

# Ten Ways to Bounce Back

Staying resilient is like keeping fit, and just as most people feel better when they are in fit, life challenges will be less formidable when we learn to stay resilient. Here are ten ways to bounce back from challenges you face at work and at home.

## 1. Find a sense of purpose

Resilient people have a passion or purpose that nourishes and sustains them. It might be spending time with a sick relative or volunteering for a charitable organization. Take the time to identify what activities bring you a sense of fulfillment and personal satisfaction. Then work out how to translate your aspirations into action. You could enroll in an evening class or volunteer in your local community. Activities outside of work that give you a sense of purpose can keep you going, especially during difficult times.

## 2. Have a positive outlook and practice gratitude

Thoughts like, "It's terrible and I can't do anything about it," wear down your resilience. Turn negative thoughts into positive action and you'll feel better. Focus on the part of your life that feels good today and avoid wasting anger or negative energy on trivial things. Try not to let small annoyances affect your mood. Spend time with people you like and do things you like to do. Use humor to help you see the positive. Plan something today that you can look forward to. Remember that optimism is a skill you can learn—it just takes practice.

Practicing gratitude helps you stay positive. Take a few minutes each evening to think about the things you were grateful for that day. Write down everything, from enjoying the sunrise or a beautiful piece of music to appreciating your family or friends.

## 3. Take pleasure in the small joys of life

The small joys of life are what renew us, give us peace, and keep us strong. Make time for small joys and doing things you like, such as being outdoors, being with family and friends, reading, gardening, cooking or getting exercise.

## 4. Take an active approach to solving your problems

Resilient people have an ability to negotiate and renegotiate life. That means being able to anticipate problems and come up with solutions. Here are some ways to successfully tackle problems:

**Identify the problem.** Writing down what the problem is can be very helpful.

**Confront the problems.** Don't deny, ignore, or let them weigh on your mind.

**List your possible options for dealing with the problem.** You always have options and you will discern that some are better than others.

**Seek input from knowledgeable people you trust.** Talk with those who can provide you with resources, information, and ideas.

**Use some of the skills you've acquired at work to help you manage your personal life.** At work, you tackle a problem by gathering information and resources and breaking big tasks into defined and manageable steps. Use some of those same skills to handle problems at home.

**Try to focus on the things that you have control over.** For example, if you are caring for a relative with a chronic illness, try to put aside sad thoughts about your relative while you are at work. If you focus on your job and the things you do have control over, you may feel better and your problems may not seem so overwhelming.

**Look back to how you successfully handled problems in the past.** Ask yourself, "How did I get through it? How can that knowledge help me now?"

## 5. Help others, and learn to accept help from others

Asking for help is hard for many of us. Do you ever ask a good friend or co-worker for support when you need it? If your child is having a problem, do you ask for support from the teacher? Paying attention to what you need and asking for help are signs of resourcefulness and strength, not weakness. And it will help you feel stronger and more resilient. Talk about what you are going through with others. Learn from people who have been through what you are going through. Don't wait for someone to call you—be the initiator. If you are facing a challenge and a neighbor or friend offers to help with meals or transport, allow yourself to accept the help. Be there for people you care about and they'll be there for you.

## 6. Take care of yourself

You can't be resilient if you don't take care of yourself. If you're physically exhausted or overextended emotionally, it's more difficult to bounce back and get through a difficult time.

**Speak to your doctor whenever you aren't feeling well.**

**Take some time off.** Use your vacation or personal days from work.

**Get exercise.** Studies show that people who exercise are more resilient.

**Keep your life simple.** Plan simple meals. Resist signing up for too many activities. Don't be afraid to say "no."

**Limit the amount of caffeine and alcohol you drink.**

**Stick to the "80/20" rule in your eating.** Some experts say if 80 percent of what you eat is healthy—with a nutritious, low-fat mix of vegetables, fruit, and whole grains—then you can allow

yourself to eat what you want for the remaining 20 percent.

**Pay extra attention to taking care of yourself if you are experiencing a stressful life event** such as a separation, a job change, or the death of a relative or friend.

**Take time to recover.** Just as you need time to recover from a physical illness, you also need time to recover when you experience emotional setbacks or losses. Think about how you recover from a cold or flu: you rest and take care of yourself. You need to do the same when you are recovering emotionally. When your emotional resilience is worn down, you need to pay extra attention to getting enough rest, eating balanced meals, making time for relaxation, and seeking support from the people you love.

## **7. Keep learning and growing**

When was the last time you learned something new, made a new friend, or pursued a new hobby or interest? Take advantage of opportunities at work and in your personal life to learn and grow. You could learn a new computer or technical skill, a new language, or a new game or sport.

Stop yourself from thinking and saying, "I'm too old to . . . ride a bike, learn a new language, take up walking." Learning makes you feel capable, fulfilled, and more resilient.

## **8. Embrace change**

The only constant in life is that everything changes. So the ability to handle change is a key survival skill of all resilient people. Try to anticipate change and look ahead to see what's coming. That way you'll be prepared for the next change when it happens. Make a conscious effort to stay flexible, and learn to say yes to new opportunities.

Realize that the only real way to change is to do something more than once. For example, if you want to change your habits and get more exercise, you have to keep at it week after week until this change becomes part of your routine.

## **9. Be a doer, not a complainer**

The primary way people bounce back is by staying active and maintaining a normal routine. When you sense you are in a rut, that's the time to get going, to move forward. Enroll in a class or volunteer to help a friend, neighbor, or relative in need. Tell yourself, "I'm going to take this step."

Remind yourself that resilience is about taking charge. Start with the small step you can take right away, rather than waiting to take the big step and maybe never getting to it. For example, spend an hour every week on a big clean-up project that's been making you feel guilty. Plan things to look forward to. Work on a plan for today, tomorrow, next week.

## **10. Work on reducing stress in your life**

Most of us are familiar with the classic symptoms of stress. It can often cause sleep problems, trouble concentrating, headaches, stomachaches, neck, shoulder, or back pain, heart palpitations, and lack of energy. Are you aware of the negative "spillover" effects that stress can have on your personal relationships, your home life, and your ability to bounce back and cope with everyday activities? Here are some ways to work on reducing stress in your life:

**Try to pinpoint what's causing your stress.** Identify the source. Sometimes we feel sad and are not sure why. Identifying what is truly bothering you is half the battle.

**Find ways to simplify and organize your life** so that the problems and challenges you are facing are manageable. Look for things you can do to feel less overwhelmed. You might spend weekend time organizing and simplifying tasks to make things easier for the week ahead.

**Find ways to relieve tension.** Try relaxing your shoulders when you're tense. Roll your shoulders forward and then back in a rotating motion. Take a meditation or yoga class.

**Let go of your anger.** Anger is a negative emotion that increases stress and consumes a lot of mental energy. How often do you find yourself saying, "It's not fair!" or "It's all your fault!"? Learn to let go of your anger, forgive, and move on. You'll have more energy and feel more resilient.

**Take advantage of the programs and benefits your organization offers** to help you take positive steps to increase your resilience and find ways to reduce stress and balance the demands of your work and personal life.

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