

# Top Ten Tips For Remaining Psychologically Resilient

Psychological resilience can be defined as the ability to resist and manage stressors and to “bounce back” from stressful life events. It is vital to understand that resilience is not being strong all the time and never experiencing stress. Resilience is the ability to be aware that stressors are having a psychological impact, and to consciously engage in activities that help you manage and cope with these stressors.

## TIP 1: Maintain a social support network

It’s much easier to be resilient in the face of work and life challenges if you have a solid social support network. Talking about your feelings and having strong connections to your partner, family, friends, and co-workers helps you to be more effective at facing life’s difficulties. It is important to make time for your friends and loved ones and it is vital to stay connected even when you’re under pressure and may not feel like being sociable.

## TIP 2: Maintain a third place

An important element of being resilient is to have and maintain a “third place.” This third place should be in addition to your home (first place) and your workplace (second place). Your third place should be a physical environment where you go to relax, socialize, engage in an interest, or pursue a hobby. Examples of third places are your gym, local park, library, and so on. When under pressure, we have a natural tendency to spend too much time at work or home. It’s nourishing to spend time at our third place.

## TIP 3: Help others

Research shows that people who help others—doing volunteer work, mentoring, and other acts of giving—are more resilient than those who do not engage in such an activity. Engaging in such worthwhile activities provides a sense of purpose and accomplishment, and also boosts wellbeing.

## TIP 4: Keep a boundary between your personal and work life

Pressures and problems can come from both your personal and work life. One key strategy to maintaining resilience in the face of pressure is to keep a clear boundary between your work and personal life. You need to have techniques for “switching off” from work so that it doesn’t invade your personal life. There are a variety of methods for this, for example by listening to calming music on your commute home to help you relax and turn off work-related worries or thoughts. Don’t forget, it’s also important to not let personal problems impact work.

## TIP 5: Know your early signs of stress

As stated earlier, being resilient is not about being strong all the time and never feeling stress. Resilience is knowing when you are starting to feel stressed and using techniques to help manage your stress—for example by doing deep breathing, getting exercise, and talking to family and friends about how you are feeling. To help with this it is useful to be aware of what your early signs of stress are. Early signs tend to occur in four areas:

**Physical.** Many people experience physical signs when they are starting to feel stressed. These may include headaches, neck and shoulder pain, or stomach problems.

**Emotional.** Anger, irritability, frustration, and low mood can be emotional signs of stress.

**Cognitive.** When under pressure, we tend not to think as effectively and may have trouble concentrating, focusing, making decisions, or have lower productivity at work.

**Behavior.** When we are stressed we may have sleep problems, withdraw from loved ones, or abuse drugs or alcohol.

## **TIP 6: Get exercise**

As a general rule, the healthier you are physically, the easier it is to be resilient to stressors. One key to maintaining your resilience is to be active, in particular, cardiovascular exercises and body stretches. The key is to do some exercise, little and often, for example walking, swimming, cycling, or playing sports. It is very important to maintain an exercise regime when you are feeling particularly stressed and if possible do slightly more exercise than usual to help you cope with the difficulties.

## **TIP 7: Practice deep breathing**

Deep breathing is one of the easiest relaxation techniques to master and it is also one of the most effective in helping you remain calm and resilient. Slow, deep (diaphragmatic) breathing slows down your heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and reduces tension in the muscles. Here is the simplest method for practicing deep breathing:

- Sit comfortably in a chair with a good posture and both feet flat on the floor.
- Close your eyes and place your left palm on your stomach and your right palm on your chest.
- Now breathe slowly in through the nose and out through the nose without holding your breath at any point.
- Try and expand your stomach as you breathe in and contract your stomach as you breathe out.
- Try to breathe so that only your left palm moves and not your right. Your chest and shoulders should not move as you breathe, only your stomach. All the time you should be relaxed and concentrating on breathing slowly.

## **TIP 8: Reduce self-criticism**

One habit too many people have which reduces their resilience is that they are too critical of themselves. Self-criticism often occurs as a voice in our head (sometimes called an internal monologue). We're critical of our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Often linked to self-criticism is our tendency to be too critical of others as well. Self-compassion and being less critical of others and ourselves has been shown to boost resilience as it reduces negative thoughts.

## **TIP 9: Get organized**

Managing the fast pace of modern life and the multitude of activities and tasks we have to keep track of both at work and in our personal life can be stressful. To be resilient, it's important to have an organizational system that helps you stay on top of things. You'll feel less overwhelmed. To help you maintain your resilience, your organizational system should include two major elements:

**Keep your to-dos outside of your head.** In other words, you should not rely on your memory to trigger when you should do your actions. That's the job of your organizational system. The less you rely on your memory, the better.

**Prioritize your tasks.** It is always vital to have a clear distinction between tasks that are urgent, time dependent, and must be performed now (such as taking an important call); and those that are important but can be dealt with later.

## **TIP 10: Practice resilient thinking**

A vital element of resilience is perception: how you perceive and think about the challenges life throws your way. Resilient people tend to be good at keeping stressors in perspective so they aren't overwhelmed by them. One way they do this is by focusing on how they can solve or tackle problems. To practice resilient thinking, focus on solutions, not problems and the feelings problems generate. Think of it this way: If you fell into a hole, your thinking should be about how to climb out of the hole, not how you fell into it to begin with or how unlucky you are to be in the hole.

A very useful technique for maintaining resilient thinking is to keep a [Gratitude Journal](#). Write down in it the things for which you are grateful for in life. By carrying out this activity you are training your mind to focus on positive things, which in turn helps build resilience.

In your busy life, it may not be possible to implement all of these tips. But try to think creatively. It may be possible to combine two or more tips together, such as playing tennis with a friend, which would enable you to maintain your social ties and support network at the same time that you're getting exercise.

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