loss of energy*
- *loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities*
- *difficulty concentrating, coping, or making decisions*
- *persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment (such as chronic pain or digestive disorders)*
- *feeling sad, lonely, or unhappy*
- *thoughts of death or suicide*

You can take a confidential depression screening test online at the National Mental Health Association Web site at www.nmha.org. Or talk with your doctor or health care provider if you have concerns. If you have thoughts of death or suicide, seek help immediately.

Depression is highly treatable. Many people who live with depression are resilient and are able to maintain their resiliency with help and treatment. If you are suffering from depression, contact your health care provider.

Most resilient people have interests and hobbies, whether it's knitting, fishing, bowling, reading, hiking, or some other activity. If you've let a favorite pursuit go by the wayside, consider taking it up again.

3. Take pleasure in the small joys of life.

How did you respond to the statement, *"I have time for things I enjoy, like being outdoors or being with people I care about"*? Do you take the time to love your family and friends? To kiss them goodbye? The small joys of life are what renew us, give us peace, and keep us feeling strong. They also sustain us during times of crisis and challenge. Put a symbol of your small joys on your desk, bureau, or kitchen table as a constant reminder. Circle two small joys from the list below that you're going to schedule time for tomorrow, or write down small joys that aren't on the list and schedule time for those. Make time for small joys such as

- taking a solitary walk in the park or on the beach
- watching a pretty sunset
- laughing out loud
- reading a bedtime story to your child
- watching a movie with your teenager
- doing a quilting project
- working in your garden
- listening to the birds on your way to work
- going fishing
- eating ice cream
- cooking
- reading until you fall asleep
- having a day with no "agenda"
- playing tag with your grandchild
- spending time with your adult child
- getting a massage
- talking with friends and co-workers
- taking your child to the playground
- having lunch with a co-worker
- visiting a relative or friend

4. Take an active approach to solving your problems.

“When I’m faced with a big problem, I usually come up with a solution.” How did you respond to this statement? Resilient people have an ability to negotiate and renegotiate life. That means being able to anticipate problems and find solutions. Here are some steps to take to successfully tackle problems:

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM. Writing down and defining what the problem is on paper is often helpful. Project Resilience—a private organization in Washington D.C. that consults to schools, clinics, and prevention agencies—conducted a study of resilient adults who had grown up in conditions of poverty, neglect, abuse, and addiction. In answer to the question, “How did you do it?”, many said they relied on writing to help them face problems and gain insight into their lives. Try writing about your challenges. Keep a journal and use it to write down your goals, milestones, and when things are bothering you.

REMEMBER THAT SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OFTEN INVOLVE BRINGING IN OTHER PEOPLE TO HELP. Seek input from knowledgeable people who can provide you with resources, information, and ideas.

ACT. Don’t deny your problems, ignore them, or let them linger and weigh on your mind. Taking action will help you feel stronger, more in control of your life, and more resilient.

USE SOME OF THE SKILLS YOU’VE LEARNED AT WORK TO HELP YOU MANAGE YOUR PERSONAL LIFE. At work, you tackle a problem by gathering information and resources and by breaking big tasks into defined and manageable steps. Use some of those same skills to handle problems at home.

FIND WAYS TO SIMPLIFY AND ORGANIZE YOUR LIFE SO THAT THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES YOU ARE FACING ARE MANAGEABLE. Problems and challenges can leave you feeling drained and less resilient. Look for things you can do to feel less overwhelmed. You might spend weekend time organizing and simplifying to make things easier for the week ahead. If you are caring for young children and a relative with a chronic illness, use Sunday nights to get your life together for the week ahead. Put out your children’s clothes for the next five days, be sure there’s food for everyone’s lunches, and review the family calendar so you know where everyone has to be and when.

