



**Illinois Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



## ***How High Do You Bounce? Building Resiliency in Yourself and Others***

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## Activity: Doors Closed Doors Open

The door that closed on me was \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The door that opened for me was \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Questions to consider: What led to the door closing? What were the effects of the door closing on you? What helped you open the new door? Was it easy or hard for you to realize that a new door was open? What does a closed door represent to you now? Did the experience bring anything positive? Now think of all the people that have helped you open doors in the past. What did they do to help you? **And what could you do to help others?**



Adversity and traumatic events cause us huge amounts of stress that negatively impact our physical and mental well-being. **Can you list some life events that can cause us stress?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Resilience is:

*the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. As much as resilience involves "bouncing back" from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth. (APA, 2012)*

Think of a family or person that you know who has dealt well with adversity, a crisis or a traumatic event. **What traits does this family or person have? What strengths have you observed?**

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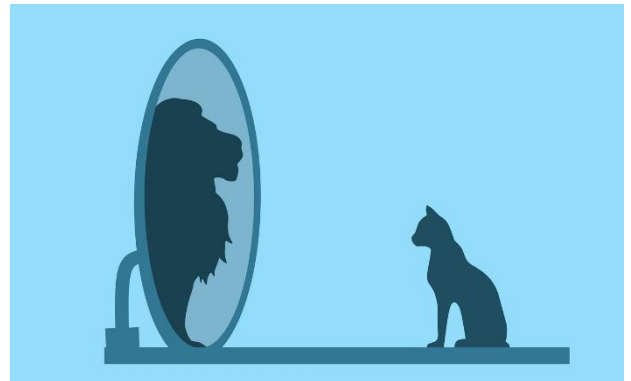
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Research has identified many characteristics or traits most commonly found in resilient people, families and organizations. They are listed here along with ways that these traits can be built up to increase resiliency skills or reserve.

### Characteristics of resilient people:

- They are able to reframe the situation and view difficulties as challenges and opportunities for growth. They view the challenge as manageable and NOT permanent and they actually feel adversity paves the way for opportunity. Also see mistakes not as failures, but as important lessons being taught and they try to learn from them.
- They also see mistakes not as failures, but as important lessons being taught and they try to learn from them.
- They have confidence in themselves and this belief enables them to take risks (Levy, 2003)
- They have initiative and are assertive – they carve out the parts of situations that they can control. They know they can't control the events in their lives from happening but can control how they perceive them and how to respond.
- They address the reality of the situation and deal directly with the problem and what they actually have control over. They have what Author Diane Coutu call realistic positivism – they see the situation as it is while staying positive about the ability to cope and conquer.
- They are flexible by letting go of the old ways that may not be working and are open to new ideas. They can cope with change, are adaptive and think outside the box. (Temin, 2015)
- They are compassionate because they know that when you are kind to others, it makes you feel good. According to the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, compassion creates positive work relationships and increases cooperation and collaboration.



- They are creative
- They have a sense of humor. Research shows that humor improves mood, relieves pain, improves immune system, soothes tension and relieves stress. (Temin, 2015) One of the greatest benefits of humor is that it allows us to see with a new perspective on the situation. It allows us to distance ourselves from the problem situation and see it from a different perspective where it looks much more hopeful. (Kuiper & Nicholl, 2004)
- They are positive and optimistic.

Fine tune your optimism by:

- Being around positive people that support you
- Laugh and surround yourself with things that help relieve stress
- Practice positive self-talk
- Don't worry over the things you have no control over

*“The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”*

*~Lawrence Pearsall Jacks*

- They practice gratitude. Take a moment and list three things you are grateful or thankful for:




- They are spiritual. This can be meant in a religious sense or can also mean that they feel they have larger values and a belief in something bigger than themselves and it can be a very powerful motivator.
- They practice self-care. Being kind to oneself is one of the most critical elements to bouncing back and moving ahead. They get enough sleep, eat well, exercise and they practice stress management techniques.

