

# Resilience and Academic Success

College can be a stressful experience for many young people. Hardiness is a characteristic that is important for academic success.

Q Can you benefit from improving your resilience-related cognitive and behavioral skills?

**To become more resilient, you must decide that you find personal value in this change, it must be important to you.**

**You must be willing to take action to develop resilience, it is not something that will develop passively.**

Is it the mountain we conquer, or  
ourselves we conquer?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXYmxMGVFsE>

# Resilience is...

- ❖ Not just surviving, but thriving in adversity
- ❖ The ability to persevere through obstacles
- ❖ The confidence in yourself to persist when life is difficult

Synonyms: Grit, mental toughness, hardiness

Proverb – Tough seas make good skippers

# Resilience in the News

"Boston is a tough and **resilient** town. So are its people." Barack Obama - Boston Bombing

"...part of what makes America strong is our **resilience**, tenacity, innovation and our willingness to be optimistic about our future." Valerie Jarrett

"A Year After Sandy, New Initiative To Help '**Resilient**' Cities Prepare For Disaster"  
Headline from Forbes - Sandy Hurricane

"I've always been impressed with the tremendous **resilience** of the American economy"  
Dick Cheney

"**Resilience**, recovery, grief on Sandy Anniversary"  
Headline from Yahoo News  
- Sandy Hurricane

"After The Sandy Hook Shooting, Experts Say Kids Are **Resilient** In Coping with Trauma" Headline from Huffington Post - Sandy Hook Elementary Shooting

# Resilience comes from....

## A. Early experiences....

1. where have you taken on a challenge, struggled and persisted to success?
2. where have you taken on a challenge, failed and then tried again?

Thomas Edison

Try... fail... try again.... fail better... try again.....

# Resilience comes from....

B. Realistic expectations of self and others

C. Awareness of your limitations

D. Identification of negative thoughts that limit risk taking and increase stress.

IT IS NOT A 'BORN WITH' QUALITY'

# A. Early Experiences

## High School

What characteristics of yours or your high school made it less likely you would develop grit?

- HS was easy because.....

What high school experiences made it more likely that you would develop resilience?

- Challenges

## B. Core expectations/beliefs that undermine resilience

- Making mistakes is a sign of incompetence
- If I make a mistake, I am a failure
- Patience is for other people
- Failure is a sign of weakness
- Distress should be avoided

# Understanding and Managing Expectations

Use feedback/information from others to help form realistic expectations about a goal or challenge

Use this data to develop a set of expectations and process for achieving your goals.

**Exercise:** Interview a classmate about a difficult experience or challenge. Collect objective data on their experience and use it to set expectations for your own experience.



# C. Personal Limitations

Common beliefs inconsistent with the idea of having limitations

- Perfection is obtainable
- If I work hard, I will always be successful
  - (Corollary) If I'm not successful, it's because I didn't try hard enough
- People will think poorly of me if I don't meet their expectations
- I have no limitations

# D. Transforming Stress into Resilience

- Four common responses to stress and stressful situations.
  - Our ability to manage stress is often determined by your historical experience including
    - Lessons from parents
    - Experiences in school
    - Tolerance for distress
    - Self-esteem

Can you identify your most common stressors?

# Four common responses to stress and stressful situations

## 1. GIVING UP

Individuals who give up succumb to the stressful situation and feel defeated.

- Often lack persistence
- Are uncomfortable taking on challenge
- Avoid situations that might result in distress

The avoidance of failure is comforting

The idea of failure implies a person has tried and given best effort.

- May rationalize that, with more effort, or different circumstances, they would have been successful

# Four common responses to stress and stressful situations

## 2. PUT UP

Individuals who put up usually struggle with the stressful situation

- they usually have the ability to tolerate some distress and accept that their level of well-being is diminished temporarily

# Four common responses to stress and stressful situations

## 3. **BOUNCE UP**

Individuals who bounce up fully recover from the stressful situation back to their prior level of functioning, which we call resilience

- *No fear of failure*
- *Willing to accept challenge*
- *Tolerance of distress/discomfort*

# Four common responses to stress and stressful situations

## 4. **STEP UP**

Individuals who step up do whatever it takes to meet the challenge and grow to an even higher level of functioning and well-being than previously experienced, an experience called thriving

# Your personal responsibility line

Acceptance of personal responsibility

Ownership of choices and freedom to choose

Saying... 'I want to....'