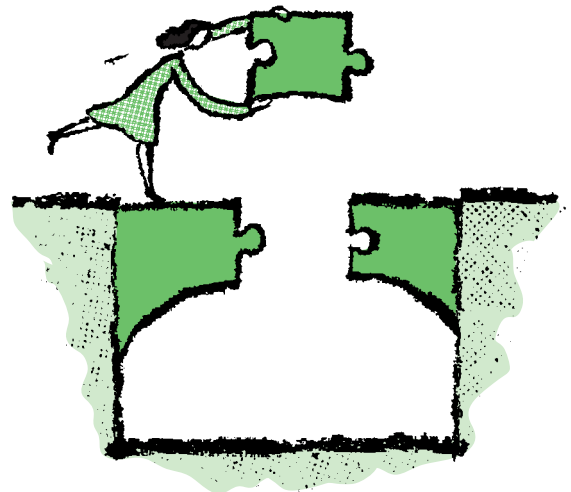
“We learn wisdom from failure much more than from success. We often discover what will do by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery.”

—Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1849)

TRY TO FOCUS ON THE THINGS THAT YOU HAVE CONTROL OVER. For example, if you are caring for a relative with a chronic illness, you have control over your thoughts and emotions when you are away from your relative. Try to put aside sad thoughts about your relative while you are at work. If you focus on your job and the things you do have control over, you may feel better and your problems may not seem so overwhelming. You can also influence whether you have breaks from caregiving when you aren't at work. Do you have backup help so you can take a break? How can you get that backup help if you don't currently have it?

TRY NEW APPROACHES IF YOUR USUAL APPROACH ISN'T WORKING. The more flexible you are, the more resilient you'll be. Be willing to change game plans if the plan you're following isn't working or if a better one presents itself.

LOOK BACK TO HOW YOU SUCCESSFULLY HANDLED OTHER SETBACKS AND CHALLENGES. Ask yourself, “How did I get through it? How can that knowledge help me now?” Don't dwell on past mistakes and disappointments.



5. Rely on and help others.

Asking for help is hard for many of us. How did you respond to the statement, “*When I need help from a friend, relative, or co-worker, I ask for it*”? Do you ask a good friend for advice when you need it? Do you ask a co-worker or your manager for support when you are feeling overloaded? If your child is having a problem do you ask for support from the teacher? Paying attention to what you need and asking for help is a sign of resourcefulness and strength, not weakness.

TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH WITH OTHERS. Be there for people you care about and they’ll be there for you.

LEARN FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN THROUGH WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH. Don’t wait for someone to call you. Be the initiator.

GET USED TO ACCEPTING HELP. If you are going through a difficult time and a neighbor or friend offers help with meals or rides, allow yourself to accept the help. Sometimes you have to recognize this as an issue and practice saying yes.

JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP. Support groups can be a tremendously helpful way to get through hard times. There are support groups for overcoming alcohol or drug addiction; for coping with grief, loss, divorce, or chronic illness; for help with family problems and other issues.

6. Take care of yourself.

You can't be resilient, no matter how hard you work at it, if you don't take care of yourself. If you're physically exhausted or overextended emotionally, it's twice as hard to get through difficult times. Look back to see how you responded to statement six: *"I take care of myself. I get enough rest and exercise and I eat balanced meals."* Most of us need to focus more energy on taking care of ourselves. Here are some suggestions:

SCHEDULE A CHECKUP IF YOU HAVE NOT SEEN YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER WITHIN THE LAST YEAR.

TAKE YOUR VACATION DAYS OR PERSONAL DAYS FROM WORK. A recent study shows that one in four people don't take their full vacation time each year. Plan an activity or something to look forward to on your time off from work.

GET EXERCISE. Studies show that resilient people exercise more than other people.

KEEP YOUR LIFE SIMPLE. Plan simple meals. Resist signing up for too many activities and committees. Don't be afraid to say "no."

LIMIT HOW MUCH CAFFEINE AND ALCOHOL YOU DRINK.

STICK TO WHAT SOME EXPERTS CALL THE "80/20" RULE IN YOUR EATING. If 80 percent of what you eat is healthy—with a nutritious, low-fat mix of vegetables, fruit, and grains—then you can allow yourself to eat what you want for the remaining 20 percent.

