



# Resilience and You

by GAIL CARROLL

**H**appy New Year to all. This past year has been one of many challenges, changes and first experiences. The experiences we have had are many and varied. Some people have taken each day and each challenge as it has arrived and some have struggled to various degrees depending on how impacted their community or school. Many are asking, “Will we survive this pandemic? How much longer will this go on? Will our lives ever be the same again? What effects will this have on the world, our careers, our children and the future?” That then leads us to ask, “Are we resilient?” If so, how resilient are we? One thing we all can say is that we have been known as hardy Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We have survived many things, especially this past year: Snowmageddon and its state of emergency, a pandemic and a shutdown of the world as we knew it and a return to school with many new restrictions and protocols to follow.

So, what is resilience? Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines resilience as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

The American Psychological Association describes life as a journey. It comes with its ups and downs and its twists and turns. There is no map or handbook for life. Sometimes we get lost, some times are more challenging than others. Life is filled with uncertainty but, we bounce back, we survive it and sometimes we even become stronger thanks to our strong constitutions and resilience.

How do you know if you are resilient? What do you need to do to become or grow resilience? Here are a few Principles of Resilience (Inspired by Katherine King PsyD., *Psychology Today, Lifespan Perspectives*, March 31, 2020):

**1. Believe in Your Ability to Cope:** No matter how strong we are or think we are, we can feel overwhelmed or buried under. It is much better for us to acknowledge our thoughts and feelings and know that it is okay. Remember to believe in yourself and to identify and rely on your strengths. Here are some tips to consider:

- Use positive self-talk
- Be your own advocate and champion
- Use your sense of humour

- Don't be afraid to reach out and ask for support
- Take a few deep breaths

**2. Stay Connected With Supports:** It is so important to stay connected. We might be isolated or have to isolate at times given our different circumstances, but it is important to stay connected to those you care about and those who care about you. It gives our spirits a lift, improves our mood and contributes to our overall well-being. Some tips for staying connected you might consider:

- Use Face-Time, Zoom or other e-platforms to connect with friends, colleagues and loved ones when getting together in person is not possible.
- Make a phone call to those you care about. Just the sound of someone's voice can give you both a lift. It is always appreciated to know that someone thought of you today and cared enough to reach out.
- Enjoy e-concerts, game nights, sharing a meal with friends and family via e-platforms. Some colleagues and school staff have enjoyed meals together through this venue when getting together in person is not possible.
- Send daily texts or emails with little quotes or sources of inspiration.
- Write a good old fashioned letter to friends, colleagues or family who live away and share stories.

**3. Talk About It:** It is important to share our thoughts and feelings and not let things bottle up. If we don't share what is happening for us then we contribute to anxiety or feelings of doom. An all-time favorite educator once advised a group of students: “Don't be a stamp collector.” She explained that if every time we have a thought or a feeling and we ignore it we can equate each of those as a stamp we put in a jar with a lid on it and think we will just deal with it at another time. “Thoughts often trick us into thinking that we just don't have time to deal with our thoughts, feelings and/or issues right now. The problem is that when we don't make time for this and keep putting stamps in the jar, one day the lid is going to blow off and we are left more vulnerable with a larger mess to clean up.” (Sr. Madeleine Veitch 1977) Helpful tips to consider:

- Reach out and share your thoughts and feelings

with a close friend or a group of colleagues. You can arrange your own support network and do this within your school or friend group on a daily or weekly basis. Make a time for it even if it is only 20 minutes.

- Call your EAP and arrange to meet with a qualified counsellor. Someone with whom you can confide and who can be a source of support for you.
- Join a support group online. Especially during the pandemic we are seeing an increase in online support groups.
- Know that it shows strength to reach out and ask for help or support. Some things can feel too big to carry on our own and we just need to have a space to feel safe and be heard.

**4. Be Helpful To Others:** Sometimes in helping others we are also helping ourselves. When we help others we give the gift of service and while it lifts the spirits of those whom we are helping, it also releases endorphins and helps uplift our feelings and sense of wellness. Some helpful tips to consider:

- Drop a meal off to a friend, colleague or family member who may not be feeling well or who may be isolating.
- Put together a little care package of snack foods or some favorite things like warm fuzzy socks and a book.
- At school you can lift one another's day by sharing little cards with uplifting quotes, pictures or cartoons.
- Remember that everyone is going through something right now and what we all need is patience, kindness and understanding from each other.

**5. Practice Gratitude and Mindfulness:** It is easy to feel carried away by the tidal wave of the many struggles and sad things happening in the world. We are all working through a global pandemic, but look at the good things we have learned. We have learned that sometimes a global crisis can make us more creative in how we work and bring us closer together as a team. Some helpful tips to consider:

- Talk about gratitude and what you are thankful for each day. It can be anything from enjoying that the sun is out today, enjoying a perfect cup of tea or coffee, a favorite cookie or homemade treat or meal. The more we talk about what we are grateful for, the more positivity and gratitude we grow in ourselves and others.
- Show kindness wherever you can. One simple act of kindness can inspire others to do the same.
- Practice daily mindfulness and meditation.
- Remind yourself and others that no matter what

the circumstance, it will not last forever. That is why change is such a wonderful thing.

**6. Cultivate an Attitude of Survivorship:** Don't allow yourself to fall into a victim mentality. Remember that others have been there before you. In the case of pandemics, our ancestors survived the Spanish Flu in 1918 during a time when we did not have access to the resources we have today. (heritage.nf.ca) You are strong and will survive and even thrive long past this situation or any other that you face. Some things to consider:

- You choose your attitude. *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."* (Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*)
- When we can no longer change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves. When we are faced with these situations, we need to adapt and find meaning in the circumstances we find ourselves. (Viktor E. Frankl)
- Take heart in that no matter how grim a situation looks, the smallest thing, thought, idea or action on your part contributes to making things better for all.

**7. Seek Meaning:** Believe there is meaning and a lesson in everything. Once you find your meaning and your purpose in any challenging situation you have conquered and overcome. Some tips to consider:

- Take some reflection time each day and think or reflect upon whatever challenges you are currently facing. Do I have a larger purpose here?
- You are the author of your own story and journey. You are the map writer. There is always a purpose for challenges, changes, opportunities and adventures that come our way. Your job is to seek the answers and know that you are strong and will not only survive, but thrive. You will grow from these experiences and help bring about positive change in your own life and through sharing in the lives of others.

*There are many aspects of life you can control, modify and grow with. That's the role of resilience. Becoming more resilient not only helps you get through difficult circumstances, it also empowers you to grow and even improve your own life along the way.* (American Psychological Association [apa.org/topics/resilience](https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience)).

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