



SUSTAINING OUR COMMUNITY DURING TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

By taking care of yourself and consciously doing things to reduce your stress, you can boost your resilience to better manage the unpredictable and stressful things occurring in yourself internally, in your relationships, and in your environment. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and strategies that can be developed, some of which include:

- **Reframe the situation:** When you can reframe your situation to give you a fresh and positive outlook on the changes you experience, they may not feel so bad. This is not just thinking that things are not as bad as they could be but seeing the good in what is happening. Think of a tighter budget to be creative within the limits you have. Most changes also create opportunities, so try to find those.
- **Remind yourself of strengths:** We all need to be reminded of our strengths, especially when we face difficulties and challenges. Because of your natural strengths, you will be able to cope. You can keep a list of them in your wallet and pull it out when you need it.
- **Practice problem-solving:** Having good problem-solving skills and being able to think on your feet helps you to adapt readily in changing circumstances. Take note how the people around you solve problems and put those methods into practice in your life.
- **Improve your self-control:** Managing your emotions and impulses well can help change feel less overwhelming. Even when you are not facing changes, try to keep your emotions from going to extremes, and check yourself if you feel like you are escalating. Do not lose your common sense.
- **Fake it till you make it:** Even if you do not feel strong or resilient, acting like you are can create new brain connections. After a while, it sinks in and becomes real for you.
- **Grow in flexibility:** Flexibility is a key part of resilience. We can get stuck in routines of daily life, but we often need to get out of those ruts to survive change. It enables you to bend painlessly with changing situations. To grow more flexible, practice letting things go and letting others have their way. Think about things from others' points of view and try to work with them. Be willing to change your habits and routines to rise to your changing needs.
- **Focus on what you can control:** There are many things you cannot control as you deal with changes in your life but thinking too much about those can weigh you down. If you focus on the things you can control, and start taking active steps to manage change, you will feel more resilient.
- **Rethink your worries:** If you are a natural worrier, compartmentalize your worries so that they do not snowball out of control. Set aside a certain time to consider what is worrying you and do not let those thoughts take over the rest of your day. Also, ask yourself, what is the worst that could happen? Once you identify the possible consequences, you can prepare or fix things to avoid them.
- **Let go of shame and blame:** Some negative changes can lead people to blame themselves and others. That results in shame and anger. Most of the time, though, no one is at fault. As you release the hard feelings you have held, you will feel more at peace as you face the future.

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During challenging times, it is especially important to focus on taking good care of yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally. You can make the choice to “act” constructively rather than “reacting” to what is happening. To “act” is to take responsibility for your well-being and choose effective coping strategies.

Physical Coping Strategies

- **Adequate rest** is the foundation of stress management. Establish a routine and get to bed at a reasonable hour.
- **Exercise is excellent** for stress management and will also help you sleep better if you complete it no later than three hours before bedtime. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise routine.
- **Eat well-balanced and regular meals.**
- **Choose activities that allow you to relax** when off work (fish, read, quilt, paint, run, hike, walk, meditate, practice mindfulness, listen to music, dance – whatever you like to do).
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs** to cope unless your doctor gives you a needed prescription.

Mental Coping Strategies

- **Get the facts from reliable sources** to learn more about the problem, rather than relying on the rumor mill to provide accurate information.
- **Write it out, taking a problem-solving approach.** For example, if you are facing a financial issue, write out your living expenses, your current income, the changes you would anticipate in your income and sources of additional income. Make a list of your skills and how you could market them if needed later. It helps to put things in black and white, because it gives you a fact-based look at the situation and gives you a greater sense of control.
- **Recognize that you have time** to form a plan, and that you may never have to activate it.
- **Talk it out.** Brainstorm your problem-solving ideas with your loved ones to get their input and ideas.
- **Shift your focus** to the here-and-now needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy, and the things you need to get done. Give your thoughts a break from constantly thinking about the “what if” that scares you.
- **Structure your time.** Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most, and in doing this, your interpretation of what is happening will become more alarming and less objective.
- **Remind yourself of your abilities and strengths.** Self-statements such as “I have always figured out some way to land on my feet” get you back in touch with the fact that you’re steering your own ship – you are not a bottle tossing and turning on life’s seas.

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- **Rely on your spirituality.** Turn the problem over to your higher power for guidance and strength. We know that the human spirit is very strong. Survivors of concentration camps have taught us that developing a certain mental focus helped them endure hardships that go far beyond what we will have to endure.
- **Read inspirational writings to find meaning** in what is happening. The context in which we see our life experience makes all the difference.
- **Set short-term goals.** What are some things that you want to accomplish in the near future?

Emotional Coping Strategies

- **Reach out to people who care.** Identify and talk out your thoughts, feelings, and fears with loved ones.
- **Spend time in enjoyable activities** with friends and family.
- **Write out your feelings.** You are dealing with an abstract but very powerful loss – the loss of expectations and assumptions. There is a grief process that comes along with loss, and that process consists of stages of shock, denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. Those stages are not smooth and orderly. They surface, retreat, and resurface in a disorderly fashion. We base much of our lives on the belief that life is reasonably predictable and controllable. We form expectations for the future based on that. When our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, we lose our balance, and our worlds are shaken. You know from previous crises in your life, however, that you will eventually regain your balance.
- **Recognize anger as a secondary emotion.** Anger is often a surface emotion that covers up a deeper emotion, such as fear, hurt, or feeling of powerlessness. When you find yourself feeling anger, search for the deeper emotion, and work with it instead. Write about it. Talk about it.
- **Be cautious not to take out your anger on friends and relatives.** It will be much harder for them to be emotionally supportive if they are feeling attacked by you and snapping at them will cause you to feel worse about yourself. As stated above, talk with them about the emotions which underlie your anger, and ask for their cooperation and support.
- **Contact Wheeler's Employee Assistance Program.** This employer sponsored benefit offers confidential counseling services to employees and their family members at no cost. The services include a predetermined number of sessions per issue for consultation, brief solution-focused counseling, and referral services. If you are referred to a treatment resource beyond the EAP counseling, there will generally be some costs involved. Some of these costs may be covered by your medical insurance plan. When you call the EAP, you will receive information, support, and assistance in scheduling an appointment with a licensed mental health professional at a location and time that is convenient for you. In support of social distancing during these challenging times, telehealth counseling is also available. Our goal is to help you and your family members overcome obstacles that may interfere with your job, health, or general well-being. Call Wheeler EAP anytime at [1.800.275.3327](tel:18002753327) or visit www.wheelerclinic.org/eap.