



How to Cope with Stress (Pressure) & Increase your Resiliency

What do we mean by resilience?

Simply put, resilience is the ability to cope under pressure. A person who copes well under pressure is resilient.

Research suggests that the ability to cope well under pressure is based on a positive outlook, combined with strategies to manage pressure.

What does resilience look like?

Behaviours associated with resilience include:

- understanding and valuing the meaning of what you do at work
- doing what you can to get on with the people around you
- taking a problem-solving approach to difficulty
- keeping a sense of perspective (and humour) when things go wrong
- being flexible and willing to adapt to change and to learn
- greeting new situations, new people and new demands with a positive attitude
- drawing on a range of strategies to help you cope with pressure
- offering support to colleagues when they need it and asking for help when you need it

Where does resilience come from?

The way we behave is shaped by a range of factors including personality and past experience, as well as current circumstances and the people around us. All of these things therefore influence a person's resilience.

Are some people naturally more resilient than others?

Some people may have qualities that make them more resilient than others. Resilience, however, is best defined in terms of behaviour and support. Behaviours can be learned and support put in place – which means that, in practice, there is a lot we can do to help people become more resilient.

That's the focus of this resource.

What makes a person resilient?

Personal resilience is about self-awareness, coping strategies, getting the right support and being positive.

Self-awareness, strategies and support help you to cope.

Feeling able to cope builds your confidence and helps you to develop a positive outlook.

Confidence and a positive outlook enable you to grow and develop.

You then become a source of strength and support for others.

A resilient person

...has a sense of purpose and direction

...is self-aware

...takes a positive outlook on things

...can recognise when pressure is causing a problem

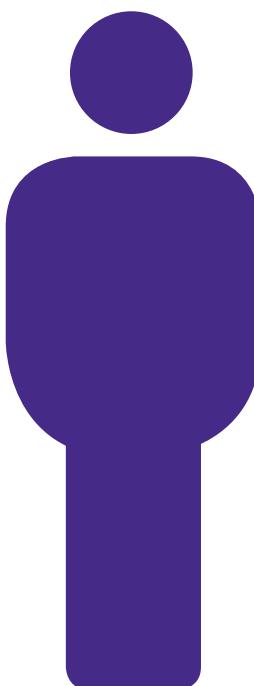
...has confidence in their own abilities

...has strategies to cope with in-the-moment pressure

...makes connections to other people

...has strategies to cope with long-term pressure

... grows and develops





Task: How resilient are you?

Consider each of the questions below, then mark where you sit on the line between 'not much' and 'a lot'.

Afterwards, ask people who know you well if they agree.

If you think about yourself at work and outside work, is there any difference in where you are on the lines?

To what extent are you	Not much	A lot
1. In touch with your thoughts and feelings?		→
2. Able to live with an unresolved problem?		→
3. Positive and optimistic about life?		→
4. Able to think accurately about things?		→
5. Sensitive to how people around you are feeling?		→
6. Confident of solving problems?		→
7. Willing to embrace the new in order to grow?		→

From your answers, you can see your key areas for development. This next section will help you to develop your own personal resilience.

What is pressure and when is it a problem?

Part of coping with pressure is recognising when it starts to become a problem. That means being:

- aware of how you are feeling
- alert to the signs and symptoms of too much pressure.

Pressure can be in-the-moment or long-term. Too much of either kind is harmful physically and psychologically.

In-the-moment pressure can arise from everyday situations such as being late to work, being short-staffed or facing last minute demands.

Too much in-the-moment pressure makes people misread situations and react inappropriately – with consequences that can last well beyond the moment. Repeated often enough, in-the-moment pressure also becomes a health risk.

Long-term pressure builds up over time and could be affected by both home and work issues. Long-term pressure poses a much more serious health risk, as well as undermining people's judgement and behaviour.

In-the-moment pressure

How to recognise when in-the-moment pressure becomes a problem

People's reactions vary, but here are some typical early signs.

Physical	Digestive problems, nausea, light headedness, dry mouth, heart pounding, rashes or flushing
Emotional	Immediate emotional judgement, short temper, feeling overwhelmed, paranoia
Behavioural	Procrastinating, neglecting responsibilities, nervous habits such as pacing, nail biting
Thinking	Inability to concentrate, seeing only the negative, constant worrying, self-blame, poor judgement

Learning to recognise these early signs is one of the most important stages in developing resilience. It enables you to take action before the threat becomes overwhelming.



Task: What are your early signs?

Take a moment to think about what your early signs are. If it's helpful, imagine you're a person in a restaurant having their card rejected. What does that moment feel like?

Strategies to cope with in-the-moment pressure

Strategies for coping with in-the-moment pressure focus on simple but highly effective techniques to relax, become more self-aware and regain control of your thoughts and feelings.

