

# Top Ten Tips for Remaining Psychologically Resilient

1st December 2020

Psychological resilience can be defined as the ability to resist and manage stressors and to “bounce back” from stressful life events. It’s vital to understand that resilience isn’t being strong all the time and never experiencing stress. Resilience is often the ability to be aware that stressors are having a psychological impact and consciously engaging in activities that help you manage and cope with these stressors.

## Tip 1: Maintain a social support network

It’s much easier to be resilient to the challenges of work and life if you have a solid social support network. Talking about your feelings and having strong connections to your partner, family, friends and work colleagues helps you to be more effective at facing life’s difficulties. It’s important to make time for your partner, family, friends and work colleagues and it’s vital to keep being social even when you feel under pressure and you may not feel like being sociable.

## Tip 2: Maintain a third place

An important element of being resilient is to have and maintain a “third place”. This third place should be in addition to your home (first place) and your workplace (second place). Your third place should be a physical environment where you go to relax, socialise and/or engage in an interest/hobby. Examples of third places are health clubs/gyms, sports clubs, pubs, places of worship and so on. When under pressure, we have a natural tendency to spend too much time at work and/or home, but it’s important to keep spending time at our third place.

## Tip 3: Thinking of others

It’s often been noted that people who perform voluntary work are more resilient than those who don’t. This is because by engaging in voluntary work an individual has thought about what’s important to them and then spends some time on this activity without monetary reward. It’s not necessary for you to engage in voluntary work (although you may decide to), but it is helpful in being resilient to think about what activities are important to you and to spend some time engaging in them.

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Tip 4: Keep a boundary between your personal and work life

Pressures and problems can come from both your personal and work life. One key strategy for resilience under pressure is to keep a clear boundary between your work and personal life. You need to have techniques for “switching off” from work so that it doesn’t impinge on your personal life. There are a variety of ways to do this, for example stopping for a coffee after leaving work and before going home. Don’t forget, it’s also important to not let personal problems impact on work.

Tip 5: Know your early signs of stress

As stated earlier, being resilient isn’t about being strong all the time and never feeling pressure/stress. Resilience is knowing when you’re starting to feel stressed and using techniques to help keep in control e.g. deep breathing, exercising more and talking to family and friends about how you’re feeling. To help with this it’s useful to be aware of what your early signs of stress are. Early signs tend to occur in four areas:

**Physical:** Generally, more people have some physical signs when they’re starting to feel stressed. This can be headaches, pain in the neck/shoulders or digestion problems.

**Emotional:** When under stress, people can feel angry, frustrated and/or low in mood.

**Cognitive:** When under pressure, we tend not to think effectively, so we can become indecisive or more forgetful, or experience concentration difficulties.

**Behaviour:** Behaviour can change; we can lose our temper more frequently or have trouble sleeping.

Tip 6: Physical exercise

As a general rule, the healthier you are physically, the easier it is to be resilient to stressors. One key way of maintaining your resilience is to be active, in particular, cardiovascular exercises and body stretches. The key is to do some exercise, little and often, for example walking, swimming, cycling or playing sports. It’s very important to maintain an exercise regime when you’re feeling particularly stressed and if possible do slightly more exercise

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than usual to help you cope with the difficulties.

## Tip 7: Deep breathing

Deep breathing is one of the easiest relaxation techniques to master and it's also one of the most effective in helping you remain calm and resilient. Slow, deep (diaphragmatic) breathing slows down your heart rate, lowers blood pressure and reduces tension in the muscles. The simplest method for practising deep breathing is as below:

Sit comfortably in a chair with a good posture and both feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes and place your left palm on your stomach and your right palm on your chest. Now breathe slowly in through the nose and out through the nose without holding your breath at any point. Try and expand your stomach as you breathe in and contract your stomach as you breathe out. Try to breathe so that only your left palm moves and not your right. Your chest and shoulders should not move as you breathe, only your stomach. All the time you should be relaxed and concentrating on breathing slowly.

## Tip 8: Reduce self-criticism

One habit too many people have that reduces their resilience is that they're too critical of themselves. Self-criticism often occurs as a voice in our head (sometimes called an internal monologue) which is critical of our thoughts, feelings and behaviour and often linked to self-criticism is our tendency to be too critical of others. One method to help us be less self-critical, and therefore more resilient, is to consciously try and become less critical and negative towards others.

## Tip 9: Personal organisational system

Increasingly in modern life, we have a multitude of activities and tasks to keep track of both at work and in our personal life. Managing all these tasks can be stressful. So to be resilient, it's important to have an organisational system that prevents us feeling overwhelmed by the demands placed upon us. Specifically, your organisational system should achieve two major elements which help you maintain your resilience:

Keep your to-dos "outside of your head". In other words, you shouldn't rely on your memory

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to trigger when you should do your actions, it's your organisational system that reminds you when to do things. The less you rely on your memory, the better.

It's always vital to have a clear distinction between tasks that are urgent (that is, time-dependent and must be performed now, such as answering a ringing phone) and those that are important and can be dealt with at your own pace. Resilient people tend to spend more time on actions that aren't urgent but are important, whereas when we are under pressure and stressed we tend to focus on the urgent, unimportant tasks.

## Tip 10: Resilient thinking

A vital element of being resilient is how you perceive and think about the challenges that life throws at you. Resilient individuals tend to be good at keeping stressors in perspective so that they're not overwhelmed by such stressors. Equally, resilient individuals focus on how they can solve their problems or make their problems easier in some way. Resilient thinking tries to be as creative as possible and to focus on the solution and/or management of a problem, not on the problem itself and the feelings it generates. The analogy for resilient thinking that's often used is: "when you've fallen into a hole, your thinking should be 'how do you climb out of the hole?', not how you fell into the hole or how unlucky you are to be in the hole".

A very useful technique for maintaining resilient thinking is to keep a gratitude diary. Every day, you should write down three things in your life that you're grateful for. The key is that every day you should come up with three new things to be grateful for. By carrying out this activity you're training your mind to focus on positive things, which in turn helps you be more resilient.

In your busy life, it may not be possible to implement all of these tips. But you should always try to think creatively—it may be possible to combine two or more tips, for example, playing tennis with your partner and/or children enables you to maintain your social support network, spend time on an activity that's important to you, and gives you some exercise.

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