

LEARN TO IMPROVE RESILIENCE:

A guide for training your brain to increase resilience.



What is resilience?

The American Psychological Association describes resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors.¹

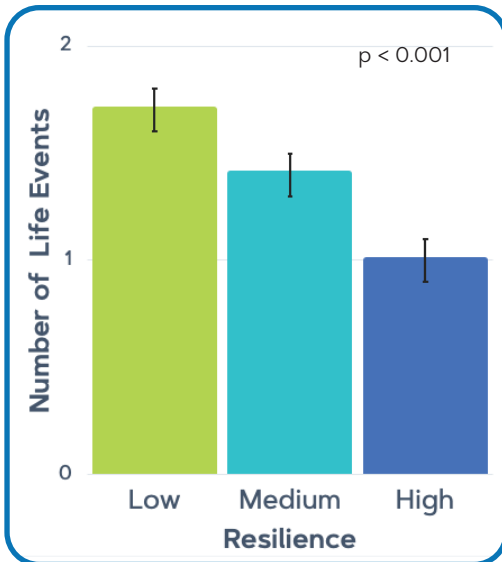
But resilience is not as simple as a trait that people either have or don't have. It is a set of behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed. It's all about flexibility and adaptability, including how you respond to stress, overall positivity, or how willing you are to change in the first place.

1. <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>

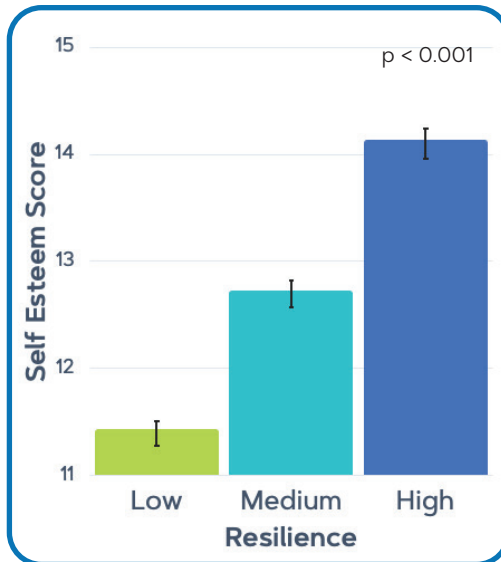
The Science Behind Resilience

Before discussing these behaviors, thoughts, and actions, it's important to understand there are a number of factors out of our control that can affect how high or low our resilience is. Studies show those who deal with stress early in life, such as difficulty in school or a parent's divorce, are more likely to be less resilient as they age. Those who struggle with social connectivity and self esteem also show signs of lower resilience. However, this doesn't mean resilience can't be improved for those who happen to fall into this category. It simply takes an extra step to understand these vulnerabilities and how to adapt to overcome them.

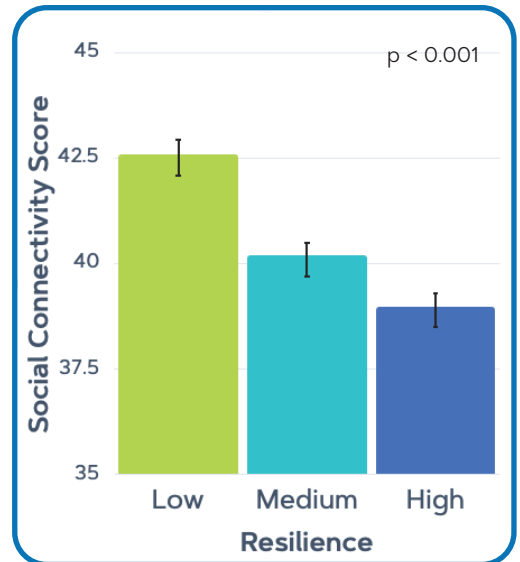
Resilience Levels Related to Early Life Stress



Self Esteem Levels Related to Resilience



Social Connectivity Levels Related to Resilience



*Data from the above graphs provided by an internal unpublished analysis conducted in a study of 1,664 people.