Here are some examples that you might find useful.

Techniques to relax

- Breathe

Breathe in for a count of seven, out for 11.

- Tighten, then relax

Tighten all your muscles for count of three, then let go. Repeat.

- Movement

A quick walk, going up and down stairs, stretching – it doesn't have to be strenuous. Any sort of movement will help you de-stress.

- Targeted muscle relaxation

Muscle tension is a very normal reaction to pressure and can contribute to so-called 'stress headaches'. Stomach, shoulders, neck and jaw are all typical places to store tension. Notice where you are tight and consciously relax the muscles. Self-massage (e.g. pressing your fingertips into the muscles in the back of your neck, or your shoulders) is good way to find and release muscle tension.

Techniques to manage thoughts and emotions

- Step out of the stressful situation

Literally walk away and give your attention to something else, even if only for a moment. It gives you a chance to calm down and regain control of thoughts and emotions.

- Talk to a colleague

Talking about thoughts and feelings can help to release tension. All your colleague needs to do is listen and make sympathetic noises while you talk. Putting things into words to another person gives you distance and helps you calm down. It can also give you a different perspective on the issue.

- Notice what you are feeling

This is a mindfulness technique to help you manage emotion. Ask yourself, ‘What am I actually feeling?’ Identify the feeling (or feelings) – anger, fear, embarrassment, whatever. Don’t judge yourself, don’t fight your feelings. Just observe and accept them. Whatever they are, those are your feelings. Taking that step back, becoming aware of your feelings and accepting them puts you back in charge and lets you move on.

■ Making the best of a difficult situation

A difficult situation presents you with two basic options and then a choice.

Two basic options ... Change the situation or change your response to the situation

1. Change the situation

Can I change the situation?
Can I alter it to make it
manageable?

Alter it, or...

2. Change your response to the situation

Can I make the situation
manageable by changing my
behaviour?

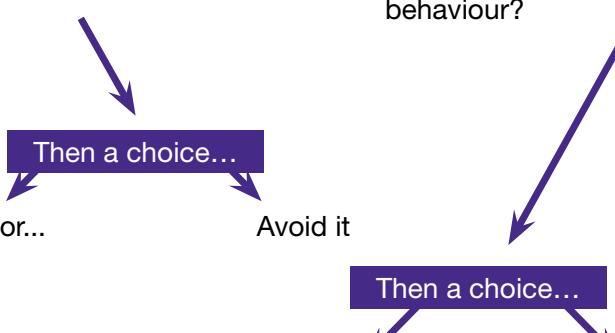
Avoid it

Then a choice...

Then a choice...

Adapt to it – change
your behaviour, or...

Accept it and
stop worrying



■ Mindfulness

The essence of mindfulness can be summed up in three words, **be here now.**

Mindfulness involves paying full attention to your feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations in the present moment. This means standing aside from any other thoughts, worries, upsets, plans etc. that normally absorb and preoccupy our mind.

Being mindful enables you to disengage from your worries and upsets, to give you a break and some distance from everyday stress, and helping you regain perspective and a deeper sense of self.

Mindfulness training is about acquiring techniques to focus your attention in that way. You can start by reminding yourself to take more notice of your thoughts and feelings. Tai-chi, yoga and meditation are more formal ways of

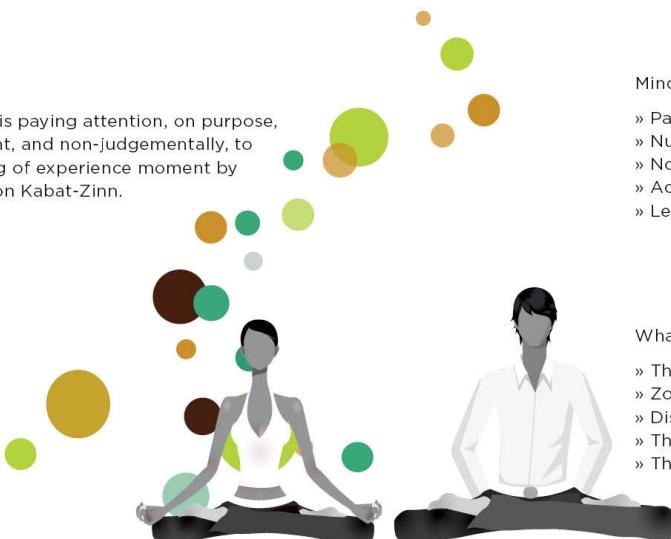
Mindfulness

Definition

Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, in the present, and non-judgementally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment — Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Mindfulness attitudes:

- » Patience
- » Nurturing trust
- » Non-striving
- » Acceptance
- » Letting go



What occupies your attention?

