

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Emotional Resilience

Stress is a fact of modern life - seemingly everywhere and all the time. There are so many sources of stress: caring for children, disabled persons and elderly parents, holding down a job, and making time for a social life are all everyday sources of stress. Added to these everyday stresses are extraordinary events such as deaths, serious illnesses, natural disasters and social upheavals that often occur randomly and without warning. It is easy to become frustrated by the great number of pressures that consume you on any given day. Over time, the cumulative effects of multiple stressors, small and large, can combine to wear you out before you've had a chance to get started.

Stress can overwhelm your defenses despite you best efforts at coping. In the short term, you may lose your temper, your blood pressure may soar, and you may even feel sick to your stomach. Over the longer term the cumulative nature of stress can keep you on edge long after individual stressful events have passed, and can even contribute to medical problems. For example, unresolved and lingering stressful feelings of anger, hostility and aggression appears to make the development of heart disease and arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) more likely to occur.

There is no escaping stress, but there are ways you can learn to handle stress better when it is present, and to 'bounce back' faster from its impact. The collection of skills, characteristics, habits and outlooks that make it possible to remain maximally flexible and fresh in the face of stress is often referred to as "emotional resilience", which is the topic of this article. Learning to become more emotionally resilient can dramatically improve your attitude and your health in the face of inevitable stress

Defining Resilience

To be resilient means to be able to 'spring back' into shape after being deformed. To be emotionally resilient means to be able to spring back emotionally after suffering through difficult and stressful times in one's life. Stressed people experience a flood of powerful negative emotions which may include anger, anxiety, and depression. Some people remain trapped in these negative emotions long after the stressful events that have caused them have passed. Emotionally resilient people, on the other hand, are quickly able to bounce back to their normal emotional state.

The Resilient Attitude

How do they do it? What is it about emotionally resilient people that make them more effective at managing stress than non-resilient people? The key difference between the groups appears to be that emotionally resilient people have a specific set of attitudes concerning themselves and their role within the world that motivates and enables them to cope more efficiently and effectively then their non-resilient peers.

Specifically, emotionally resilient people tend to:

- Have realistic and attainable expectations and goals.
- Show good judgment and problem-solving skills.
- Be persistent and determined.
- Be responsible and thoughtful rather than impulsive.
- Be effective communicators with good people skills.
- Learn from past experience so as to not repeat mistakes.
- Be empathetic toward other people (caring how others around them are feeling).

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- Have a social conscience, (caring about the welfare of others).
- Feel good about themselves as a person.
- Feel like they are in control of their lives.
- Be optimistic rather than pessimistic.

These special beliefs characteristic of resilient people help them to keep proper perspective, and to persist with coping efforts long after less resilient types become demoralized and give up. In order to become a more resilient person, it is necessary to work on cultivating these beliefs and attitudes for your own life.

Growing in emotional resilience requires that you work towards greater self-knowledge. It is important, for example, that you to learn to identify how you react in emotional situations. Becoming aware of how you react when stressed helps you gain better control over those reactions. A good framework to help guide you towards becoming more aware of your emotions is something called Emotional Intelligence.