PAY EXTRA ATTENTION TO TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF WHEN TIMES ARE DIFFICULT. Studies show that we run a greater risk of getting sick during stressful life events. Watch your health carefully if you are experiencing a stressful life event such as a separation, a job change, or the death of a relative or friend.

TAKE TIME TO RECOVER. Just as you need time to recover from a physical illness, you also need time to recover when you experience emotional setbacks or losses. Think about how you recover from a cold or a case of the flu: you rest and take care of yourself. You need to do the same when you are recovering emotionally. When your emotional resilience is worn down, you need to pay extra attention to getting enough rest, eating balanced meals, making time for relaxation, and seeking support from the people you love.

7. Keep learning and growing.

“I feel like I’m growing. I’m learning new things and facing new challenges.” How did you respond to that statement? When was the last time you tried something new?

BRANCH OUT. Eat new foods, visit places you’ve never been, meet new people, learn something new, like how to play the piano. Pursue new interests.

LEARN NEW SKILLS TO PERFORM WELL AT YOUR JOB—AND KEEP ON LEARNING.

Learning new skills makes you feel more competent and capable and will help you recapture some of the excitement that may be missing for you from work. Be flexible about taking new assignments. Learn a new computer or technical skill. Identify something new you can start learning next week or month.

ASK YOURSELF IF YOU ARE “STUCK IN YOUR WAYS.” The next time you attend a meeting for work, school, or a community group, ask yourself, “Am I open to new ideas?”

SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE YOUNGER AND OLDER THAN YOU ARE. There is much to learn from people of all ages.

STOP YOURSELF FROM THINKING AND SAYING, “I’M TOO OLD TO . . .” “I’m too old to ride a bike . . . learn a new language . . . try yoga.”

REMEMBER THAT THE MORE CHALLENGING A SITUATION IS, THE MORE YOU CAN LEARN FROM IT. Every life challenge provides learning opportunities and a chance to grow. Adversities such as a major illness, a job loss, or a painful breakup force you to examine your values and reevaluate your priorities and personal relationships. Most of the time, relationships are richer and goals are much clearer following a crisis or challenge.

“ . . . the fastest way to change is to laugh at your own folly—then you can let go and quickly move on.”
—Dr. Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese?*

8. Be ready for change.

The ability to handle change is a key survival skill of all resilient people. Just as the seasons change, our lives change constantly, too.

TRY TO ANTICIPATE CHANGE AND LOOK AHEAD TO SEE WHAT'S COMING. That way you'll be prepared for the next change when it happens.

MAKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO STAY FLEXIBLE. Try these “flexibility” exercises:

- Take a different route to work, home, or the store. If your spouse or partner is driving and takes a different route than you'd take, enjoy the ride and don't complain.
- Turn off the TV. Watching television puts your brain in “neutral.” For your brain to stay flexible, it needs to keep stretching and growing.
- When you catch yourself saying “no” to an invitation, say “yes” instead.
- Learn a new sport or game.

REALIZE THAT THE ONLY REAL WAY TO CHANGE IS TO DO SOMETHING MORE THAN ONCE. For example, if you want to change your habits and get more exercise, you have to keep at it week after week until this change becomes part of your routine.

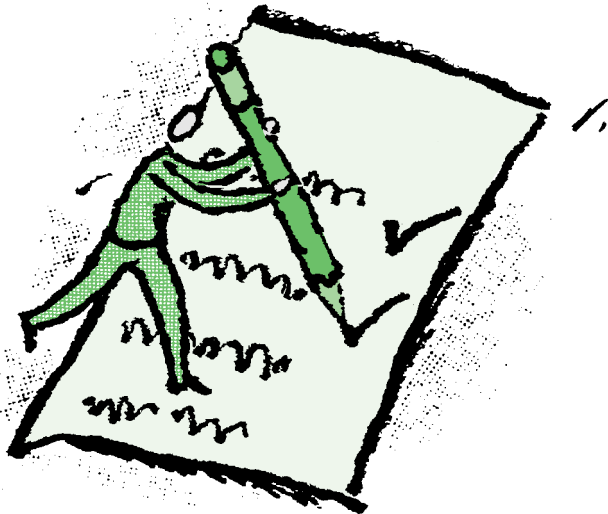
9. Be a doer, not a complainer.

