



BounceBACK

How resiliency helps us get through and grow from life's challenges.

You probably don't know anyone whose life hasn't been impacted by the 2020 pandemic. Our jobs have changed. Our social and family lives have changed. We worry about things we didn't a year ago. We may ask ourselves, "How will I get through this?"

Resiliency describes our ability to adapt and learn from adversity. Everyone has some resiliency, but people with stronger resiliency find it easier to cope with difficult situations.

"I think of resiliency as the ability to grasp the larger picture and find your own peace in the midst of chaos," says Kimberly Smith, MSW, LCSW, CEAP, and Boone Hospital Center senior EAP consultant. Kimberly has been with the hospital's Employee Assistance Program for nine years where, she says, "I teach people how to become resilient."

Resiliency isn't a personality trait, but a set of skills that you can learn, practice, and develop. There's no single clinical definition of resiliency, but experts agree that resilient people are strong in several key areas, including meaning, self-awareness, relationships, self-care, and optimism. We may be stronger in one area than another — someone who finds meaning from helping others might spend hours volunteering, but not give themselves time to get enough sleep.

Meaning

People tend to feel happier when they have a strong sense of purpose and live in alignment with their core values. Our values may include family, helping others, learning, faith, or teamwork. When our actions don't reflect our values, we can feel uneasy or anxious. Identifying your core values and how you reflect them in your thoughts and actions can help you better navigate difficulties. Even if you can't see ahead of you, you still know who you are.

"We need to be able to follow our own values, mission or code of honor — whatever guides us — and we need to stick as close to that as possible, both professionally and personally. That's going to help us more than many other coping mechanisms," Kimberly says.

Self-Awareness

Our thoughts don't appear out of nowhere — they're habits shaped by our beliefs and experiences. And they're not always correct — we can experience cognitive distortions, or ways of thinking that reinforce negative thoughts. If a coworker seems less friendly than usual, you might immediately assume they're upset with you, only to learn later that they're distracted by worries about a loved one. Self-

awareness helps us step back and recognize inaccurate and unhelpful thoughts before we act on them. People with strong self-awareness find it easier to see their problems realistically and look for solutions.

Relationships

Humans are naturally social — we need other people. At the same time, other people can be a source of conflict. Resilient people enjoy positive interactions and healthy relationships with their family, friends, coworkers, and community. They can accept support from others and give support to others, building a strong support system that can make a big difference in a crisis. People with strong relationship skills are more likely to set healthy boundaries, express gratitude for others, and develop good communication skills.

Self-Care

Self-care means tending to our own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. We can forget to make self-care a priority, especially when we focus on caring for other people. But a lack of self-care makes it harder to handle our own problems and to help others. Self-care is often compared to putting on your own oxygen mask first before helping someone put on theirs. Stress can drain our energy, but making time to exercise, rest, eat a healthy meal, meditate or pray recharges our batteries.

“Everybody needs to keep their energy and ability to focus on the activities and responsibilities of daily living. We have to start with ourselves, then work our way out to make changes we want to see in our life, our community, and our world,” Kimberly says.

Optimism

Optimism doesn't mean minimizing difficult situations and emotions. In fact, a positive outlook on life can actually help us see a situation more realistically. Optimism gives us hope and builds confidence in our ability to get through rough patches, but it doesn't come naturally for most of us. Our brains look constantly for potential threats, but they can be too vigilant. We may react to a conflict with a coworker — or possibility of a conflict — the same way we'd react to seeing a shark swim towards us. We may fear that a conflict at work could lead to losing our job, then losing our

home, health, or loved ones. Constantly fearing the worst outcome makes it harder to act on our core values.

Kimberly sees optimism as having a “mature perception” and understanding what you can control, like your feelings, actions, and words. She says: “Most of us would like to think we have more control than we do. Many things that happen are things we're not in charge of. But if we understand ourselves, we recognize what we can feel in charge of.

For example, we may learn to measure our self-worth with external things, like our job title or income. Someone who bases their self-worth on their job may find it harder to handle an unexpected layoff in an economic downturn than someone who bases their self-worth on how they live their core values.

Kimberly says: “People with strong resiliency have a more internal locus of control. They have a sense of understanding of who they are, which is more to do with what's inside of them than what's on the outside.”

People with less resiliency are at higher risk for burnout and depression. When we lack resiliency, our problems can make us feel overwhelmed and powerless. Kimberly explains that when less resilient people face obstacles, “They may become paralyzed and don't know what to do. They find it harder to function or focus.”

Strengthening our resiliency doesn't require a gym membership — there are simple exercises we can practice at home or on break. But it's important to be intentional and to commit to regular practice.

“Cultivating resiliency skills is like planting a garden,” Kimberly explains. “You won't see growth right away, but if you keep at it, you might see it pay off months later.”

Kimberly practices what she teaches. “Yesterday, I had to make a lot of calls. So,

I sat down, took five minutes, and practiced my own resiliency skills — deep breathing and calming my mind, instead of having all the chaotic thoughts rolling around. Some days, deep breathing may not be enough, and I'll need to do additional work.”

“I recognized that it was critical for me to practice resiliency to allow me to get up when life seemed too hard,” says Employee Health Nurse Cindy Brengarth, BSN, RN. “I choose to promote resiliency at Boone because it's made a huge difference in my life, and I hope I may affect someone else in a positive way.”

Resiliency is necessary for health care professionals who frequently experience stressful situations. Despite receiving excellent care, a patient may have adverse outcomes, or their condition could change unexpectedly. Health care professionals can have difficult encounters with patients, family members, or colleagues. Building resiliency empowers caregivers to take better care of themselves, so they can better take care of their patients.

Cindy shares a monthly message with Boone employees about different areas of resiliency, each with a resiliency-building exercise. She says, “Resiliency may help reduce burnout, increase empathy and compassion, and reconnect health care workers with the joy and purpose of their practice.”

Resiliency doesn't mean never experiencing stress or painful emotions, but it can help us survive them and, more importantly, to learn and grow from them. When we talk about a difficult situation in our past, we may tell it as a story about how we became stronger or wiser. We're actually telling a story about our resiliency.

“At the end of a hard day, we can all find the strength to face a new one,” Kimberly says.  By Jessica Park



Hard times can make anybody feel anxious or depressed. These feelings don't mean you're “crazy” or weak, but if anxiety or depression interferes with your activities, relationships, health, or quality of life, **don't be afraid to ask for help**. Your primary care provider can help you explore options to manage anxiety or depression. More mental health counselors now offer appointments over the phone or a secure video chat. Check-in with your support system and look for resources at your job or church. Remember, you deserve to feel your best.