

“I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.”

–Maya Angelou

Resilience

When I think of the people we serve each day here at the Center for Family Services, the one skill that I hope they strengthen is their resilience. I want the children and adolescents as well as the adults we work with to be resilient. I want them to be able to cope with all that life might bring. I want them to thrive! I want my Team and co-workers to be resilient and to thrive! I love this quote by Maya Angelo. It reminds me that life happens to everyone. But it does not have to define us.

But what exactly is resilience? Resilience has been described as being able to manage life’s ups and downs, to go with the flow, strength, rising above, endurance, or persistence. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resiliency as:

“the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences...”

Which just begs the question, why do some people bounce back quicker than others when faced with adversity? Why do some feel hopeless and helpless and delve into deep depression and anxiety or use substances to cope? Why do others manage adversity with a hopeful outlook, and optimism? Is there a magic formula? Can resilience be learned or cultivated? Or are some of us just born resilient while others struggle?

For answers, I turned to the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania where Dr. Martin Seligman and his colleagues research, train, and educate others on how to improve their well-being and optimism. The Resilience Program identified the following competencies as essential for resilience: Self-awareness, Self-Regulation, Mental Agility, Strength of Character, Connection, Optimism.

It turns out that we can develop these skills as our amazing brains keep learning from experience. We *can* cultivate resilience! How does this translate into our day to day life? Here are some suggestions:

- Practice mindfulness. Learn to focus on the present moment rather than on what happened in the past or what might happen in the future.
- Manage stress - Develop coping skills, such as engaging in exercise, going for a hike in nature, setting boundaries, listening to music, or dancing it out.
- Identify and focus on your strengths. Practice positive affirmations.
- Develop a network of supportive relationships.
- Learn something new – challenge yourself.
- Write a gratitude list – take the time to focus on the positive.

- Take a self-compassion break: <https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Tender-SelfCompassion-Break-2.mp3>

Should you need assistance with developing some of these skills, reach out for professional help. Your therapist will assist you in learning new ways to cope.

When things become overwhelming, do not hesitate to reach out to your local crisis screening center or the National Suicide and Crisis Line by calling 988 or 1-800-273-8255.

Resources

<https://www.apa.org/>

<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

<https://self-compassion.org/>