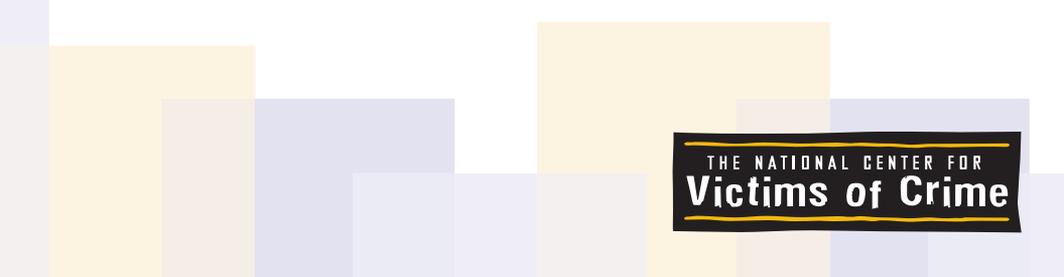


REACH IN. REACH OUT.

FINDING YOUR
RESILIENCE



THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

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WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is the power to cope with adversity and adapt to challenges or change. It is a process of drawing on beliefs, behaviors, skills, and attitudes to move beyond stress, trauma, or tragedy. Although naturally stronger in some personalities, it can also be learned. Resilient people have a range of strengths such as self-knowledge, personal meaning, optimism, and the ability to foster relationships and care for themselves and others. By reaching within themselves to mobilize these strengths and by reaching out to connect with others, they confront life's obstacles and emerge with greater wisdom and flexibility.

WHY RESILIENCE MATTERS

Life doesn't always go the way we wish or expect. Problems arise in our families, workplaces, and communities. Relationships end, children leave home, we lose our jobs, we get sick, or a loved one dies. Things change, and there's so much we can't control, particularly after September 11, 2001. We can no longer expect to feel secure all the time. But most of us do suc-

cessfully adjust to changes, finding ways to get through the tough times in our lives. How do we do it?

FINDING YOUR RESILIENCE

Resilience: Think of resilience as elasticity or flexibility. Resilience is not rare, and everyone is resilient in some ways. Whenever you recover from a setback and get better at coping with life's difficulties, you become even more resilient.

Overcoming Problems: Being resilient doesn't mean you no longer have problems or are not affected by difficulties. It doesn't mean you are not sad when a relationship ends or you are not worried about your family's physical and financial well-being. It doesn't mean having answers to all of life's problems. Being resilient means finding ways to cope

“Life is not what it's supposed to be. It's what it is. The way you cope with it is what makes the difference.” ~Virginia Satir

with problems that arise, taking care of yourself and those around you, and emerging stronger than before.

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.” ~Helen Keller

Finding Strengths: Many of us had to adjust to a new world after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Some lost loved ones or friends. Others lost their jobs. Many are still struggling to stay productive at work while worrying about what might happen next. Those who have experienced a terrorist attack or suddenly lost loved ones may have intense emotional reactions such as distressing thoughts, feelings, and images about the event. Some may have terrifying dreams and intense physical and psychological symptoms. Those who lose loved ones may feel horror, sadness, and fear for the future, often for long periods of time. And many who were not directly affected live with a heightened sense of risk and the knowledge that their own lives have been profoundly changed. You can find resilience in many different ways and at your own pace. Find-

ing resilience involves believing and acting as if tragedy may be surmountable. When you focus on resilience, you can see how strong you already are—and can become even stronger—to successfully navigate whatever life brings your way. Just as emergency instructions on airplanes tell you to put the oxygen mask on yourself first before assisting others, recognizing how to be resilient makes you better able to help your children, spouse, partner, coworkers, neighbors, and community members lead fuller, more productive, and even truly joyous lives.

CORE STRENGTHS

Research shows that resilient people draw on core strengths to cope with adversity. People with healthy coping skills, self-knowledge, personal meaning and perspective, optimism, and strong relationships are well equipped to successfully confront the challenges of life.

Healthy Coping: Healthy coping, or the ability to successfully manage life, creates a balance between stressors (or negative feelings) and positive emotions and focused actions. Coping is the process of deliberately taking action to create and maintain that balance. Coping involves paying attention to your physical, emotional, men-

tal, and spiritual needs so you can be healthy, calm, self-aware, and creative in meeting the challenges you face.

Self-knowledge: Self-knowledge means knowing and accepting yourself as you are, even if that knowledge sometimes makes you uncomfortable. It means identifying your strengths and your weaknesses—areas where you are successful and areas where you could use some help. Self-knowledge means learning and accepting who you are, how you feel, and what you can do rather than trying to become what you think others want you to be. By seeking and valuing self-knowledge, you become more effective in all aspects of your life.

Personal Meaning and Perspective: Personal meaning involves identifying the most important elements and values of your life, exploring your own perceptions, and finding ways to put your values into practice. Personal meaning may or may not be spiritual in nature. It is usually discovered and felt rather than consciously invented.

Personal meaning is part of the foundation—and often the product—of successful struggles with adversity. Those who have developed a strong sense of meaning have perspective, a framework

for living and a set of values that help them set priorities, make judgments, and determine their own actions.