~~Personal Responsibility~~

Saying... "I need to...."

denying, blaming, making excuses, rationalizing,  
intellectualizing

(More time spent above the line = greater self esteem)

# Assignment for session II

Develop a personal mission statement for your life....

- Identify ways in which you can use the statement in times of struggle, adversity and discouragement.
- Recognize your personal ideals/beliefs about performance, what do you expect from yourself.
- Identify important personal goals and values

**Exercise:** Exhaustively list joyful activities and events and use the list to deduce passions and construct a preliminary statement of how you would like your life to be, what you would like to accomplish.



# Example mission statement

## Values

- Working with people, direct care
- Living near parents to care for them when elderly
- Work has variety and challenge

## Goals

- Ph.D in Counseling Psychology
- Working at a highly competitive university CC
- Opportunities to teach and provide direct care

# Assessing your resilience

Resilience is a measurable quality

In Your Time at Rensselaer

- Describe some situations where you demonstrated resilience?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Describe some situations where you needed resilience?

# Assessing Resilience

- ❖ When faced with failure, are you likely to persist or avoid the situation?
- ❖ When you have the opportunity to try something new, are you more likely to choose something where you are more likely to be successful?
- ❖ How well do you adapt to change?

# Assessing Resilience

As a child, who were your role models that demonstrated

- Persistence
- Determination
- Grit
- Tolerance of failure

Give examples of your observations of your role models demonstrating these qualities

# Assessing Resilience

- ❖ When thinking about working on a task that is difficult, do you usually procrastinate?
- ❖ Do you find setbacks to be discouraging?
- ❖ Do you believe if you work hard you will usually be successful?

# Resiliency Factors

- Persistence
- Motivation
- Goal Orientation
- Optimism
- Confidence
- Cognitive reframing
- Emotional regulation
- Decisive risk-taking
- Internal locus of control
- Insight
- Self-efficacy
- Altruism
- Connection to others
- Utilization of relationships
- Well balanced lifestyle

# Your personal responsibility line



Acceptance of personal responsibility

Ownership of choices and freedom to choose

Saying... 'I want to....'

---

~~Personal Responsibility~~

Saying... "I need to...."

denying, blaming, making excuses, rationalizing,  
intellectualizing

(More time spent above the line = greater self esteem)

# Developing Resilience

- A. Identify thoughts that prevent resilience
- B. Identify thoughts that encourage resilience
- C. Use effecting stress coping strategies
- D. Practice persistence
- E. Explore self-explanatory style
- F. Acceptance
- G. Letting go
- H. Social support.
- I. Tolerating distress

# A. Identify the thoughts that make it difficult to develop resilience

What beliefs make it difficult to develop tolerance and persistence

➤ “If I can’t do something perfectly, there is no point in doing it”

As you recognize these beliefs....

➤ Begin to look for a rationale for these thoughts... why is this belief true?

➤ Is it true because it seemed it was true in the past?

## B. . Identify thoughts that encourage resilience

Begin to consider alternative/new beliefs and then experience those beliefs to explore the consequences in real life.

- Failure is a natural aspect of taking on challenge
- Experiencing distress is a normal condition
- Long term goals often require unpleasant experiences
- You may come to the realization you want things that are unpleasant but help you to achieve a long term goal

# C. Use effecting stress coping strategies

## **Problem focused coping**

- ❖ active coping
- ❖ planning
- ❖ positive reframing
- ❖ acceptance

□ Help students solve stressful situations inside their circle of influence, usually a more productive strategy

## **Emotional focused coping**

- ❖ Denial
- ❖ Behavioral disengagement,
- ❖ Self-distraction
- ❖ Venting

□ Useful when feeling overwhelmed, or when help not available

## D. Persistence L(earned)

Learn and practice habit formation, and distraction techniques.

Use these skills to resist the temptation to not change negative behaviors, and develop new positive habits.

**Exercise:** Consider a habit you want to change. Using your understanding of behavior change, create a set of strategies to modify your daily routine.



## E. Self-Explanatory Style

Your way of understanding and explaining positive and negative events can be either positive or negative.

The stories we tell ourselves, the interpretations of these events, affect our resilience and opportunities for success.

**Exercise:** Consider an adverse event you have experienced and write a list of explanations for why the event occurred. As you consider this list, think about the importance of looking past your first explanation.



