

Definition & Attributes of Resilience

Definition of “resilient”: Strong, resistant, quick to recover, spirited, determined or flexible.

Definition of “attribute”: Quality, characteristic or trait.

What is Resilience?

- Resilience is the ability to adapt to adversity, to roll with the punches and cope with life’s misfortunes and setbacks.
- Resilience will help you survive challenges and even thrive in the midst of hardship. It can help you endure loss, chronic stress, traumatic events and other challenges both big and small.
- Resilience won’t make your problems go away, but resilience can give you the ability to see past them, find enjoyment in life and handle stress better.
- Resilience is developing “Internal Resources” (skills and coping mechanisms to improve your mental well-being) that you can draw on throughout life’s ups and downs.
- Becoming more resilient takes time, practice, experience and often guidance from others.
- Resilience doesn’t mean you ignore your feelings. When adversity strikes, you still experience anger, grief or pain, but you’re able to go on and remain generally optimistic and go on with your life.
- Being resilient also doesn’t have to mean going it alone. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key component of being resilient.

17 Attributes of Resilience

The following attributes describe resilient people. Keep in mind that you – like most people – may show some, but not all, of these attributes/strengths when faced with difficult situations and challenges. You don’t need to show all of these attributes in to be considered resilient.

- 1. Sense of Humor** — Resilient people don’t take themselves too seriously; this does not mean they cannot be serious at times but they have a sense of humor about life’s challenges. Humor is the ability to find something funny (especially yourself!) in a situation, even when things seem really bad. Humor often gives you the perspective needed to relieve tension and make a situation better.
- 2. Optimistic** — Resilient people look at the bright side of a situation. They believe in their own strength and their ability to address and overcome any problem. They see something negative as an opportunity to do something better or get something better. They consider adversity a challenge not a threat.
- 3. Faith** — Resilient people have a spiritual practice or belief (this does not necessarily mean a religious belief). They have faith in themselves and the universe to overcome anything.
- 4. Curious** — Resilient people are childlike in their interest in the world. They are curious about situations. They experiment and wonder about things and laugh. They are not caught up in the past and they focus on new possibilities.
- 5. Morals** — Resilient people are connected to what is most important to them in life (their values). They know the difference between right and wrong and are willing to choose and stand up for what they believe.
- 6. Acceptance** — Resilient people understand that setbacks are part of life and that the future can sometimes be uncertain. They focus on the important things in life and know what they can and cannot control. They save their energy to fight the battles that are necessary.

- 7. Flexible** — Resilient people accept that the future can be uncertain. They are able and willing to adapt to adversity and change.
- 8. Physical Well-being** — Resilient people take responsibility for their physical well-being. They eat healthy food, exercise and get enough rest. This helps protect them from life's physical and emotional stresses. Resilient people know the importance of taking time for themselves, they know how to relax and appreciate all the big and small things in life.
- 9. Problem Solvers** — Resilient individuals are able to be calm and rational when faced with a problem. They are aware of important details, take advantage of opportunities and can envision a successful solution.
- 10. Creativity and Resourcefulness** — Resilient people use creativity, imagination or resourcefulness to make something happen or express feelings, thoughts and plans in some unique way.
- 11. Strong Social Support System** — Resilient people surround themselves with supportive friends and family. They build healthy connections and maintain relationships that continue to grow. Whenever they are faced with a problem they know the importance of having people around who can offer support. Being able to talk about challenges can be an excellent way to gain perspective, look for new solutions or simply express emotions. While being resourceful is an important part of resilience, it is also essential to know when to ask for help.
- 12. Independence** — Resilient people show independence by keeping a healthy distance between themselves and other people so they can think things through and do what is best for them. They know how to step away from people who seem to cause trouble or make things worse by their words or actions.
- 13. Survivor** — Resilient people see themselves as a survivor, not a victim.
- 14. Personal Responsibility** — Resilient people perceive themselves as having control over their own life. They do not blame outside sources for failures and problems. They have what psychologists call an "Internal Locus of Control." They believe that the action they take will affect the outcome of an event. Of course, some factors are simply outside of our personal control, such as natural disasters. While we may be able to put some blame on external causes, it is important to feel as if we have the power to make choices that will affect our situation, our ability to cope and our future.
- 15. Insightful** — Resilient people have insight and ask themselves questions even when the questions are difficult (Why did I do that? How could I have managed that situation better?). They answer honestly and therefore they are able to learn and move forward from mistakes. Having insight helps us understand a problem and analyze a situation from many perspectives in order to make the best decision.
- 16. Initiative** — Resilient people take control of a problem and work to solve it. They see a problem and ask questions of themselves and others. They often become the leader in activities and work well within a team.
- 17. Purpose** — Resilient people have focus and set goals. They see meaning and purpose in life and what they do. They are self motivated and determined.

(Adapted from "Project Resilience" by Steven and Sybil Wolin (<http://projectresilience.com/index.htm>), "Resiliency in Action" by Nan Henderson (www.resiliency.com) and MayoClinic.com (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/resilience/MH00078/NSECTIONGROUP=2>).

This handout was created with information from the above resources by Isla Kerr.