
Build your resilience to cope with Covid-19 challenge

WomanUp's Dearbhalla Baviera points how we need to pay attention to how we resource ourselves in order to have the resilience overcome the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis.

We are only at the early stage of processing the traumas and uncertainties that have been caused by #Covid19. You may know people who have contracted the virus, you may have relatives or friends in the front line in the health services and you may have concerns about elderly relatives or others who are in the high-risk category.

There has been a shock to the way we have lived our lives. There is the immediate economic impact that the crisis has had in terms of job losses, pay cuts and business closures. Also, there are considerable uncertainties about our own financial futures and the prospects of whole sectors and individual businesses.

These are indeed VUCA times. The term, which stands for volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, has been around for a while and is often used to describe the geopolitical uncertainties of recent years. VUCA has taken on a whole new meaning with Covid19, given the scale of the pandemic and the consequences for us as individuals and professionals and for the society and economy to which we belong.

Another term, resilience, is in everyday use and being spoken about as essential for helping us get through these difficult times. But what does resilience mean and how can we become resilient when we're dealing with unprecedented stresses and concerns? How can we be resilient in supporting others in dealing with their anxieties and fears? How can we move from a sense of surviving and 'just getting through' to thriving?

To move beyond surviving, we must bring an awareness of how we resource ourselves as we adapt and respond to the change and uncertainties that sometimes can be overwhelming

Shifting the narrative

The American Psychological Society describes resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, crisis and significant times of stress.” Managing your responses is core to being resilient. As [Carol Bolger identified](#) in the first of this #CopingWithCovid19 series, it’s important to firstly recognise what is inside and outside of your control. We can’t change what has happened, all we can do is change how we respond.

We can shift the narrative from “what happened” to “what happens next?” Instead of agonising about why your income has dropped, or why your job may be gone or curtailed, or even why we have so many Zoom calls, it’s far better to focus your mental energy on how you can use these changed circumstances to your advantage. Maintaining a forward focus with a sense of purpose, is a core element of building emotional resilience and resourcing yourself.

How can you use this time to slow down and create space to focus on the many things that have been put on the long finger in the past? For some people, spending more time with your family and supporting elderly parents, children or siblings is a positive outcome in this environment. Some senior leaders who are often time poor are now admitting that they are enjoying more time at home with their families, while balancing productivity and focus on the business.

Changes and practices

If you have more time, can you enhance your skills, your health, your connections? Online courses are booming as professionals allocate more time to upskilling and spending time on the learning and other things that had long been put on the long finger. When you look back and consider how you adapted, what will you be proud of?

Can you shift the way you work that is to your advantage? You may be one of the many people who have adapted well to remote working and even finding that you are more productive. There is a merging of work and home – work has come home and home inevitably comes into work. How are you adapting your working arrangements to allow both systems to work side by side? This may need to be reviewed on a weekly basis as the pace of change is so fast.

Building resilience includes practising self-compassion. Paying attention to the range of emotions that we are all experiencing is one way of being more compassionate to yourself and others.

Suspend self-judgement. Set realistic expectations. Give yourself the permission to say that these times are really tough but that’s OK. You don’t need to be positive for 100pc of the time. How you resource yourself in these moments, impacts how quickly you can bounce back. You may find that you need to let off steam every now and again – and that’s fine, knowing that this time will pass. Know the best way for you to do that – breathing, running, meditating, connecting with friends and family. Reflective writing and journaling are really positive ways to process and reflect on current times.

‘Switch off’ space

As [Clodagh Hughes identified](#) in the second of this #CopingWithCovid19 series, downtime is key. Scheduling time for fresh air, exercise, daily meditations or time to resource yourself in whatever way you can is really important right now. Equally important is finding your own ‘switch off’ space, which given the current restrictions, might be your apartment balcony, the garden, the bathtub or the spare room. Be very clear where your space is. Bring conscious awareness to what is working for you so that it becomes an easy go to.

In the early days of this change, I found that my “me time” was in my car. Once a day, towards the end of the day (after I had checked school work, projects, walked the dog, checked in on family, completed client calls and did other work) I went to the car. Initially I went for a drive. Then it moved to sitting in my driveway. It was my safe space.

I took a breath. I listened to the radio (news or music depending on what I haven’t had much of during the day). I called family or friends. I listened to a short meditation or a podcast. Just for a short time. That was enough. That was enough to walk in the front door feeling resourced. I was available again to meet everyone else’s needs, uncertainties and anxieties, as well as being ready to laugh, engage and settle into family games for the evening.

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