



## Forging Resiliency in Challenging Times

**Every challenge you face in life, is an opportunity to build resilience.**

Resilience is a word that is getting a lot of attention these days, and for good reason. The last 24 months have been unlike anything most of us have ever witnessed before. COVID-19 has not only put tremendous strain on our physical well-being, and of course our medical communities, but the mental health impacts have reached earthquake proportions in many ways as well, giving rise to a possible new dimension of the pandemic; **the Mental Health Pandemic.**

Emerging data have shown how significant the impact of the pandemic has been on our well-being. For example, we know that working mothers have experienced extreme levels of hardship through COVID and had to take on more than working dads, regarding household, childcare, and educational needs. A global study of health care workers across 21 countries shows alarmingly high rates of depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for those working in health care through the first waves of COVID.

**And we know that the impact has been disproportionately more difficult for those with pre-existing mental health conditions or financial struggles.**

### What is resiliency?

In essence, resiliency is our capacity to get through challenging times in a manner that gets us back to our baseline state. At the very core of this definition is a requirement for experiencing hardship, adversity, or difficulty. Without challenge, we wouldn't be able to build resiliency.

COVID created several conditions of sizeable disruption and distress that were sudden, widespread, and sustained. Our daily rhythms and routines, social connections, personal livelihood, and how we get our individual needs met all shifted seemingly overnight. And because of this, not despite this, we were forced into activating our psychological immune system, adapt, pivot, and engage in resiliency skills in ways many of us had never previously been challenged.

We're learning a lot about resiliency through this pandemic, with key psychological skills that don't necessarily require a globally disrupting virus to require moving forward. Here are a few key takeaways about how to build personal resiliency in your life.

## How to build resiliency

### Creativity and Curiosity

**Creativity** abounded as our familiar sources of entertainment, enjoyment, and connection evaporated through COVID. We found new ways to connect with others meaningfully. In-person events pivoted to virtual events. We held drive-by celebrations for graduations and birthdays. Curiosity grew too. We learned new skills. Took on new challenges. Embraced new hobbies.

**Curiosity** is one of, if not the most underrated psychological skill in life. For example: As a runner, there are plenty of times in which the art of running begins to get uncomfortable, be it by pace, distance, or intensity. Those moments offer a choice. We can become curious about the experience, wondering what's around the bend in the trail, if we can hang on for another mile or sometimes even just another step longer. The curiosity to experience and explore is critical to our well-being and is at the centre of resiliency. When feeling any level of discomfort in your life, you can start by getting curious about the experience and then looking for ways to get creative in working through it.

### Capacity to calm

Any type of psychological regulation, whether in mind, body, or emotion, requires our capacity to create a sense of calm in our lives. We can do this through **credible self-talk**, reminding ourselves we can do challenging things, or in the body through the practice of **mindfulness and deep breathing**. Fortunately, there has never been a better time to practice deep breathing and meditation given the access to online recordings and teachers.

### Connection and belonging

**Connection is the number one preventative psychological factor** we have in our lives. We need and thrive on social belonging. Connecting with others regularly and authentically is amazing. But when done deliberately and intentionally, it reminds us that we have shared experiences, shared difficulties, and shared opportunities for working together to get through tough times. And sometimes embracing the shared struggles and hardship with someone else is just the thing you need.

### Hope

Hope for a better future state. Hope for increased fitness, for a better connection, for a sense of belonging. Sometimes, **hope that we have enough** to make it through is enough. Hope helps us see past the struggles of the current moment and look into the future recognizing that "this too shall pass."

### Efficacy

Efficacy is the belief that we have what it takes to be successful. Efficacy beliefs are critical, from getting through the day and believing that you can get through the next difficulty, to the bigger goals of breaking through your perceived hardships. Our ability to endure is largely determined by our efficacy belief that we have what it takes to not only get through this moment of difficulty but in doing so helps us connect to longer-term goals.

**Please note: this blog post is not a substitute for ongoing mental health care, evaluation, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health providers with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.**