

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

One sure way to lessen the risk of a stress relapse is to build your resilience for the inevitable humps and bumps of life. Resilience is the strong ‘knowing’ within yourself that you’re able to cope with what’s in front of you.

I find resilience a heartening concept. To me it means that all the struggles we’ve had weren’t in vain, and will make our inevitable future trials a little easier to bear. We’ve each overcome numerous challenges, and so we all have some resilience, but it’s reassuring to know that we can develop this ability further.

You’ve already done a lot to build resilience by working through this book. You’ve learnt more helpful ways to think about your problems, manage your emotions and cope better with the physical side of stress.

Let’s now focus on some key habits to keep you strong, connected and better at managing your stress. Think about which of these you do naturally and which you could improve on.

HANG IN THERE

At times things will get tough, and you might feel stressed for a day, a week or longer. When you’re in a rough patch, remind yourself, ‘This too shall pass.’ Have confidence, knowing that you’ve experienced many difficult moments in your life and got through every one of them.

STAY OPEN TO SUPPORT

When you’re feeling stressed or down, it’s tempting to shut yourself away, which only makes you feel more isolated. Friends and loved ones protect us from feeling all on our own. They provide a fresh perspective, a helpful distraction and support when we’re finding our feet again. They let us know we’re important just the way we are. So even if you don’t like showing that you’re struggling or feeling fragile, stay open to support and you’ll bounce back faster. There’s no medal for going it alone.

GO ON A MIND HOLIDAY

Our minds are always busy, mostly worrying. It’s important to remember that fully immersing yourself in what you’re doing right now actually gives your brain the break it needs.

Each day, find an activity you can lose yourself in completely. Think of all the things you’d like to do and pick one you want to work on right now (if you’re stressed, pick a fun one). When you start, your brain will probably tell you there are lots of other things you should be doing. Ignore it, and then completely immerse yourself in your activity. Let go of the worry about getting it done well or quickly; just focus on enjoying yourself.

HAVE A LAUGH

Humour is the antidote to stress. When we’re stressed we take our situation and ourselves far too seriously. Laughter proves there’s more to life, and protects us from the terminal condition of overseriousitis! Laughter lowers the production of stress hormones, slows the stress response, and means we can look at things from a new perspective and think our way out.

Victor Frankl, a famous psychiatrist and author who was interned in a concentration camp during World War II and witnessed more suffering than we ever could imagine, wrote in his timeless book *Man's Search for Meaning*, 'It is well known that humour, more than anything else, [gives us] the ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.'

So take a break for a moment and do something, anything, that makes you laugh.

HAVE A HOBBY

Hobbies we find fun, relaxing and pleasurable offset our stress and allow us to recharge. Taking our mind completely off our day-to-day worries is essential for restoring it to correct functioning. It's like pressing 'undo' on our brains. These breaks provide us with the insight that not everything has to be focused in this moment, and that there are many other positive things to look forward to.

PRACTISE GRATITUDE

As we've seen, taking a few moments to note down what we've achieved or what we're grateful for over the past day or week improves our overall well being and helps us cope with stress. No matter what you have or don't have in your life, gratitude is where you can park all your worries and focus on what's good in your life – big or small. When we do, we feel better about our lives and more optimistic about the coming week.