

Six Steps to Becoming More Resilient

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To become more resilient, it's important to understand and accept three things. First, trauma is not about something "wrong" with you; it's about what *happened* to you. Second, no one is *born* resilient. Resilience is something we develop over time as we experience traumatic events in our lives, and it's something we can learn. Third, we become resilient largely through the stories we choose to tell ourselves about what our trauma "means."

For all we hear about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), research suggests that the great majority of people who experience trauma do not become permanently traumatized. Most bounce back after a while, after they have been able to refit the puzzle pieces of their story back together in a way that lets them keep going. The experience of "living to tell" about our trauma gives us the awareness that we are able to pick ourselves up and continue on, even find happiness and love in our lives.

This awareness—what I call "conscious resilience"—can give us a powerful tool to resist the emotional onslaught that a traumatic experience can bring. Drawing consciously on our experience of survival, pulling through tough times, can help us face whatever else life may throw at us. Knowing that even when we get knocked down we have a history of getting back up makes all the difference in the story we tell ourselves *about* ourselves.

Knowing who we are, where we come from and belong, is the key to being confident, courageous, and resilient. Understanding our place in our family and community lineage, sharing stories of heroic deeds, learning from our elders' wisdom—these are essential characteristics of a real community. They are equally essential for us individually, as we transform our personal stories to tales of healing and wholeness rather than woundedness and brokenness.

Here are six steps you can practice to become more resilient, starting now:

- **Make yourself the hero of your life story:** Reframe your personal story as one of strength and survival, rather than weakness and victimization.
- **Remind yourself of what you've already survived:** Knowing you have pulled through other challenging experiences helps you believe you'll be okay after another one.
- **Practice shamelessness:** You didn't "cause" your trauma and you can choose not to let it define you, or to let anyone else define you by it.
- **Claim your place in history:** Knowing how we fit into our family, community, and era gives us a solid foundation to stand on.
- **Learn from your elders:** Wisdom is the fruit of resilience and we can learn from others' experiences about sustaining ourselves through tough times.
- **Practice positivity:** Reject the "woe-is-me" mentality, and focus instead on what you can do to improve your situation.