Optimism: Optimism, as a source of resilience, means the ability to believe there is a solution for stressful life events. It means the ability to cope and plan, rather than avoid thinking about how to deal with negative experiences. Optimistic people accept their reactions to

“You must look within for value, but must look beyond for perspective.” ~Denis Waitley

problems and attempt to work through them. They grieve and struggle but can still move in a positive direction, seeing problems, however severe and painful, as surmountable. Optimism instills a sense of hope and trust in self and others, enabling people to live longer and healthier lives.

Strong Relationships: Having strong relationships with family and friends and being part of extended “social networks” at home, work, and in your community also build resilience. People in supportive, loving relationships are more likely to feel healthy, happy, and satisfied with their lives and less likely

to have mental or physical health problems. Developing and sustaining strong relationships requires that you learn how to communicate effectively, identifying obstacles to communication (e.g., negative emotions and different communication styles), taking responsibility for yourself and your actions, and being flexible and dependable. It is important to give children warmth and love, create a consistent and predictable home environment, and encourage them to build strong, successful relationships.

HOW RESILIENT ARE YOU?

The first step in building resilience is gaining an understanding of how resilient you are right now. The following questions can help you begin to understand your coping style and the core strengths you already have:

- *Do you always think things will get better, get worse, or stay the same?*
- *Do you see the humor in things, see the humor but feel guilty when you do, or seldom find things to laugh about?*

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” ~Confucius

- *Do you tend to take action when things change, use change to learn, or procrastinate when changes in your life produce problems of one kind or another?*
- *When faced with adversity, do you tough it out, cope in constructive ways, or soothe your feelings in unhealthy ways?*
- *When confronting a problem, do you deal with it on your own, ask for help, or avoid letting anyone know you need help?*

To learn more about your own resilience, visit www.victimsofcrime.org. The National Center’s Resilience Self-Assessment questionnaire can help you find your current strengths, identify the skills you can develop, and locate resources you can use to become more resilient.

HOW TO BUILD RESILIENCE

“Reach In. Reach Out.”

Resilience can definitely be learned and strengthened. To develop your resilience, experts recommend several very specific practical strategies:

Take Care of Yourself: Pay attention to your health and your emotions. Do things you enjoy, and exercise regularly. Learn the physical signs of stress and what works best to calm them.

In responding to traumatic or stressful events, you may want to write down your thoughts and feelings. Some people find that meditation and spiritual practices restore their hope and their connection to others.

Develop Yourself: Develop specific goals, and then work toward them. Start by regularly accomplishing small, achievable tasks. Rather than avoiding problems, make decisions, and then think about what you've learned about yourself as you emerge from struggles. Build confidence in your ability to solve problems, and trust your instincts.

Keep Things in Perspective: Look at the broader picture when you face a problem. Accept that change is inevitable and that new circumstances may alter your goals and the course of your life. Learn to distinguish between the things you can and cannot change. If you are overwhelmed by a tragedy, seek support from loved ones and friends. If needed, seek professional help to cope and draw upon your own resilience.

Practice Problem Solving: Remember that problems, even personal tragedies, can be survived. Think about how you have solved problems in the past and how you have moved beyond previous crises in your life. Identify the strengths

that help you accept and work through trying times. Learn to identify the stumbling blocks and "thinking traps" that keep you from accurately analyzing problems. For example, do you blame yourself or others, jump to conclusions, magnify or minimize problems, or "think" with your emotions instead of your mind? Once you recognize such traps, you can learn to solve problems more effectively.

Strengthen Your Relationships: "Keep up" with family and friends who are important to you. Communicate regularly with loved ones to keep relationships healthy and strong. Show love to your children and create a consistent and predictable home environment for them. Help others when you can, and accept help from them. For some people, just learning how to ask for help is major progress. If you enjoy groups, join civic organizations or groups that support goals you value.

MANAGING LOSS

People respond in unique ways when faced with tragedy. Adversity often stirs strong emotions, evoking sadness, fear, frustration, and sometimes physical and psychological problems. There is no "right" way or prescribed time frame for responding to tragedy. However, if you or a loved one experiences a particu-

larly strong, unchanging emotion (sadness, anger, frustration, or withdrawal) or engages in self-destructive behavior for an extended period of time, it might be beneficial for you or your loved one to consult with someone who is experienced in helping people through crises.

RESOURCES

For more information on resilience, including a brief self-assessment questionnaire, fact sheets on many aspects of resilience, and other helpful resources, visit www.victimsofcrime.org

VIRGINIA RESILIENCE PROJECT POST-9/11

This booklet is based on the work of the Virginia Resilience Project Post-9/11, a strength-based public health initiative that promotes the resilience of 9/11 victims, their families, and first responders in Virginia by helping them cope with the ongoing trauma of the 2001 terrorist attack. Through a public awareness and outreach campaign, self-help resources, community-based forums, links to services, and other support, the project helps Virginia victims mobilize their own strengths, identify and share strategies to cope with adversity, and strengthen bonds to others affected by the attack. The project's youth-led public health initiative seeks to help affected middle- and high-school students address their 9/11 experiences, develop coping strategies, and provide resilience-building messages and resources to other adolescent 9/11 victims.

PROJECT PARTNERS:

Northern Virginia Family Service, Inc.
(www.nvfs.org)

Families of September 11
(www.familiesofseptember11.org)

Pentagon Memorial Project
(www.pentagonmemorial.net)

Arlington Employee Assistance Program
(www.arlington.k12.va.us/personnel/EAP)

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