



Believing You Can Cope Is Half the Battle When Facing Life's Challenges

Emotional Intelligence

The ability to identify and manage emotions is key to building resilience. Emotional intelligence involves:

- Recognizing your feelings while they are happening.
- Controlling your feelings so that what you express is appropriate to the situation. Cultivating skills such as maintaining perspective, being able to calm yourself, and shaking off irritation, anxiety or sadness. This can help you avoid the pitfalls that strong emotions can push you towards.
- Staying focused on your goals despite the emotions you feel.
- Return to your feelings later to acknowledge what triggered them. Ask other's opinions and consider if the situation needs further attention or if it should be learned from and forgotten.

In the children's story, *The Little Engine that Could*, the little engine agrees to pull a long, broken-down train over a high mountain after larger, more powerful engines refuse. "I think I can, I think I can," said the little engine. And when it's successfully coming down the other side, he said, "I thought I could, I thought I could."

That's resilience: believing you will be able to cope in the face of barriers, limited resources, trauma, tragedy and other major stressors (family and relationship problems, serious medical concerns, work challenges, etc.). Being resilient means "bouncing back" from life's difficulties — and becoming stronger in the process.

Psychologist Emmy Werner conducted a 32-year study of 698 children in Hawaii from before birth and into their 30s. She monitored them for stressors (while in the womb, family breakups, poverty, and other hardships). One-third of the children were considered "at-risk" while the rest came from stable families. Of the at-risk children, one-third of them grew into resilient young adults. She found three characteristics that set the resilient children apart from those less resourceful. First, they might have had a strong bond with a parent, teacher or other caregiver/mentor who supported them through good, and hard, times. Next were kids who were independent, sought out

new experiences and had a positive outlook on life. Lastly, resilient kids were ones who believed that they (not their circumstances) influenced their fate.

Werner also found that some people who weren't particularly resilient as children were able to learn the skills of resilience and overcome significant setbacks later in life. That means, for those of us who are not naturally resilient, it is possible to *develop* resilience.

Building Resilience

Why build resilience? Resilient people are likely to meet personal life expectations and work demands on a regular basis. They take action to deal with setbacks and ask for help when they need it. Resilient people know when they need rest and time to restore. With strong relationships with family, friends and colleagues, they set goals and work towards them with a sense of purpose.

Being resilient doesn't mean you won't feel pain, distress or sadness through difficult periods. But you will use skills, behaviors and thoughts to help you to survive, and even thrive.

Here are some recommendations from the American Psychological Association for building resilience.

- Maintain connections with family and friends. Become active in community associations, faith-

Good for Health!

The positive outlook associated with becoming and being resilient is good for your health. Research has consistently shown that positive emotions like happiness, contentment and joy are linked to stronger immune systems. Our immune system is what helps us resist infections and fight disease. Check out the KnovaSolutions newsletter, [The Path to Emotional Wellness](#).

See our other newsletters that highlight ways to find balance through good nutrition, exercise and problem-solving:

[Food for Thought. Healthy Food and Other Ways to Feed Your Brain](#)

[Work-Life Integration. A 21st Century Take on Work-Life Balance](#)

The information contained in this newsletter is for general, educational purposes. It should not be considered a replacement for consultation with your healthcare provider. If you have concerns about your health, please contact your healthcare provider.

based organizations and other groups that interest you and offer social support. Both accepting help from people who care about you and assisting others in their time of need, can help give you hope and build resilience.

- Nurture a positive self-image. Believe that you can overcome a challenge, like the little engine, even if you don't yet know how. A positive attitude about your ability to solve problems can stimulate creative thinking.
- Try on the optimist hat! Expect that good things will happen, and that you will be able to manage problems that come up. Visualize what you want instead of worrying about what could go wrong.
- Reboot your view of crises. Try to see difficulties as problems to sort through, rather than impossible obstacles. We can't control the fact that change is a part of life and stressful events will continue to happen. It may be necessary to set new goals and accept a new normal. During challenging times, try to find the positive. Focus on the things you can change and give less energy to what you can't.
- Set realistic goals and try to do something, even small tasks, every day that moves you closer to achieving your goals. This will give you a sense of accomplishment and confidence.
- Address problems head on, rather than ignoring situations in hopes they go away. Resolving conflict has a way of reducing stress. Be proactive and decisive, but with your emotions in check. For example, if a friend or co-worker says something that irks you, you may be tempted to blurt out an angry response. Instead, use the resilient method of noticing the emotion, controlling it, and re-

spectfully disagreeing with the person. After the heat of the situation, find a safe outlet to express your feelings. Talk to a friend or other trusted person and decide if the comment needs to be re-addressed in a calm, constructive manner.

- Maintain perspective. When problems are looming, keep the big picture in mind. Avoid blowing problems out of proportion. Look for things to learn and find the good side of a bad situation.
- When you've come through a stressful event, ask yourself what you learned. Did you discover you had more reserves than you thought, build closer relationships or learn a new skill? Did you come through stronger? Remember these milestones when the next difficult situation occurs.

That All Sounds Great, But...

If you are right in the middle of one of life's rough spots, but haven't started working on building resilience, this is a good time to ask for help. Who in your support network do you feel comfortable reaching out to? Sister, son, spouse, friend or religious person? Does your employer offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)? Have you called your KnovaSolutions clinician? Use your support system to help you think through possible solutions and actions to take.

How can KnovaSolutions help? If you are struggling with stressful situations, we can offer an empathetic ear, provide information and support, and refer you to resources. Sometimes just talking to an impartial person can clear away the cobwebs and make it easier to take the next steps. Whatever your stressors are, let KnovaSolutions lend a helping hand. We'll help you on your way to a more resilient way of life. Call us at **800/355-0885**, Monday to Friday, 8 am-8 pm, MT.