## What are some ways you manage or reduce stress:



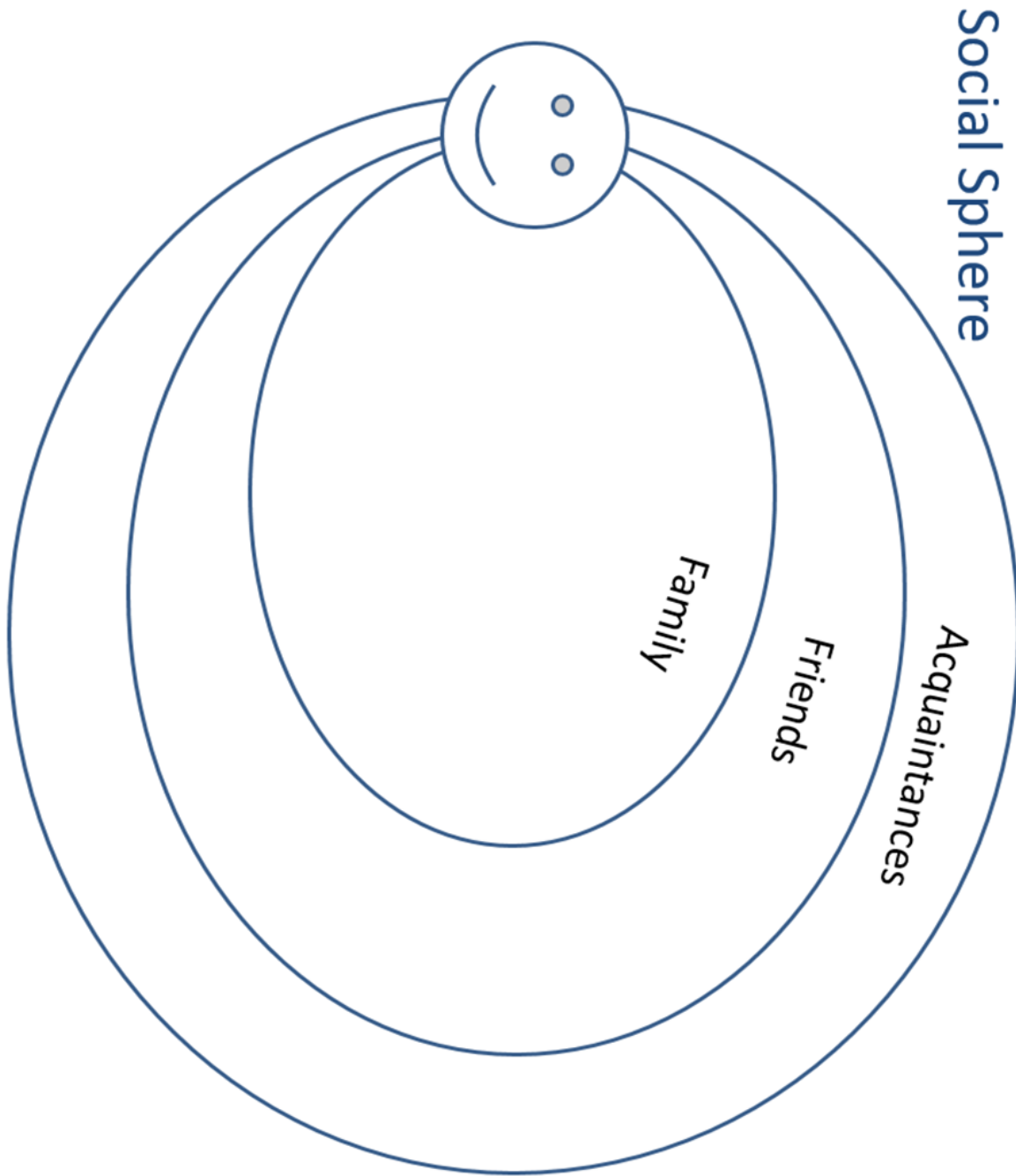
Stress reducers are unique to each person and just need to be something that help us relax, are soothing and pleasurable, make us feel good and be something we can build in our lives on a regular basis.

Activity: see self-care plan on page 9.

- They are mindful. Mindfulness is a method to reduce stress and is the ability to focus one's attention on the present moment – not thinking or worrying about yesterday or tomorrow. For guidance in practicing mindfulness, there are several classes, scripts, videos and audio files available online. There are also several Apps available like Calm, Insight Timer, Headspace and Stop, Breathe & Think – among others. There are also many books available that can probably be found at your local library.
- They have strong support systems. They know they have other people to help them and feel a sense of belonging and connectedness and have strong relationships with others.

## Activity: Social Sphere

Take a moment and think about your social connections and complete the social sphere. Who is in your sphere? So how are your social connections? What can you learn from your connections? Do you need to add to your sphere?



- They have purpose. Individually and as part of an organization – there is a strong sense of purpose, goals and vision. A sense of purpose has been defined as a motivating factor that provides individuals with a sense of meaning in life. Volunteering with a local homeless shelter or simply supporting a friend in their own time of need, can help garner a sense of purpose, foster self-worth, connect with other people, and tangibly help others, all of which can empower you to grow in resilience. (APA, 2012)
- They practice positive communication habits which are also necessary for resilient relationships. These habits assist in meeting life’s challenges, help resolve conflict, and promote loyalty and trust.



