



**Nottinghamshire  
County Council**

# **Personal Resilience Good Practice Guide**



**Workforce Planning & Organisational Development**  
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## Introduction

There are many life events or experiences that can cause mental distress, for example: bereavement, relationship breakdowns, moving house, financial worries.

At work, our job is much more than simply a way of earning a living. It provides identity, contact and friendship with other people, a way of putting structure in our lives and an opportunity to meet goals and to contribute to society.

However, in today's workplace we all need to be able to cope with increased demands, pressures, budget cuts, performance targets, changing roles and an uncertainty about the future.

**Personal Resilience** can play a key role in how we manage difficult situations and will help individuals to improve their performance in the workplace as well as having a positive impact on their health and well-being.

While most of us deal with things well most of the time any one of us can simply have a bad day. Any of us can become upset and reveal that we are human after all!

And, when things “get too much” it may be that all we need is:

- A brief time-out period
- A quiet place away from others to shout or cry
- Someone to be with you – and simply ‘be there for you’ and listen

Having and developing **personal resilience** is the way we can best deal with the challenges that life can throw at us as well as ensure we enjoy the most from life too.

This guide is designed to help you understand and think about your own resilience and how it can be improved upon.



## What is Personal Resilience?



When we think of Personal Resilience many things come to mind but essentially it is the ability to bounce back from difficult situations.

Personal Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy and even in times of stress.

It is important to remember that contrary to belief this is not something that you either have or don't have. It involves thoughts and behaviours all of which can be learned and developed through using some of the techniques that we will provide in this module.

In order to understand resilience it may help to think of some of the challenges you have had to overcome in your life and think about how you responded to them.

There are a combination of elements that contribute to resilience.



**Communication & Problem Solving:** Resilient people are sensitive to the early warning signals that a problem is about to occur and often thrive on finding solutions to problems rather than let the anticipation of a problem overwhelm them. Communication skills and the ability to empathise are also very important in that they allow us to understand others' points of view.

**Managing strong feelings and impulses:** The ability to deal with strong emotions such as stress and anger is essential. Stress in particular can be a positive force for those who are resilient, offering them the motivation to get things done.

**Supportive Relationships:** Caring and supporting relationships both within and outside the family are very important. It is these relationships that offer support, encouragement and the trust we require to be truly resilient.

**Flexibility:** The ability to be flexible is very important when things go wrong. Resilient people tend to learn from their mistakes and embrace change rather than shy away from it.

**Optimism:** Are you a glass half full or half empty type of person? If you are an optimistic person when something goes wrong in life you try to look at the situation and not think of the worst case scenario but how you can take the situation and improve it.



It is important to remember that it isn't the people or events that make us feel bad - it is the meaning we give to them. This applies at home or at work.

Here is a work example...



Samara is fairly new in her job and has been assigned her first task to do on her own. When she presents the work back to her manager he is not happy. He tells her the task was not completed correctly and the documentation has errors in it. He asks her to go through it again and to give him a revised version by Thursday at the latest.

Samara's first reaction is disappointment - this was her first task in a new role and she feels like she has let herself down. She then starts to panic - what if she isn't up to the job, what if her boss decides she isn't capable and lets her go? She feels like just giving up now and going straight home.



Samara decides to phone a friend on her break and tell her how upset and worried she is. Her friend calms her down and helps her re-assess the situation. Her boss has given her some constructive feedback and has given her a chance to redeem herself and re-do the work.

After their chat Samara feels much calmer and realises that she has blown the situation out of proportion. She has made some silly mistakes but it isn't the end of the world.



She takes her time to re-do the task and the paperwork and her boss is very happy with it this time. She now realises that if her boss provides some constructive feedback in future she should look upon it as a chance to improve and take direction.



Samara has used the resilience assets that she possessed to resolve this situation. Her relationship with her friend helped her re-assess the situation and it had a positive outcome. If she had not talked the situation through with a friend it is possible that she would have walked out of her job.



## How Resilient Are You?

### Pressure v Stress



The Health & Safety Executive define stress as 'the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed upon them'.

There is a clear distinction between pressure and stress here in that pressure can have a positive effect giving us the push to get a job done whilst stress can be detrimental to health.

Every job requires a certain amount of pressure as without it employees can become bored and under-stimulated but the important thing is to get the balance right and ensure that the pressure does not become excessive.

### How do you respond to Stress?

Stress affects each of us differently and can affect your mind, body and behaviour but do you know how to control it or does it control you?

The first thing you need to do in controlling stress is to identify your stressors - the situations or causes of stress.

