



Enhancing Personal Resilience

Personal resilience is the capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity and to bounce back from setbacks, trauma and high stress.

What Low Personal Resilience Looks Like

Irritability/Anger: Being quick to anger and irritable is a very common characteristic of low resilience and often leads to conflict in the work place.

Persistent Illness: One of the most frustrating characteristics of low resilience is constant illness. Since our immune systems are depressed when our resilience is low, we cannot fight off the viruses and bacteria that naturally bombard our systems.

Becoming Isolated or Over Clingy: As resilience diminishes, people can either start to isolate themselves from other people or become too dependent on having family or friends around them.

Moodiness: As resilience decreases, there can be a change in our body's hormones that causes mood swings. We can experience extreme highs and lows, sometimes several times a day.

Overreaction to Normal Stress: When a car cuts you off, most people are slightly annoyed. A person with low resilience may overreact and become enraged.

Easily Depressed/Crying: Some people with low resilience find they feel sad a lot and cry more easily than they used to. They struggle to control their emotions.

Trouble Sleeping: Trouble sleeping is extremely common among people with low resilience. Many of us focus on how to sleep better without realizing that instead we need to enhance our resilience.

Poor Memory: This is another very common result of low resilience and is most acute when Department staff tries to study a language when their resilience is low.

Lack of Hope: The most troubling characteristic of low resilience is the lack of hope, the lack of a vision for the future. This can sometimes evolve into despair. This makes it hard to plan and problem solve and can manifest as cynicism and a lack of caring.

Activities That Enhance Resilience

We all know that if we exercise regularly, eat well, and get adequate sleep we will become healthier and more resilient. But, too often we stop there. We also need to incorporate resilience enhancing activities into our lifestyles and make time for these activities in the same way we make time for eating, sleeping and exercising. Here are some resilience enhancing activities:

- **Rest Your Brain:** Focusing your brain on only one thing at a time is an amazing way of rejuvenating and finding a sense of calm. Think of this as resting your brain. While meditation is an effective way to rest your brain, there are many other ways such as yoga, art work, gardening, jigsaw puzzles, and photography to name a few. Think about what you can do even for short periods of time to focus on only one thing at a time and build this into your weekly schedule.
- **Stay Connected:** Studies show that having a supportive social network has a positive impact on resilience. Prioritize spending time with family and friends.
- **Manage Your Workload:** Studies show that working long hours negatively impacts productivity and damages resilience. If you are working long hours, ask yourself whether you really have to or have you adopted an unnecessary workaholic culture. If you have to work long hours, take regular breaks and take time off to rejuvenate.
- **Have a Passion:** Most highly resilient leaders have a hobby or passion outside of work. Do something you love on a regular basis that has nothing to do with work.
- **Practice Moderation:** Excessive alcohol use erodes resilience and you can see this same negative impact when you indulge in other areas such as spending or food. Enjoy food, drinks and spending in moderation but avoid extremes.
- **Be Altruistic:** Altruism is directly linked to resilience. Volunteer somewhere, contribute to your community, hold the door open for a colleague.
- **Laugh:** Laughter is very good for resilience. Watch that comedy show, value the jokesters in your life, take a 5 minute YouTube break, laugh often.
- **Be Grateful:** Studies have directly linked showing gratitude with resilience. Say thank you to people who help you and think every day about what you are grateful for.
- **Know Yourself:** Listen to yourself and be honest about what you can and cannot do. Ask for help when you need it. Seeking help is strength not weakness.

Where to Get Help

If you find that you are experiencing characteristics of low resilience that are severe and last for long periods of time, or they interfere with your normal functioning, seek help through MED Employee Consultative Services (or your agency's staff care office) or your own personal physician or mental health professional.

For resilience training at your post or in your office, email the Transition Center's Resilience Project at FSITCResilience@state.gov. State Department employees can subscribe to FSI's resilience blog at <http://wordpress.state.gov/fosteringresilience>.