



Creating a Resilience Tool Kit

We all could benefit from resilience training to bounce back from traumas or even daily pressure and stress. Resilience defines our capacity to bend without breaking. In Latin, *resiliens*, means “to rebound or recoil.” “Re” means “again, back, anew.” Resilient people overcome challenges of all kinds – trauma, personal challenges, and just day-to-day blows. They bounce back stronger, wiser, and more empowered. Here is a baker’s dozen tool kit of positive habits to strengthen resilience:

1. Apply virtue strengths to challenging situations

We live life operating on a continuum from service before self, to grumpy, to downright nasty. Rumi reminded us that we are all jackasses, though we do all have angel wings. When we are not busy being a mule, we can strive to become the best version of our self.

Ask yourself: How would you use virtues in a challenging situation that you are facing now?

2. Realistic optimism

While we can’t control events, we can control our response. We don’t live in Disneyland. Reality means we get clear about the factors that we can’t control. Optimism means that we kick into gear everything possible to contribute to a favorable outcome for others and for ourselves. Put your weekly tasks into one of three groups:

- Group A: Those you can control
- Group B: Those you can influence
- Group C: Those you can neither control nor influence

Prioritize those in group A, focus where you can on group B, and ditch those in group C.

3. What would you do if you weren’t afraid?

Our brain’s threat detector creates a negativity bias in us, yet 85% of our worries never happen. And most that did happen were not as bad as we thought it would be, or we learned worthwhile lessons. When events are scary, ask three questions to help keep fear in perspective:

- What’s the worst that could happen?
- What’s the probability that the worst will happen?
- If the worst happened, could I handle it?

4. Supporting self and others

For whatever you are doing in the moment, is it helping you or others? If so, keep it up. If not, cut it out.

“Sometimes it is very easy to hold a grudge; however, it harms no one but you.”

– Nelson Mandela



5. Benefit-finding exercise

One way to get past resentments is to identify the hidden benefits of negative experiences to make the costs seem smaller and less controlling of our lives. Think about being harmed by another person from your recent past. It could be something minor or something serious. Then, take a few moments to identify some positive consequences of the event that you were not expecting. Perhaps you became aware of personal strengths that you did not realize you had. Perhaps a relationship became better or stronger as a result. Or perhaps you grew or became a stronger or wiser person. Here are some common benefits for you to consider:

- I discovered strength I didn't know I had.
- I became wiser (slower to trust in relationships, less naïve).
- I gained confidence in myself.
- I became more kind and less selfish.
- I learned the importance of forgiving.
- I learned more about how to be a good teammate.
- I became less worried about pleasing others.
- I learned about qualities to look for in friends.
- I learned how to deal constructively with my anger, and I learned how to keep a cool head.
- I learned how to be grateful for what I have.
- I learned to stand up for myself.
- I learned the importance of learning to stand up for others.

“Pressure is a privilege.”

– Billie Jean King

6. Performing under pressure

Practice three steps to perform better under pressure:

- Step back – Buy some time. Step back to figure out what is happening. Take a deep breath to tamp down your primordial brain and to kick in your thinking brain.
- Step up – Sort out how you want to show up under pressure. Which virtue is being called for—compassion? Courage? Hope?
- Step in – Time to act. Strive to be the person you want to be. (Ceri Evans, personal interview, 9/20/2020)

“I am a fool, but I know I'm a fool and that makes me smarter than you.”

– Socrates

7. Constructive vs. destructive

When someone shares good news with us, our response can strengthen them and our relationship or diminish and weaken our relationship. We can be active and constructive (genuinely offer enthusiastic support), passive constructive (lame or lazy support), passive destructive (ignore the good news), or active destructive (focus on the negative). Here is what these four different responses look like after someone tells us they got a promotion:

- Active constructive – What a wonderful opportunity. What most excites you about your new position? Who do you look forward to working with? What a great way to build on your strengths.
- Passive constructive – That’s great.
- Passive destructive – What are we going to have for lunch?
- Active destructive – That sounds like loads of work and hassle. You would be crazy to take this job.

“One aspect of neighborly love is that we must not merely will our neighbor’s good, but actually work to bring it about.”

– Thomas Aquinas

8. People who bring out your best self

Write down the people who bring out your best self. Figure out how to spend more time with them. People who contribute to our character and strengths contribute to our resilience.

“We had the experience but missed the meaning. And approach to the meaning restores the experience in a different form.”

– T.S. Eliot

9. Reflection questions for big kids

Once a week ask four questions of yourself. Or as a family ask these four questions together.

- Did I reflect on the virtues?
- In what acts of compassion was I involved (relieving the suffering of another person)?
- In what acts of social justice was I involved (righting a public wrong where I live/work in community)?
- Did I learn from my mistakes? (Not did I make a mistake?)

10. Reflection questions for kids

First, the parent makes it clear that unconditional love means the kid didn’t do anything to earn parental love and couldn’t do anything to lose it. Once that is established, make it clear that the purpose of school is not to be the valedictorian, first chair violinist, or starting quarterback. The purpose of school is to ask three questions every day:

- Were you brave?
- Were you kind?
- Did you learn from your mistakes? (Again, not did you make a mistake?)

11. Reflection questions in the spirit of Benjamin Franklin:

Ben started the day by asking, "What good can I do today?"

Ben ended his day by asking, "What good did I do today?"

I want to say thank you to all the people who walked into my life and made it outstanding, and all the people who walked out of my life and made it fantastic."

– Unknown

12. Hunt for the good stuff

At the end of each day, reflect on what went well. Write down three or four things that went well as a result of practicing virtue.

"I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you."

13. "Ho'oponopon"

This word reflects an ancient Hawaiian forgiveness practice that roughly translates to "cause things to move back in balance" or to "make things right." It is practiced by expressing four phrases: I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you.