

Bouncing Forward

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The term resilience is defined as, “the ability to recover from (or to resist being affected by) some shock, insult, or disturbance” (Wikipedia). Much of the research in this area has focused on individual traits of resilience yet in the last few decades, has been explored as a result of post-war or post-terrorist events, as well as in the area of family systems. Froma Walsh, one of the leading researchers defines resilience as “the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful”.

The concept of resilience addresses more than survival, whereby, within the right conditions, can create factors which serve to help in the future. Some studies state that people with a hardy personality possess three general characteristics: Firstly, they hold the belief that they *can control or influence* events in their experience. Secondly, they have an ability to feel deeply *involved in or committed to* the activities in their lives. Finally, they anticipate change as an *exciting challenge* to further development. Other theorists include aspects of *hope and faith* in that a person who holds an *optimistic outlook* in what is to come in the future sets a foundation for resilience.

In terms of family systems, resiliency can be strengthened by a family’s coping skills in terms of what the family does in face of challenges and disruptions, whether they are chronic or acute. When a family can identify their own *strengths and resources* in face of crises, as well as day-to-day challenges, this is one factor. When a family can appraise what *meaning* they hold as a unit, in their community and in the larger world, these are other resilient factors. The ability for a family to *communicate* effectively during crises, *connect* emotionally with each other and maintain a *broader view* of their circumstance are resilient coping strategies.

What does all this say about you? Take a look at the challenges you have faced to date. As yourself the following questions:

- Have you felt that you could control or influence your experience of these challenges?
- Have you taken on challenges as opportunities for growth and learning?
- Have you been hopeful and optimistic at points of your experience of those challenges?
- Have you been able to call on your own inner resources when facing obstacles?
- Have you been able to mobilize other resources when you needed to?
- How well do you communicate and connect with others who are in your circle of support (family, friends, and colleagues)?
- What larger meaning have you drawn from these experiences?

We often define resilience as the ability to “bounce back”. The essence of becoming resilient is working towards meeting new challenges with a sense of opportunity and empowerment. The idea here is to draw on those traits which you possess naturally or commit to learn to develop those at further reach. When you can communicate your

experience and share it with those who can listen to and support you, your relationships will strengthen as well. Knowing at a deeper level that everything you are experiencing has its purpose and that you can derive meaning from it, you will be on the path to "bouncing forward".

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