

Manage Stress by Building Resilience

Disruptive, distressing and traumatic events such as a sudden death, a natural disaster or an act of violence can create stress and anxiety. You can take steps to reduce stressful reactions, feelings and thoughts in the short- and long-term by strengthening your *resilience*.

Resilience is the process of adapting and being flexible in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or other sources of stress. By strengthening your resilience, you will be better able to persevere thoughtfully and creatively through the challenges posed by a crisis. These enhanced skills become part of your resilience tool-kit for more effective every-day coping.

Here are some ways you can build emotional resilience and strengthen your sense of control during a difficult time.

Make connections. It's easy to feel alone with your worries and reactions. Connecting with close family members, friends, co-workers, and neighbors can be a source of strength and support. By discussing some of the challenges you are experiencing, you may discover you are not alone. You can also learn strategies from others who are managing similar experiences.

Help others. Reach out and help others who are also managing challenges. Helping others can give you a sense of accomplishment and self-worth while decreasing the feelings of helplessness a disruptive event can evoke.

Take a media break. Watching relentless replays of disaster footage can increase your distress. Often, the media tries to interest viewers by presenting worst-case scenarios. These may or may not be representative of what's happening to your home or community.

Start problem solving. Use stress management tools to break the fight-flight response so that you can start using the problem-solving part of your brain again, not your reactive, more primitive, part of your brain.

Accept that change is a part of living. Your goals or visions of your future may need to be modified after a crisis. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can change.

Move toward your goals. Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly—even if it seems like a small accomplishment—that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

Take decisive actions. Rather than withdraw, avoid, or become 'stuck,' be active. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Get back into a routine as soon as possible. Although some disasters, such as a flood or hurricane, can uproot people from their normal routines, establish new daily routines as soon as you can, even if the routines may have to change again once the crisis is over.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of internal strength, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and heightened appreciation for life.

Nurture a positive view of yourself. You are persevering through difficult circumstances. That's an accomplishment. Develop confidence in your ability to solve problems which helps build resilience over time.

Keep things in perspective. Try to consider these stressful circumstances in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. You've tackled past hardships that may have felt overwhelming at the time. Tap into those successful skills to get through current challenges.

Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear. Remind yourself of the positive people and circumstances in your life. Try to see beyond the current situation to how future circumstances may be better.

Take care of yourself. Engage in healthy behaviors that will enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Be patient in the midst of the chaos. You may not feel like it, but eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience difficulties sleeping, you may be able to find some relief through relaxation techniques. Avoid alcohol and drugs since these can increase feelings of sadness or distress and hamper your progress in successfully managing current circumstances.

For many people, using the resilience-building strategies described above may be sufficient to get through the current crisis. At times, however, an individual can get stuck or have difficulty managing intense reactions. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living.

If you need additional information or would like to speak with a counselor, please call MyLife Services – 844-405-LIFE (5433) or visit us at www.MITMyLifeServices.com. We are

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