

## Resilience and Victim Service Providers

### Why Resilience Is Important to Victim Service Providers

As a victim service provider who helps victims of crime rebuild their lives, you may often be exposed to intense human suffering. You may bear witness—day in and day out—to traumatic accounts of rape, assault, domestic violence, stalking, homicide, and other types of crime. You see the direct impact—fear, grief, anger, physical injury—of crime on victims. You wouldn't be human if this pain didn't affect you. At the same time, you won't be effective as a victim service provider if your clients' stories overwhelm you.

Resilience—the power to cope with diversity and adapt to challenges or change—can help you positively address the negative reactions you may have in providing victim assistance so that you may more effectively assess your client's needs and develop a plan of support, while still conveying compassion and empathy to the victim you are helping.

### Core Elements of Resilience

Resilience is a process of drawing on beliefs, behaviors, skills, and attitudes to move beyond stress, trauma, or tragedy. Although naturally stronger in some personalities, resilience can be learned. The following discussion reviews the core elements of resilience and offers strategies for strengthening those elements in yourself.

**Self-knowledge and insight.** Self-knowledge and insight means knowing and accepting yourself as you are. It means identifying your strengths and your weaknesses. Self-knowledge and insight means learning who you are and how you feel, rather than trying to become what you think others want you to be.

*Strategies to develop self-knowledge and insight:*

- **Explore your motivations**—Explore your reasons for working in the victim services field.
- **Identify triggers of discomfort**—Identify issues that make you feel uncomfortable so that you can work through them or avoid them.
- **Clarify mission and goals of your organization**—Understand the mission and goals of your place of work to better appreciate where you fit in.
- **Recognize those things you can and cannot control**—Realizing that you cannot control everything in life can be a breakthrough in understanding yourself.
- **Receive adequate training**—Working without sufficient training can create a great deal of stress. Be sure that you receive adequate training so that you feel competent in your services.

**Sense of hope.** Having a sense of hope means that you believe situations will get better in the future. If you have a sense of hope, you are optimistic and have the capacity to envision a solution to stressful life events. Having a sense of hope also means that you have a sense of humor and have the ability to have fun. If you have a sense of humor and can laugh at your mistakes, you will significantly reduce your stress.

*Strategies to develop a sense of hope:*

- **Develop opportunities to succeed**—Engage in activities with tangible or achievable goals, which may allow you to have a more positive outlook on your work.
- **Practice gratitude**—Take the time to appreciate the good things in your life.
- **Give praise**—Acknowledge the successes of your colleagues.
- **Diversify client types**—Seek opportunities to work with different types of clients, which may allow for more successes and be less demanding.
- **Have fun**—Find ways to relax and have fun with colleagues through staff lunches, picnics, games, birthday parties, or other events.

**Healthy coping.** Coping is the process of deliberately taking action to create and maintain balance in your life. Everyone needs to find a balance between stressors or negative feelings and positive emotions to offset stressful situations with more positive experiences.

*Strategies to develop healthy coping:*

- **Find a balance in life**—Balance work with leisure activities (e.g., exercise, reading, gardening, hobbies).
- **Sleep**—Being fully rested is fundamental to good health and is critical to building resilience.
- **Develop calming and relaxation techniques** (e.g., deep breathing, meditation, taking a walk).
- **Change the pace**—Change the pace in your life to gain a new perspective (e.g., ride a bike instead of driving; make a phone call instead of sending a text message; take a fun class instead of watching TV every night).
- **Rely on your supervisor**—You don't have to carry the entire stress of your job alone; regularly consult with your supervisor for guidance and support.

**Healthy relationships.** Fostering strong, healthy relationships means creating meaningful connections with family and friends and becoming part of an extended “social network” at home, work, and in the community. People in supportive, loving relationships are more likely to feel healthy, happy, and satisfied with their lives.

*Strategies to develop healthy relationships:*

- **Enhance communication skills**—Learn how to clearly express your emotions, needs, and thoughts.
- **Collaborate**—Consult with your colleagues on cases to ensure that victims have access to the widest range of resources possible. Collaboration among staff can lead to more effective problem solving and increased productivity.
- **Take a team approach**—Work in teams to foster positive communication and enhance a sense of interdependency among staff members.
- **Address conflicts proactively**—Misunderstandings and conflicts that arise in the workplace can add stress to already stressful work. Deal with problems, issues, or concerns immediately—they seldom disappear on their own, so make conflict resolution a priority.

**Personal meaning.** Personal meaning is about identifying the most important elements and values of your life. It is about exploring your world view, identifying your values, and finding ways to put your values into practice.

*Strategies to develop personal perspective:*

- **Assess your personal values**—Explore and clarify beliefs about yourself and the world around you.
- **Assess your perspective of suffering**—Victims' stories can challenge your personal faith. Yet if you re-examine your beliefs about evil, morality, and justice, you may gain perspective on suffering, which will also likely change your perspective about your work.
- **Question old beliefs**—You may have to modify or adjust old beliefs, rather than completely abandoning them, to accommodate traumatic work experiences.

- **Foster altruism**—Separate and apart from your work, reach out to others in need, genuinely listen to their concerns, and give to people just for the sake of giving. The positive experience can significantly add to your personal resilience.
- **Abandon all activities not coherent with your values**—If you feel you are participating in work that is no longer consistent with your personal meaning of life, you may be creating more stress for yourself. You will experience increasing stress until you or your organization changes.

## Help Your Staff Build Resilience

If you manage a victim services program, it is very important to have policies and procedures in place to ensure that staff members have opportunities to build their own resilience and adequately deal with the stress of their jobs. Regular staff recognition, employee training, case debriefings, role playing, staff discussions, reassignment to less stressful cases, and other interventions can help staff members gain perspective and acquire additional tools to maintain objectivity while providing effective victim support.

## A Final Word

Most victim service providers do not go into this field for the financial rewards, but out of personal commitment or some other connection to crime victimization. The sense of satisfaction that comes from helping crime victims get back on their feet can be another important source of resilience.

## For More Information

**The Resilience Project**—for fact sheets, additional resources, and an online resilience assessment tool.  
[www.ncvc.org/resilience](http://www.ncvc.org/resilience)

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*This Get Help Bulletin was adapted from Janice Harris Lord and Kevin O'Brien, "Developing Resilience," National Victim Assistance Academy Reference Manual, 10 (1-30), (Washington, DC: Office for Victims of Crime, 2006).*



2000 M Street NW, Suite 480  
Washington, DC 20036