The primary way people bounce back is by doing things. How did you respond to the statement, “*My life feels busy and active in a good way*”?

GET INVOLVED. Enroll in a class or volunteer to help a friend, neighbor, or relative in need.

TELL YOURSELF, “I’M GOING TO TAKE THIS STEP.” Remind yourself that resilience is about taking charge. Start with the small step you can take right away, rather than waiting to take the big step and maybe never getting to it. For example, spend an hour every week on a big cleanup project that’s been making you feel guilty.

PLAN THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO. Work on a plan for today, tomorrow, next week. An 80-year-old grandmother, recently widowed, coped with aging and loneliness by planning one thing to do every day. That gave her something to look forward to.



Surveys show that 75 to 90 percent of visits to primary care physicians are for stress-related complaints.

—The American Institute of Stress

IO. Work on reducing stress in your life.

“When I’m stressed, I have things I do to help reduce my stress.” How did you answer the question about stress? Most of us are familiar with the classic symptoms of stress: sleep problems; trouble concentrating; headaches, stomachaches, neck, shoulder, or back pain; heart palpitations; lack of energy. But are you aware of the negative “spillover” stress can have on your personal relationships, your home life, and your ability to cope with everyday activities?

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE PROGRAMS AND BENEFITS YOUR COMPANY OFFERS TO HELP YOU REDUCE STRESS AND BALANCE THE DEMANDS OF YOUR WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE.

TRY TO PINPOINT WHAT’S CAUSING YOUR STRESS. Identify the problem or source of your stress. Sometimes we feel sad and are not sure why. Identifying what is truly bothering you is half the battle.

MAKE AN EFFORT TO SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE UNDER A LOT OF STRESS OR ARE RECOVERING FROM A CRISIS. Drop commitments you’re able to drop that deplete you.

FIND WAYS TO RELIEVE TENSION. Try relaxing your shoulders when you’re tense. Roll your shoulders forward and then back in a rotating motion. Enroll in a meditation or yoga class.