Think about the types of things that cause you to stress and think about how it affects your body and mind. Makes some personal notes about how you feel.





## Signs & Symptoms of Stress

It is important to learn how to recognise when your stress levels are getting out of control. If you struggled on the previous page to identify your regular stressors then why not try keeping a stress diary to try and identify the triggers:

### Cognitive Symptoms

Memory problems  
Inability to concentrate  
Seeing only the negative  
Constant worrying  
Anxious or racing thoughts



### Physical Symptoms

Aches and pains  
Chest pain, rapid heartbeat  
Nausea or dizziness  
Frequent colds  
Loss of sex drive

### Emotional Symptoms

Moodiness  
Irritability  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Depression / Unhappiness



### Behavioural Symptoms

Eating significantly more/less  
Sleeping too much/too little  
Self-medicating through alcohol/drugs  
Nervous habits e.g. nail biting, pacing



## Managing your Stressors

Sometimes it is easy to say simply avoid the situation that is making you stressed but this isn't always possible. There are many ways to cope with a difficult situation but they all require change, whether it is changing the situation or your reaction to it.

### Avoid the stressor:

- Learn how to say no - you should know your limits and know when to say so.
- Avoid people who stress you out - if someone is constantly causing you stress you should look at ending the relationship, where possible.

### After the stressor

If it isn't possible to avoid a situation e.g. at work then you should look at altering it.

- Manage your time better - poor time management can cause stress so it is important to plan ahead and use your time wisely
- Be flexible - if you are asking someone to alter their behaviour then you should be willing to do the same
- Communicate - if something is bothering you then you should communicate your feelings in an open and honest way - you will be surprised at how much this helps to alleviate the feelings of stress

### Adapt the stressor

If you can't change the stressor then you need to look at changing yourself. You can regain your sense of control by changing your perspective.

- Re-frame problems - try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. The next time you are stuck in a traffic jam don't get stressed, instead look upon it as time to enjoy some alone time
- Look at the big picture - ask yourself if the problem or situation will be important in a month or years' time and if the answer is no you need to focus your energy elsewhere

### Accept the stressor

You need to accept the things that you can't change as some situations are inevitable.

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable - you can't control other people but you can control how you respond to them
- Learn to forgive - accept the fact that people make mistakes and move on





## How Resilient are you?

We have looked at how stress can affect us and the factors that make a person more resilient but do you know how resilient you really are?



Which of the following statements apply to you?

1. In a crisis, or stressful situation I can keep calm and stay focused
2. I am an optimistic person and see difficulties as temporary situations
3. I don't like change and prefer it when things remain the same
4. I don't like working as part of a team and prefer to just get on with my own work rather than listening to and helping others
5. Bad things always seem to happen to me
6. I have been made a stronger person by difficult situations

Resilient people try to stay positive and calm in stressful situations. They embrace change and new challenges and like to communicate and empathise with others. They would relate to statements 1,2 & 6 but less so the others.

If you would like to find out more about your strengths and weaknesses and how these can impact on your ability to perform try taking this short online questionnaire at <http://www.testyourrq.com/> . On completion you will be emailed a full Resilience Quotient report.



# How can I improve my Personal Resilience?

## Changing your state

We have identified your stressors and how they affect you in a previous section of this module - now we will look at ways of overcoming them. Mind and body are one system so each will have an impact on the other. When an event occurs it creates a physiological response in our bodies. It is possible to change your state by using the techniques highlighted below.

**Chain of Excellence:** The Chain of Excellence is based on the relationship between your breathing, physiology, state and performance.

Put very simply if you change your breathing your physiology will follow. Try to remember a time you felt really confident and think about your facial expressions, breathing and posture at this time and try to replicate this.



**Anchoring:** Anchors are simply things that trigger a conditioned response in us.

Try to think of a feeling that you want to re-create e.g. in stressful situations you would like to feel calm so try to think of a person, place or even a piece of music that helps trigger this feeling.

**Reframing:** People tend to either:

- feel they are at the mercy of events
- feel they can affect change and take control of their lives

When someone or something bothers you try asking yourself 'what else could this mean?' or 'how else can I view this?'



## Anti-Stress Top Tips

There are many simple ways of combatting stress.

**Breathing:** Good relaxation always starts with the breathing.

- Fill your lungs with air, filling them from the bottom up
- Breathe in through your nose and out through the mouth
- Breathe in slowly and regularly counting from one to five
- Let the breath escape slowly, counting again from one to five

Practise this exercise for three to five minutes whenever you feel stressed.

If you feel dizzy at any time whilst doing this you should stop.