The 7 Pillars of Resilience

If building resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions, where is the best place to begin? Resilience training incorporates an entire set of skills to improve overall growth mindset.



1. Achieve positive adaptation.

2. Build strategies for dealing with stress.

3. Have a positive attitude.

4. Regulate emotions.

5. Be flexible.

6. View failures as a way to grow.

7. Have a support system.



Train with these 7 pillars in mind to build resilience.

1

Find a way to achieve positive adaptation to adverse circumstances.

Learning to let go of the negative and focus on the positive seems easier than it is. Our minds tend to dwell on the negative, so finding a positive path forward, even if you aren't starting from where you'd like to be, is critical to improving resilience. This may involve learning lessons from difficult situations and growing from experience over time. Or, take small steps forward - each day take note of one thing that was the most positive (or least negative) thing that happened in your day, even if it's just something really small. Over time this will help your mind to "keep an eye out" for the more hopeful and positive things that happen around you.

2

Build the neural network habit of stress recovery, and have effective strategies to deal with stress.

Stress is unfortunately unavoidable. When we become stressed, our heart rates increase and hormones begin to affect our whole bodies, altering how we think and react in the moment. Effectively learning to manage stress and anxiety will greatly help improve resilience and decision making abilities. Find what works for you. This could be meditation or breathing exercises, physical activity, or a fun hobby.

3

Have a positive, constructive attitude.

Have you ever thought to yourself, "There's no way I can do that!"? Whether it's losing weight, finishing a project on time at work, or training to run a marathon, if you start off assuming you will fail, when you come across a road block along the way you'll be more likely to give yourself a reason to quit. Here, you need to learn realistic optimism and hopefulness. Remind yourself that you can do it and keep your end goal in mind.

4

Regulate your emotions.

Your emotional state will affect whether you feel determined to push forward, or hesitant and step back. The first step is to become aware of what your emotions are and when they surface. Take five minutes to ask yourself, "What's actually happening here?". A quick mindfulness exercise can be a great way to do this. Take just a few minutes to stop and pay attention to what your body is feeling and what your thoughts are and explore the situation with a child's curiosity, free of judgement and complications. This includes not only understanding your own emotions, but that of others involved as well.

5

Be flexible.

You've spent weeks building effective strategies for coping with stress and responding to negativity, but what happens when your plans begin to fall apart? Cognitive flexibility is the ability to change your thoughts and approaches when circumstances change. Keep your mind open to more than one path forward, and accept that while it may not have been your original plan, you can still adapt to reach your desired outcome.

6

View failures as a way to grow.

Mistakes are bound to happen, and how you react when they happen is a core concept of resilience. How do you view failure? It's not as simple as black and white thinking. You didn't either completely fail or completely succeed. Don't judge yourself harshly, and view your failure as helpful feedback. Apply these lessons to future experiences and give yourself an opportunity to grow next time something happens.

7

Have a social support system.

When your path forward is blocked, how do you get around it? You may feel stuck and helpless. Having a social support system is helpful in nudging you to push through when things become difficult. Find a family member, friend, or join a group of like minded individuals. When you're having a hard time, use your social support system as a source of strength to overcome adversity.



Similar to how training for a marathon requires extensive physical conditioning to strengthen and tone your body, building resilience requires training and conditioning to strengthen your mind. Both of these actions are not achieved overnight and will take time to see results. If you're looking to build your resilience, start small and set realistic goals. As you notice yourself improving, challenge yourself with something new as you continue to grow.



About Total Brain

Total Brain is a mental health and wellness platform focused on monitoring and support. Total Brain measures the 12 brain capacities that define mental health, screens for the risk of common mental health conditions, and supports individuals with mental fitness programs that maximize their mental health.

With Total Brain, individuals can improve their self-awareness and brain performance both in and out of work, and companies can improve employee performance and productivity while decreasing healthcare costs across the organization.

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