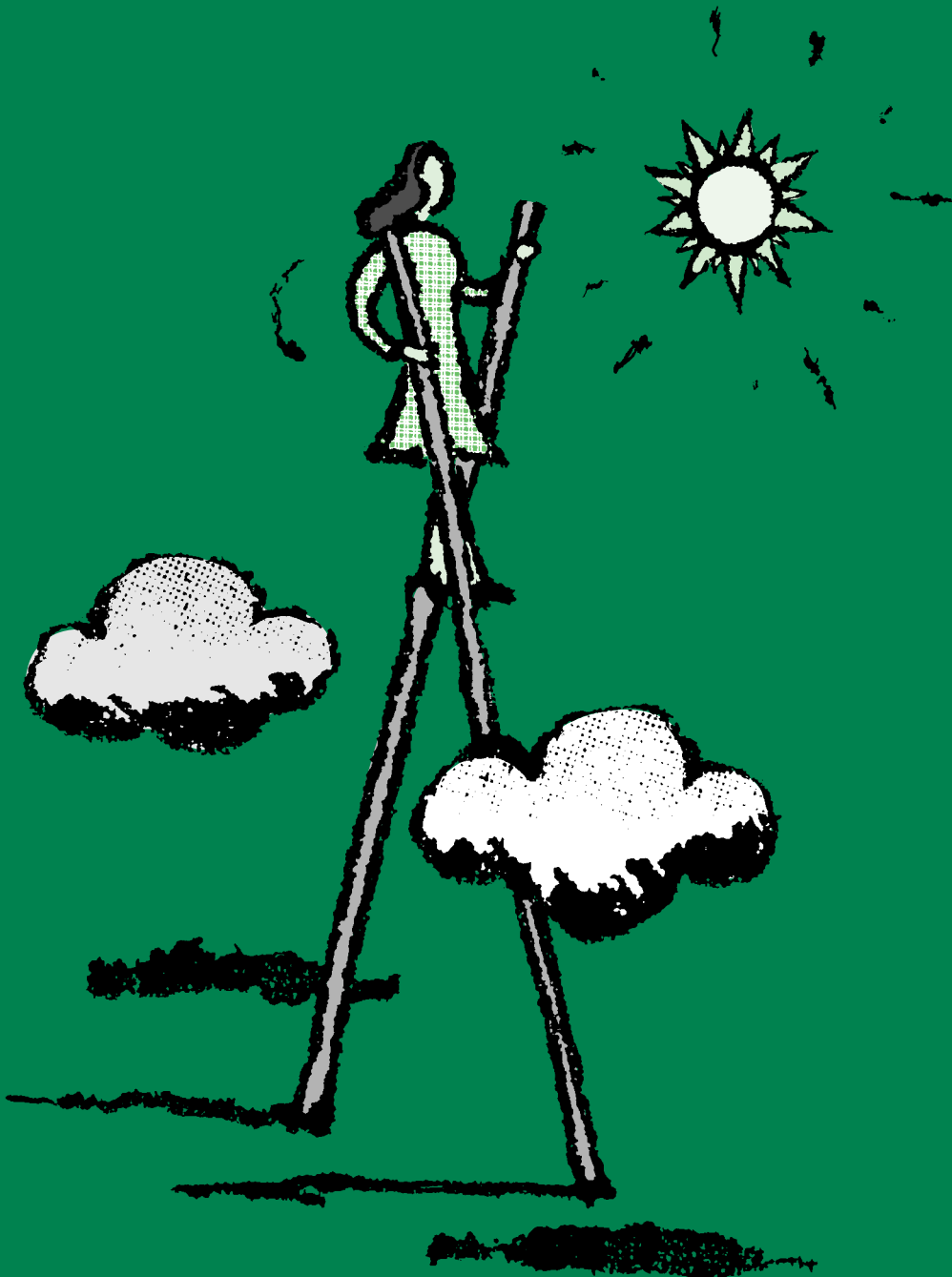
SEEK SUPPORT IN YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY. Faith, religion, and spirituality help many people move from worry to hope, and stay strong and resilient through life’s ups and downs.

LET GO OF YOUR ANGER. Anger is a negative emotion that consumes a lot of mental energy; it makes you feel more stressed. How often do you find yourself saying, “It’s not fair!” “It’s all your fault!” “Look at what you did to me!” When you’re able to let go of your anger and forgive and move on, you have more energy and feel more resilient.

- Try to get to the root causes of your anger. Talk with friends and relatives about the problem and ask what they think. If your anger is work-related, talk with a trusted co-worker or your manager about the problem.
- Learn appropriate ways to express your anger. Expressing your anger toward others physically or by shouting is never OK and never leads to a positive outcome.
- Take a deep breath when you are feeling angry. Breathe and count to five to help yourself stay calm.

Staying resilient
through the

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engages of life

Life events sometimes force us to call on all the strength and resilience we have within us. A child or a parent falls ill. Your spouse or partner loses his job. A close friend dies. You are diagnosed with an illness. You're suddenly widowed. We never know what challenges or difficulties lie ahead.

The coping skills we use to get through hard times are the same skills we use every day to bounce back and handle life's ups and downs—a positive attitude; the support of family, friends, and community; a habit of activity and learning. Here are five stories of resilient people who did just that.

