

Self-Care & Resilience

Getting our priorities right, so we can continue to care for others



THE DISCIPLINE OF SELF-CARE

Self-care is any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental and physical health. Although it's a simple concept in theory, it's something we often overlook, due to barriers in our way (such as competing demands, lack of balance, lack of awareness and/or feelings of guilt).



However, when making a commitment to prioritize one's own health and wellbeing, by engaging in regular self-care activities and routines, we can achieve a number of benefits, including:

- Sustaining the energy, motivation and health required to perform our duties at work and home
- Maintain the clear-thinking, presence, patience and compassion needed for supporting others
- Gaining a sense of control, balance and healthy boundaries in our life
- Helping to reduce the impact of stressful events and change – and enhance resilience

The 'discipline of self-care' involves: reflecting honestly on what we need in life (for wellbeing); planning steps to achieve self-care or balance; asking others for the help and resources required; and routinely making the time to do what we promise ourselves we'll do. Naturally, self-care gets easier if you practice it and set up some sort of buddy-system.

PATHWAYS TO BUILDING RESILIENCE

Self-care practices help us to build resilience. **Resilience** is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, challenge, trauma or significant stress. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.

Even by choosing to put in place some simple and reliable activities such as exercise, hobbies and catching up with friends, we're making a real difference to our minds and bodies – releasing happy hormones, reducing stress and building healthy *self-belief* and *habits* that can support us when the 'chips are down'.

Signs of Resilience

Based on years of research into those who tend to be more resilient after hardship, these six abilities represent some of the core skills in bouncing back:

- Ability to think clearly and flexibly in changing and challenging situations
- Ability to regulate one's emotions (including stress) and remain emotionally composed
- Ability to problem-solve, make sensible decisions and mobilise the right resources that we need
- Ability to maintain positive connections and relationships with others who support us
- Ability to maintain self-belief and persist in the face of challenging circumstances (also called grit; ability to face up and continue after a set-back; a positive sense of one's ability to manage things)
- Ability to maintain a state of wellbeing where we feel well, fit and energised enough to tackle life's demands (including the demands of work, study, home-life and balancing all of our chosen activities/priorities)

Broaden and Build

One modern theory of *resilience building* encourages us to 'broaden-and-build' the positive, healthy and constructive things in our life – things that support the experience of positive thinking and positive emotions, wellbeing and good coping. Choose self-care activities and routines that include and build on these things:

WELLBEING

- **Maintain basic health:** healthy lifestyle routines such as exercise, good nutrition, sleep and recreation
- **Practice self-reflection:** regularly take time to think and identify what you honestly need in order to thrive
- **Choose your attitude:** adopt a deliberate and constructive attitude toward life and life's challenges
- **Connect to positives:** recall and reconnect to your values, accomplishments and sources of gratitude/joy
- **Flex your strengths:** identify your strengths and use these more in work and life; engage in interests/hobbies
- **Purposeful activity:** do things that provide a sense of purpose, connection and meaning in your life

STRESS MANAGEMENT

- **Social support:** spend quality time talking with mates, family and others who can support you when needed
- **Recognise stress:** acknowledge that stress is normal and know your early signs of stress (checklists, feelings)
- **Regulate stress:** develop ways to relax and calm yourself on cue, e.g. relaxation exercises, positive thinking
- **Problem-solve:** adopt a problem-solving approach to life's hassles – create a written action plan with options
- **Manage energy:** work around your energy cycle (dips and peaks); use breaks and healthy energizer activities

GRIT

- **Develop self-belief:** focus on what you can do; visualise success; rehearse your approach; give things a go
- **Reframe perspective:** be realistic, identify and 'reframe' crooked/unhelpful thinking – review your thoughts
- **Bounce back:** (growth mindset) be open to feedback, learn from mistakes and try again; revise your approach
- **Practice Grit:** one mental toughness training activity is to persist longer with uncomfortable or boring tasks
- **Develop mindfulness:** the ability to pay calm attention, on purpose in the present moment, non-judgmentally

Professional help and coaching are good ways to proactively build self-care and resilience, by developing a personalised plan, around the barriers and towards one's objectives. Remember that resilience levels change over time and require active maintenance. You can be hassled or stressed– even if you're normally resilient and unbothered by things.

In this way we caution that having some 'resilience' is not enough on its own to cope with some very significant events. In these cases, other tools, actions and help will fill the gap. ***What self-care promise will you make?***