

Lesson 3 Rise Above Challenges

Resilience: The Power to Overcome

City Wellness Center Newsletter

This week's topic in the City Wellness Center Newsletter is resilience, or "the power to overcome." Julia Hone, a famous doctor, tells us how we can deal with difficult times by cultivating our inner strength.

No life is free from problems. Whatever life path we choose, we all experience adversity. This can take the form of illness, accidents, failure in exams, family and relationship issues, or other stresses. To cope, we all need the ability to overcome difficulties, which is known as resilience. Resilience means springing back, just like a bouncy ball after hitting the ground. If you are resilient, you can bounce back and recover quickly from the hard times you experience. Furthermore, you learn and grow from adversity. So, resilience is the ability to handle, recover from, and benefit from difficult life events.

There are countless stories of successful people who not only survived adversity but used it as a stepping stone to growth. Fairy tale writer Hans Andersen said that his childhood poverty, the early loss of his father, and his experience of being disrespected were the sources for his most popular stories. "The hardship was a real blessing that inspired me to write stories like *The Little Match Girl*, *The Snow Queen*, and *The Ugly Duckling*." Athlete Aimee Mullins also saw her challenges as an opportunity. She was born with a medical condition that resulted in losing both legs beneath the knee to surgery. She competed against athletes without disabilities in a national competition and participated in the Paralympics in 1996. Her career also includes modeling, acting, and public speaking. She says her physical condition is not a disability but the very thing that opened the door for her amazing potential. Both people succeeded not "despite" adversity but thanks to it. This is the real bouncing back.

You might think “Hey, these are exceptional people.” However, we are all born with the potential for resilience. Just like these people, we all can develop the strength to quickly recover from a crisis that could otherwise cause lasting damage to our mental health. The good news is that resilience is like a muscle. You can build it up through practice, by developing thoughts, behaviors, and habits that allow you to recover from painful or stressful events. Here are three basic strategies to build up this “resilience muscle.”

Three Basic Strategies to Build Up Your “Resilience Muscle”

First, accept and respect adversity as a natural part of life. This doesn’t mean being passive, but understanding that some changes in life can cause suffering or stress. Then, instead of feeling singled out and thinking, “Why me?”, you can face whatever happens and focus on what you can change, not what you can’t. Embracing challenges and unexpected obstacles in your life can help you confront them as a learning process. Think of all the success stories that could never have happened without adversity!

Second, have “me time,” that is, personal time to look after yourself. Take a break and be in the present moment, neither regretting the past nor worrying about the future. Walk, meditate, write, draw, listen to music, or exercise. If you don’t know where to start, the STOP technique can be a great meditative technique. It works like this.

Stop whatever you are doing.

Take a few deep breaths.

Observe your emotions and thoughts as they are, not judging them as good or bad.

Proceed with what you were doing. Or start something different based on what you observed.

Now go forward with your life.

Third, be connected. Allow yourself to ask for help from people whom you can trust, such as friends, family members, or counselors. Talking about your issues with someone can help you see your situation with more clarity and respond to it with more strength. Good communication helps resilience. This is the reason why resilient people tend to create good support networks.

I am not saying that these strategies are easy or remove all stress and suffering. Still, I urge you to practice them whenever you can, particularly when you are under stress. Remember that there is no better time to build your “resilience muscle” than the moment when you are in the middle of adversity and uncertainty. Practicing resilience during tough times helps you endure and grow stronger. However, you can also apply these strategies to everyday small stresses or minor challenges. Then you will gradually become more able to deal with big ones.

Resilient people tend to be happier and more fulfilled because they are less afraid of failing or challenges. So, building resilience is the key not only to overcoming adversity but also to living a happy life.

Further Reading Text – Lesson 3

Growth Mindset

Our mindset, or way of thinking, affects our ability to deal with life’s challenges. Psychologists say there are two main mindsets: “fixed” and “growth.”

For people with a fixed mindset, failure just shows that their intelligence, abilities, and talents are limited. They may think, for example, “I’ve never been good at writing. I’ll never be a good writer.” Therefore, they stay in their comfort zone, where they won’t be challenged. They tend to reject even constructive criticism. Also, other people’s success makes them feel defeated and lose confidence.

Meanwhile, people with a growth mindset accept life’s challenges. For them, failure is an opportunity. They may think, for example, “I can still learn and practice writing skills until I can write a great story.” They can learn from criticism, ask for advice, and be inspired by other people’s success. A growth mindset empowers people to feel more comfortable about their imperfections and overcome crises or mistakes more easily.

Experts say that we can develop a growth mindset through practice. Whenever you feel “It’s impossible. I’d rather give up,” why don’t you train yourself to say, “I still want to try. I can learn how to make it possible”?