Jim's family was forced to move three times in a year and a half after he lost job after job due to layoffs. During that shaky time, Jim's family faced mounting debt and the death of a close relative. All the moving turned his family's life upside down. How did he, his wife, and their young daughter get through this difficult period? "We continued with family routines in every place we moved," says Jim, "and set up new versions of the old activities. Our first priority was keeping our daughter feeling safe and continuing the routines that she knew." Today, five years later, they're still digging out of debt and their new home is much smaller than their old one. "But we have a stable life and our daughter has been resilient through it all," says Jim. "That helped us keep our spirits up. She made new friends in each new place and she seems secure and flexible. She's able to handle the bumps in the road and she has learned that life goes on no matter what."

Resilience is about having a positive yet realistic attitude and taking action in response to change.

Laura was widowed suddenly at age 38 with four young children to raise on her own. She felt terribly lonely and was teary for years, she says. "But I had faith I could draw strength from and wonderful friends and neighbors." Laura says she was determined to bring her children up with joy and a love of life. "I was brought up to believe that life is good and that we have to work very hard to make it so." Now in her late seventies, Laura spends much of her time offering support to others. "Once you've suffered a loss, it's like a sisterhood or brotherhood—you have a common bond and can draw comfort from sharing your caring."

Resilience is about relying on and giving support to family, friends, and community.

Carl was diagnosed three years ago with Parkinson's disease. He knows that the disease is progressive and Carl's symptoms are already well advanced: he has lost muscle control in his legs and arms and he moves much more slowly than he once did. At first, Carl withdrew from friends and family. "I didn't want them to think, 'Poor Carl,'" he says. But recently, he is allowing people back into his life again and he's committed to staying active. He's participating in a walk with friends this spring to raise funds for Parkinson's research. And Carl is making plans for the future. "My niece graduates from college next year," he says. "I'm going to be there."

Resilience is about not giving up.

After a trauma or crisis, many people find a certain comfort in routine, in daily chores like cooking favorite foods, doing errands, or gathering up all the old newspapers for recycling. Doing things with your hands that you enjoy—

such as gardening, sewing, cooking, or raking—can be tremendously satisfying. Crisis throws us off balance. Routine helps us restore order and balance to our lives.

Tammy had been a battered wife for seven years when her husband walked out on her and their two young children, leaving them with no means of support. Tammy moved her family across the country to be closer to relatives. She was intent on starting a new life, and her first priority was her children's future. "I wanted them to do well in life and get a good quality education." Tammy found a secretarial job at a local private school where her children could qualify for the employee discount on tuition, and she took classes at night to pick up more office skills. "She doesn't seem to know the meaning of the phrase 'give up,'" Tammy's sister says of her. "She was determined to find a solution to her problems, and she did."

Resilience is about taking action to make the future better.

A young man lost his sister in the September 11 World Trade Center attacks and a month later was having trouble coming to terms with her death and the fact that he would never see her again. At home, he was struggling with how to help his niece, his sister's teenaged daughter. The man wasn't able to talk about these intense feelings with friends or co-workers, and he found himself unable to go to work. He contacted his company's employee assistance program (EAP). The man had never before sought help from a counselor, but he scheduled an appointment with the EAP counselor. "I thought I would just sit in silence for the hour," he says. Instead, he began talking and reflecting on his sister's tragic death. An hour later, he was surprised by how much he had let out and how much talking had helped. "I have a better and clearer idea of how to go forward now," he told the counselor as he said goodbye. It may take years for him to recover from the tragic loss of his sister and he has visited the counselor twice more since his initial visit. What he realizes now is that talking with a professional really helps.

Resilience is about seeking help when you need it.

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CHALLENGES CHECKLIST

Are there difficult experiences you are facing in your life? Take a moment to fill out this checklist. Put a check mark beside each statement that applies to your life today.

- I am going through a major change in my life (separation or divorce, retirement, financial strain, relocation, child leaving home, etc.).
- I worry a lot about an older relative or spouse or partner.
- I have recently experienced a loss.
- We're coping with a serious illness in our family.
- My spouse or partner and I are having problems in our relationship.
- I feel a lot of pressure at home.
- I feel a lot of pressure at work.
- I haven't been feeling well lately.
- I'm very concerned about money.
- Daily hassles really get to me (my commute, a messy house, losing my keys, hearing my neighbor's noisy dog).