- » The present moment
- » Zoning out
- » Distractions and “multi-tasking”
- » Thinking about the future
- » Thinking about the past

7 Things Mindful People Do Differently

1

Approach everyday things with curiosity
—and savor them

Forgive their
mistakes—
big or small

2

Show gratitude for
good moments—and
grace for bad ones

Practice
compassion and
nurture connections

4

Make peace with
imperfection—
inside and out

Embrace vulnerability
by trusting others—
and themselves

6

Accept—and
appreciate—that
things come and go

Long term pressure

How to recognise when long-term pressure becomes a problem

Exposure to too much pressure over an extended period results in chronic stress. Chronic stress can produce a wide range of effects.

People can feel:

- tense, agitated, irritable, tearful, moody, helpless, anxious, depressed
- weary - physically and mentally
- apathetic, withdrawn
- distracted, unable to concentrate.

They may experience problems with:

- relaxation, sleep
- judgement, memory
- muscle tension, headaches, dizziness, nausea, stomach problems
- frequent colds, minor infections.

Often people:

- worry constantly, see only the negative, feel lonely and isolated
- eat too much or too little
- use caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs to help them cope
- put things off.

Strategies to cope with long-term pressure

Strategies to cope with long-term pressure aim to help you develop sustainable ways to manage work demands.

Here are some examples you might find useful.

Look after your physical health and wellbeing

These are the types of things that can help you to look after your physical health:

- eating a healthy diet
- not smoking
- taking regular exercise
- getting enough sleep.

They help protect your body from the effects of stress and maintain emotional balance and optimism.

Look after your mental health and wellbeing

These are the types of things that can help you to look after your mental health:

- connection to other people
- physical activity
- doing something new
- taking an interest in your surroundings
- doing things for other people.

These things build your confidence and help you to flourish in the world in a positive way.

Reminder of key learning points

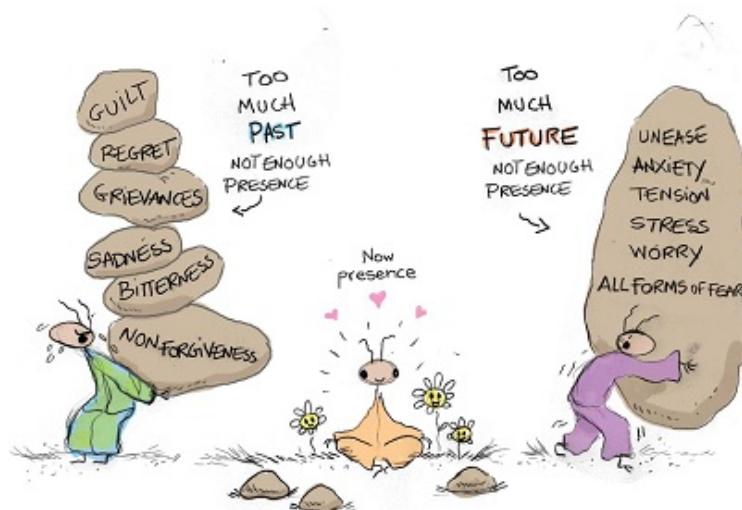
You behave resiliently when you:

- manage your own thoughts and feelings
- assess a problem before you try to resolve it
- are realistically optimistic
- think accurately about things
- are sensitive to other people's emotions
- are confident in your own ability to solve problems
- are willing to embrace the new in order to grow.

Personal resilience in a nutshell

- Personal resilience is about self-awareness, strategies, networks of support and being positive – these are all things that can be developed.
- Personal resilience is underpinned by the ability to manage in-the-moment and long-term pressure.
- Managing pressure begins with recognising when pressure is becoming excessive.
- Too much in-the-moment pressure leads people to misread situations and react inappropriately; repeated often enough, in-the-moment pressure can become a health risk.
- Simple techniques exist to relax, become self-aware and regain control of thoughts and feelings.
- Exposure to excessive long-term pressure results in chronic stress and can produce many negative physical, psychological and behavioural effects.

- Key strategies for managing long-term pressure include addressing the sources of pressure, recognising unhelpful thinking, achieving good work-life balance, respect for personal coping limits, boundary-setting, assertive communication, time-management and building networks of support.
- Research closely associates personal resilience with seven characteristics: self-management, tolerance of ambiguity (impulse control), realistic optimism, accurate thinking, empathy, self-efficacy, openness.
- Focus personal development on emotional intelligence, accurate thinking and realistic optimism to become more resilient.
- Optimism is linked to feeling that what you are doing is worth doing; you have the skills required and are able deal with difficulty.



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