

Caregiver Resiliency-Al Siebert, Ph.D., Resiliency Center

A good indicator of exceptional mental health is when a person talking about a rough experience says "I would never willingly go through anything like that again, but it was the one of best things that ever happened to me." Ask "How can I turn this around? Why is it good that this happened? What is the gift?" Get better and better every decade. Become increasingly life competent, resilient, durable, playful, and free. Enjoy life more and more.

Maintain a playful, curious, spirit. Play with new developments. Enjoy things as children do. Have a good time almost anywhere. Be curious. Experiment, make mistakes, get hurt, laugh. Ask: "What is different now? What if I did this? What is funny about this?"

Constantly learn from experience. Ask "What is the lesson here? What can I learn from this?"

Adapt easily. Be non-judgmental and emotionally flexible. Be both strong and gentle, sensitive and tough, logical and intuitive, calm and emotional, serious and playful, and so forth. The more counter-balanced inner qualities you develop, the better.

Enjoy solid self-esteem and self-confidence. Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself. It allows you to enjoy praise and compliments. It acts as a buffer against hurtful statements. Critical care nurses, for example, must handle extreme verbal abuse from some patients and families of patients. Self-confidence is your reputation with yourself. You expect to handle difficult situations well because on your past successes. "These are my reliable strengths..."

Have good friendships, loving relationships. People are more stress resistant and are less likely to get sick when they have a loving family and good friendships. Lonely people are more vulnerable to distressing conditions.

Express feelings honestly. Resilient people express anger, love, dislike, appreciation, grief--the entire range of human emotions honestly and openly, while also being able to choose to suppress

feelings when they believe it would be best to do so. These are signs of emotional intelligence. Expect things to work out well. Research by psychologists shows that optimistic people have better health, are more stress resistant, persist longer, and have more personal success.

Develop open-minded empathy. See things through the perspectives of others, even antagonists. Ask "What do others think and feel? What is it like to be them? How do they experience me? What is legitimate about what they feel, say, and do?"

Trust intuition. Accept intuition and hunches as valid, useful sources of information. Ask "What is my body telling me? Did that daydream mean anything?"

Question authority. Dr. Bernie Siegel says "cancer survivors are not good patients." Ask questions about medications. Resist manipulations that others attempt. Avoid "games" people play. Defend yourself against attacks and fight back when you must.

Have a talent for serendipity. Learning lessons in the school of life lets you convert a situation that is emotionally toxic for others into something emotionally nutritious for you. A good indicator of deep resiliency is when a caregiver talking about a difficult situation says "I would never willingly go through anything like that again, but it was the one of best things that ever happened to me." Ask "Why is it good that this happened? What is the gift?"

Deeply resilient people let themselves be transformed by their experiences. When life hands you a challenge that you didn't want or ask for, you will never be the same again. You will emerge exhausted and perhaps bitter, or you will emerge strengthened and better. You have it in you to determine which it will be.

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