See next page for an explanation.

Recognizing the challenges you are facing is key to becoming more resilient. You can't work on finding support or making changes in your life if you don't know where you need to begin. Once you have identified the challenges you are facing

CALL ON OTHERS FOR SUPPORT. Call and make plans with a friend to meet for coffee or dinner or a morning walk. Invite people over. Let those in your inner circle know you could use some support. Don't try to handle difficult things alone.

USE THE STRATEGIES DESCRIBED EARLIER IN THIS BOOKLET TO HELP YOU STAY RESILIENT THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES. Try to maintain a positive outlook. Make time for simple pleasures. Take an active approach to solving your problems. Rely on and help others. Take care of yourself. Work on reducing feelings of stress.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS HAVING TROUBLE COPING WITH DEBT PROBLEMS OR RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS, IS USING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL TO HANDLE EMOTIONS, OR IS EXPERIENCING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- sleep disturbances
- flashbacks
- changes in appetite
- severe or prolonged anxiety
- depression
- feelings of hopelessness or thoughts of suicide

Raising res



ilient children

The qualities of people who age successfully—having a positive yet realistic attitude, an adventurous love of life, a strong will, spiritual beliefs, an ability to renegotiate life when necessary, and a sense of humor—are the same qualities we want to instill in our children.

On the following pages is advice from teachers, counselors, and parents on how to build a strong and resilient family.

SHOW YOUR CHILD THAT YOU FEEL POSITIVE ABOUT THE WORLD. If you show your child that you feel positive about the world, chances are your child will grow up to view the world as a positive place. One way we learn to be optimistic, writes Martin Seligman, the author of *Learned Optimism*, is by listening to the way that our parents explain everyday events to us.

HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO EXPRESS BOTH POSITIVE AND PAINFUL EMOTIONS.

Show your children that sadness, like happiness, is part of life and that it is human and natural to feel sad and to cry. Teach your child to express his feelings in healthy and appropriate ways. Children can sense when a parent is upset. If you are sad, don't hide what you are feeling. But remember to control your feelings so that you don't burden your child with too many adult emotions. It's important that you let your child know that you are OK even if you are crying or angry. Encourage your child to talk about his feelings. Reassure him that you love him and that you will take care of him.

HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO MANAGE FEELINGS OF ANGER AND TO RESOLVE

CONFLICTS. The best way to do that is by example. Manage your own anger. Resolve conflicts in your home by using good communication skills. Teach your child that conflict is normal and that it is important to work together to solve conflicts and problems.

In the book *Making it Better: Activities for Children Living in a Stressful World*, educator Barbara Oehlberg offers the following tips for parents. Teach your child that

- everyone involved in a conflict needs to define the problem as they see it
- everyone in the conflict participates equally in building the solution
- everyone is valued equally, despite any differences in title or power
- everyone is committed to building a solution that has mutual benefits for all

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO DO FOR OTHERS AND TO GIVE TO OTHERS. Children tend to be self-focused and to feel that everything is about them. When you encourage your child to do things for others and to give to others, she learns that her actions make a difference. Encourage your child to reach out to neighbors, relatives, and others by being supportive, volunteering, or raising funds.

MODEL RESILIENT BEHAVIOR. Go on with your normal life as much as possible during sad and difficult times. This teaches your child that life goes on, although somewhat changed, no matter what. Continue routines, activities, schedules, and rules. Help your child understand that change and challenge are part of life and that some changes and challenges are harder than others.