# Focusing on Empowering Interpretations (Ellis' ABCD model)

Negative, disempowering interpretations of the stressful situations in their lives are linked to below-the-line responses in the responsibility model

- “It will feel awful if I can't get this done because I should be able to do it”
- “If I can't do all of it, there is no point in doing any of it”
- “I can do this right before class, it will be easy”

# Learning Positive Interpretations – The ABCD model

- *A* stands for the activating event or stressor;
- *B* stands for belief and represents the disempowering interpretations or negative thoughts about the activating event;
- *C* stands for consequence and represents how one feels and behaves in response to one's beliefs or thoughts;
- *D* stands for disputing the disempowering beliefs or interpretations and creating empowering interpretations

- **A**ctivating Event: receiving a grade of D on an exam in a difficult class
- **B**elief (disempowering): “Getting a D means I’m not a good student”
- **C**onsequence: “Since I’m not good at this, there is no point putting much effort into preparing for the next exam”
- **D**isputing the original belief: “While that material was tough for me, there is no way to know what will happen next”

- **A**ctivating Event: working on a project and making little progress despite putting in good effort.
- **B**elief (disempowering): “If I work hard on this, I should be able to do it, but I’m not”
- **C**onsequence: “Since I’ve worked on this without progress, I might as well give up”
- **D**isputing the original belief: “Just because I’ve worked hard at it, isn’t a good reason for automatically doing it well, perhaps I should look for some help with it”

## F. Acceptance

- ❖ Think of an opportunity to try something that you expect will be difficult.... but possible
  - Give it your best effort
    - If you have difficulty defining good effort, consult others
  - If unsuccessful after good effort, consider what you have learned from this experience
  - Note your emotional response to the lack of success
    - Try to develop some insight into the cause of that emotional response.

## F. Acceptance

Focus on learning to accept the negative emotions associated with certain goals you want to achieve (see your mission statement) Avoiding the emotions means avoiding the struggle.

Commit to the goal and cling to that commitment rather than the natural desire to avoid unpleasant feelings.

**Exercise:** Write down a goal, if possible connected to your mission statement, and that you have been avoiding because of possible discomfort. List the required steps, and the negative feelings associated with each step. Make a commitment to pursue the goal and tolerate the distress.



# Activity

- Write down a goal, experience, or desire you have been avoiding because of the discomfort or frustration it involves
- List steps to accomplish the goal or move forward
- Name the unpleasant feelings associated with each step
- Describe strategies you can use to help you cope with the pain/frustration



## G. Letting Go

What can you learn about the process of changing or letting go of a goal or dream and the benefits that arise from loss?

Only from experience can you learn about wisdom's role in deciding when it is time to let go and accept loss.

**Exercise:** Write down an activity that you attempted but was unsuccessful or a goal you did not achieve. Try to explain what happened and observe or predict what benefits you received from letting go.



# H. Social Support

- Meaningful relationships are more likely to lead to above-the-line responses and help you think/act in empowering ways.
- Health and well being are directly related to your connections with other people
- Social connection boosts your ability to tolerate distress

Proverb: If you want to travel fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go with others.

What strategies can you use to increase social support?

# I. Tolerating Distress

Develop strategies for improving your ability to tolerate distress

- Recognize that feeling distressed is a natural experience
- Remember that being upset is not a long term condition and you will feel better
- Develop some self-soothing strategies that work for you
  - Remember, these are strategies for use when in distress .....
  - Not to avoid distress or procrastinate

# Self Soothing

Meditation

Mindfulness

Listen to music

Exercise

Talk with friends

Distract your self – guide your attention to something else

Change of scenery

Relaxation training

Helping others

Find meaning in the situation

# Maintaining Resilience

- ❖ On a regular basis, monitor your emotional response to difficult situations
- ❖ Observe your reaction to failure, do you see the outcome as a personal commentary on your ability or an experience that can provide valuable learning
- ❖ Pay attention to your frequency of taking on challenge, what do you learn about yourself from avoiding challenge.

- Opened door exercise: write about three times in your life when an important door closed on you and consider what doors opened after they closed
- Random act of kindness: carry out one act of kindness a day for 5 consecutive days, write a reflection about your experience
- Forgiveness letter: write a letter to someone who has wronged you and pledge to forgive them if appropriate, but do not send the letter or discuss the letter with them.
- Three good things journal: keep a Gratitude Journal for one month, each day write about 3 good things that happened to you, and journal about these experiences.

- Change a habit paper: decide on a habit that you want to improve or change. Write 6-8 pages about the habit, your reasons for wanting to change, and the action plan you will use to create change. Focus on strengths you can leverage.