**Laugh:** Laughing is the first defence against stress and can help lower blood pressure. While laughing the brain releases endorphins, the natural feel good chemicals.

**Sleep Well:** Ensure that you get the correct amount of sleep each night (7-8 hours) and that the atmosphere in the bedroom is calm and quiet. Try to avoid computers and television up to an hour before bed time.

**Eat Well:** Try not to eat foods that aggravate stress: alcohol, butter, cheese, coffee, cocoa, coconut oil, egg yolks, junk foods, nuts, sugar and soft drinks.

Try not to self-medicate in stressful times by bingeing on junk food and using alcohol and/or drugs.

**Relaxation Techniques:** This particular technique involves tensing and relaxing the muscle groups in turn.

Start by carrying out the breathing exercise and then for each muscle exercise hold the stretch for a few seconds, relax and repeat a few times.

- **Face:** push the eyebrows together, as though frowning, then release.
- **Neck:** gently tilt the head forwards, pushing chin down towards chest, then slowly lift again.
- **Shoulders:** pull them up towards the ears (shrug), then relax them down towards the feet.
- **Chest:** breathe slowly and deeply into the diaphragm (below your bottom rib) so that you're using the whole of the lungs. Then breathe slowly out, allowing the belly to deflate as all the air is exhaled.
- **Arms:** stretch the arms away from the body, reach, then relax.
- **Legs:** push the toes away from the body, then pull them towards body, then relax.
- **Wrists and hands:** stretch the wrist by pulling the hand up towards you, and stretch out the fingers and thumbs, then relax.



## Top Tips for Resilience Building

As we have seen resilience is important both in our personal and working lives. If you have decided that you could improve your levels of resilience then we have provided some top tips to help you.



**Make connections:** Having a good support network is essential in difficult times and is critical for general well-being.

**Everything isn't always black or white:** Try not to fall into the trap of all or nothing thinking - there are always shades of grey. Try to be flexible in your thinking and be open to new ideas.



**Accept change:** Accept that change is part of living and rather than looking upon it as a negative thing you should embrace it and new opportunities.

**Move toward your goals:** When the present is difficult you should focus on a better future and start a personal action plan.

Crisis situations may seem daunting and in some cases impossible to deal with but resilient people view these situations in a realistic way and set reasonable goals to deal with the problem.



**Take decisive actions:** You should try to take control of the situation, where possible, and do something, however small. While there may not be a fast and easy solution to the problem you can start by taking small steps.

You should focus on progress made and not on the amount of work still left to do. Research suggests that those who are able to come up with solutions to problems are better equipped to deal with them.





**Self-discovery:** Difficult times can give us the opportunity to grow, learn from past mistakes and re-evaluate life.

**Remain positive:** How many times have we said or done something and then criticised ourselves? You should always try to focus on the positive and don't accept blame where it isn't warranted. Self-esteem and confidence go a long way to becoming more resilient.



**Keep things in perspective:** When something bad happens it can affect all areas of your life.

Try to keep things in perspective by not allowing one event taint your view of the other areas in your life.

**Take care of yourself:** Try to sleep well, eat well and stay active as all of these things contribute to an overall sense of well-being.

When we become stressed it is usually all of these things that will be neglected so take care to nurture your body and mind.



**Keep working on your skills:** According to Dr. Russ Newman 'resilience is not an extraordinary thing but is rather ordinary and can be learned by most anyone'.

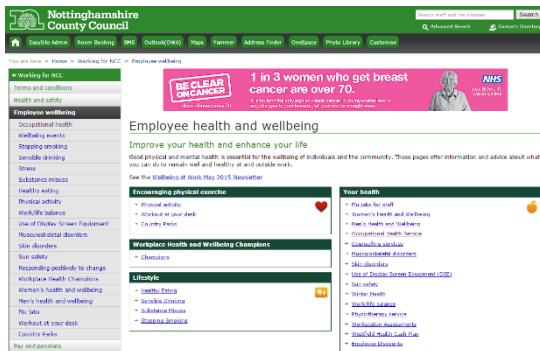
You should focus on practising some of the common characteristics of resilient people.



## What Next..?

If you would like to learn more about **personal resilience** – there is a more in depth elearning programme available on Learning Pool (<http://nottscc.learningpool.com>).

Ask your manager for more information and discuss access to a PC if you need one. You can also do this at home or in a library.



For more general health and well-being information you can also see the NCC Well Being pages on the intranet.

**Remember** – it is good to talk, raise any concerns or discuss issues with your line manager as part of supervision as you need to.

Personal resilience is a quality we all share and one we all benefit from developing and one that we can use to help and support each other.