MAKE TIME FOR FAMILY RITUALS. Family meals, celebrations, and gatherings not only strengthen family ties but also help build strong, resilient children. Make time for and cherish your family rituals. Family rituals can be elaborate celebrations of major holidays involving extended family and friends or regular Saturday trips to the library with your children. Encourage children to suggest rituals. Don't "wait until next year" for that family reunion or for a weekend of family togetherness. Try to include extended family in your rituals and routines.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND MAKE DECISIONS ON THEIR OWN. Giving your children age-appropriate decision-making opportunities helps them believe in themselves and make good choices. Show that you have faith and confidence that your child is capable of making good choices by refraining from rushing in to fix every problem. Experts have found that children who trust their problem-solving skills feel more self-confident and hopeful about the future.

HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL POSITIVE ABOUT SCHOOL. Many studies have shown that children who like school and feel committed to learning grow up to be resilient. They develop the skills they need to master almost any challenge they will face in life.

INCLUDE YOUR CHILDREN IN FAMILY DISCUSSIONS. Ask what your child thinks and what his opinions are, and encourage him to offer solutions. Listen to what your child has to say. Remember that during times of crisis it's more important than ever to talk as a family.

REMEMBER THAT "IT TAKES A VILLAGE." To raise resilient children, parents need the support of relatives, friends, neighbors, schools, houses of worship, employers, and community organizations. The more support your child has from other caring adults, the more resilient she will be. Look at the relationships your child has with adults. How can you supplement or build that "village"? In a leading research study, when resilient adults were asked what helped them stay strong and thrive, the overwhelming majority of them said a caring adult in childhood—a loving parent, a teacher, a relative, or neighbor. Encourage your child to turn to friends, relatives, and adults at school and in the community for support. Teach your child to draw strength from others during difficult times—by listening to and learning from classmates, friends, relatives, teachers, and other adults. Match any babysitting needs you have with older relatives and friends who can serve as role models.

SHOW YOUR CHILD THAT YOU PULL TOGETHER AS A FAMILY IN A CRISIS.

Encourage your child to offer support to siblings and other relatives during times of adversity. Talk about problems and solutions together. It's therapeutic and is a way for you to support one another. Research shows that even children who experienced a very stressful event in childhood, such as a major illness or the death of a parent, grew up to be strong and resilient adults if the stress was handled well by the adults around them.

READ BOOKS AND WATCH VIDEOS TOGETHER THAT FOCUS ON STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE. For example, you might read books about Anne Frank, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or Harriet Tubman. Or watch a video together such as *The Miracle Worker* (the Helen Keller story), *The Sound of Music*, or *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Talk about historical figures like Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and other people who were role models of bravery and resilience. Your local librarian can suggest other books and videos featuring stories of strength, courage, and hopefulness.

LAUGH OFTEN. Remember that the most fun-filled family activities don't need to cost much money. Reminisce together about happy times and funny "remember when" stories. Let your child take pictures of the family and organize a family bulletin board, Web page, or photo album.

“Strong families have the knack for optimism, for taking long views and a ‘big picture’ perspective.”
—Mary Pipher, *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families*

DO WHAT YOU CAN TO REDUCE STRESS AND PRESSURE AT HOME FOR YOUR CHILD.

Children, like adults, lead increasingly pressured lives today. You can help your child stay strong and resilient by

- providing structure and predictability at home
- limiting video games and how much TV your child watches and especially limiting games and programs with violent and troubling images (if your older child has a classroom assignment to watch news stories, try to watch with her)
- eating balanced meals
- making sure you and your child get enough sleep
- helping your child adopt healthy habits from early on

DON'T DWELL ON MISTAKES. Avoid being too critical. Allow your child to make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TRY DIFFERENT THINGS. Offer your child opportunities to try different music, sports, and arts activities. Spend time as a family at events of different cultures.

BE CARING AND SUPPORTIVE. Children who grow up to be resilient come from families where they received a lot of guidance, supervision, and support from their parents and other adults. You are your child's strongest advocate at school, at home, and in the world. Offer reassurance so that your child learns not to cave in to defeat. Let him know that if things don't work out the first time there will be a next time. Show your child that you believe in him. Remember to say, “I believe in you.” “I know you can do it.” “You're terrific.” “I love you.”

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Thank you.