### Basic Communication Tips:

- ✚ Practice active listening – listen to what someone is telling you instead of thinking about how you are going to respond
- ✚ Think through what you want to say first
- ✚ Make your feelings and wishes known to avoid misunderstandings
- ✚ Explain your feelings to avoid blaming and shaming others
- ✚ Speak with empathy to communicate respect for those listening
- ✚ Let them know you understand by paraphrasing and clarifying what you hear (Burcham, 2012)

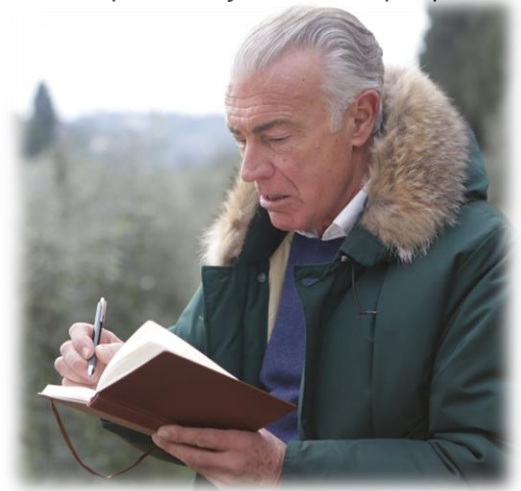
### Resiliency and Aging:

A number of studies have shown that resilience does not decline with age and, when other factors have been taken into account, older adults are at least as resilient as younger adults. Older adults may face additional life stressors like chronic health conditions, physical and cognitive decline, and

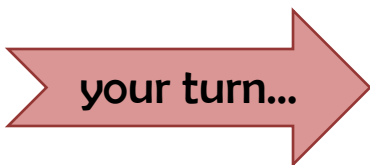
a potential loss of roles and social support. So for them, resilience emphasizes effective adaptation, adjustment, and acceptance (Windle, 2011). Studies have found that a number of internal and external protective factors or resources are associated with the emergence of resilience in the face of challenges. Many of the characteristics have already been mentioned in this workbook and include self-esteem, self-efficacy, hope, tolerance, sense of humor, spirituality, sense of purpose, and self-acceptance

(Windsor, 2015) Additional studies include better health and well-being as being associated with greater resilience and agree that higher levels of social and communal interaction and increased levels of spirituality improve resilience (Centre for Policy on Ageing, 2014)

Interventions such as reminiscence, life review, wisdom enhancements, and mindfulness-based approaches may facilitate resilience in late life (Aldwin et al., 2017). Sense of purpose is again emphasized. It is important to remember that purpose is a constant practice and can change over time. When we face transitions, whether it's changing careers, going through divorce or illness, or hitting a milestone birthday, we may be prompted to slow down, reflect, and reprioritize. People draw on the skills, knowledge, and values they've cultivated over a lifetime to start a new chapter. (Newman, 2020)



## Ways that I can build or nurture my own resilience levels:



- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_





# Self-Care Plan

What can I do to keep myself physically healthy?

**Physical**

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\_\_\_\_\_

What are small things I can say to myself to keep me going?

**Emotional**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are my social supports?

**Social**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Well-Being**

**Intellectual/  
Creative**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Environment**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What kind of creative projects can I do to keep my mind busy?

**Spiritual**

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\_\_\_\_\_

What can I do to make my physical space more welcoming?

What are things I can do to find meaning and joy in daily activities.

Source: Tara Powell, University of Illinois School of Social Work, 2020

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## **Additional Resources:**

Developing Resilience: Overcoming and Growing from Setbacks. MindTools. Retrieved from [www.mindtools.com/pages/article/resilience/htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/resilience/htm)

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Maintaining Your Motivation – Jones Loflin  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/588a5d641b10e3f790cbec60/t/589bd5c4a5790a35876bd42a/1486607815877/Maintaining%2BYour%2BMotivation%2Bby%2BJones%2BLoflin.pdf>

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[www.jongordon.com](http://www.jongordon.com)

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## Books:

The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to finding your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte, PhD 2017

Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back by Andrew Zolli and Anne Marie Healey 2013

Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant 2017

Rising Strong by Brené Brown 2017

The Micro Resilience Book by Bonnie St. John and Allen P. Haines 2017

Resilient: How to Grow an Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness by Rick Hanson, PhD 2020

Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence by Rick Hanson, PhD

Photos: <https://pixabay.com/photos/resilient-resiliency-resilience-4899283/>  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-standing-near-yellow-petaled-flower-2050994/>  
<https://pixabay.com/vectors/cat-mirror-lion-reflection-5690627/>  
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<https://www.pikrepo.com/fexbp/girl-standing-infront-of-look-forward-chalk-text>  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-in-green-jacket-holding-pen-and-book-3782814/>

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