

[“I Can’t Take Another Knock” - Improving Resilience](#)

Have you ever wondered how some people can bounce back from difficulties, and others of us can’t?

Resilience – this ‘bounceability’ – seems to vary considerably. Just recently I’ve seen an increase in therapy clients who report having suffered a series of what feels like an assault – often described as a series of knocks, or blows. It might be at home or work or both. And it’s difficult for them to keep going; feelings of being unable to cope and a retreat to understandable but often unhelpful behaviour follows.

I’m going to describe low resilience as having characteristic feelings (despair, hopelessness, powerless, sometimes anger), thoughts (“I can’t cope with this”, “I can’t take another knock”, “I have no energy to deal with it any more”) and actions (withdrawal, irritability, increased eating/smoking/drinking alcohol).

People working in the public sector particularly seem to be suffering from it at the moment – first there’s a budget cut, then a reorganisation, and then a threat of redundancy. This is without anything that may be happening at home. And it’s not just the public sector – the private and voluntary sectors are suffering too.

Let me give you some examples (the names and other details have been changed).

[Case Studies](#)

Anne has been working in local government for 23 years. She’s seen budget cuts in the past, and survived them – but she says that was easier then, when she was younger. Somehow her life has drained her of the energy she needs now. She feels exhausted, looking after her husband and 2 teenage children (who are also both looking for jobs in a difficult market). The only way she knows how to cope is through the anti-depressants her doctor has given her, although she knows they don’t solve the actual problem.

Richard has a highly paid (and at the moment secure) job in a private company. It is stressful, though, and he knows in the short term he will be making people redundant – a difficult thing for him to contemplate, as he has a soft heart and feels for them. Meanwhile at home things are difficult with his wife, who has been unhappy for a while, and with one of his sons, who has begun to take drugs. Richard himself has withdrawn into himself and talks to no-one any more; there's no-one he feels he can trust.

Ahmed runs his own business and so far has survived the worst of the recession. He's worried, though, about what the future might bring. He is in quite a bit of debt, and his young wife has just had a new baby which is taking all her time and emotional energy. Ahmed feels very isolated and has begun to drink more than he should, or wants to.

In any other circumstances, these people would manage well and lead happy and fulfilled lives. There is something about the combination of events which has led them to the point in their lives where they feel a degree of despair, and so they have had the good sense – and courage – to come to counselling for help.

Concepts

There are a number of ways to look at resilience. One is a reservoir model where we need input in order to provide output. Incoming is love, support, practical advice and luck. Outgoing is rational decisions, useful actions, thoughtful behaviours, and support for others. If there's not enough coming in, there won't be enough going out. It's a simple and effective here-and-now model.

Another model is to look at how solidly our reservoirs were built when we were growing up – some of us seem to have leaky containers! When a baby is born, its ability to manage its feelings isn't developed. There's quite a bit of evidence to indicate that this is done in the first few years. If we have unmet needs (if we're left to cry repeatedly for hours, for example) then the brain doesn't develop the neurological connections it needs in the limbic part of the brain and holes are formed in the container for us to fall through later in life when we're particularly

stressed. There's no blame in this for either the adult or its caregivers/parents – these things just happen sometimes.

What to do about it?

So what can Anne, Richard and Ahmed do about it? Well there are some tools to experiment with, but they all need practice and discipline if they are to begin to heal the holes in the psyche.

Body

Exercise has been proven to increase endorphines – the body's natural stress-busters – and over time will strengthen physical resources. The body and mind are so intertwined that this will help to build emotional resources too. It's also important to take care of the body's needs – good diet (you wouldn't put poor quality petrol in a sports car and expect top performance), affectionate touch if possible, a good warm relaxing bath, time to relax before sleep – whatever it is that the body requires.

Mind

Talking and sharing with others (whether you call it networking, coaching, talking with friends or a loved one) is very important to avoid isolation. Maybe you can get some practical advice too, but that's not really the point. Being able to connect with your strengths in the past is another good strategy – NLP anchoring might help here. We tend to forget all the bad stuff we've been through and survived – this can help us in current difficulties. Finally having a mindset that is interested in exploring difficulties and looking for the nugget of gold that is undoubtedly in there is very helpful – although again difficult to maintain on our own.

Soul

Whether you actually believe in the soul or not, having some inner peace is very helpful in times of stress. Meditation can help, taking pleasure in the here-and-now things around us, and letting go of unhelpful thoughts.

It is possible to build better resilience but it takes time and discipline – and support.

[A Practical Tool](#)

This might help you to begin thinking about your resilience....

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THINGS GO WRONG?

Start with the top 2 boxes of the exercise, and review the list of feelings and behaviours; do these correspond to any of the feelings you have when things go wrong; are there others? How does your behaviour manifest itself?

Then go onto the bottom 2 boxes looking at frequency, and whether there are any particular things that trigger the feelings and behaviour.

Feelings <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety• Worry• Depression• Anger• Loneliness• Hitting 'rock bottom' Other feelings?	Behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Push people away• Get into arguments• Sulk• Withdraw• Urgently seek comfort• Eat/drink/smoke too much• Take time off/away Other behaviours?
Frequency <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How many times a week/month?• What is the severity/depth of that feeling? (if it helps, think about it on a scale of 1-10)	What sorts of things trigger it? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At work• At home• With loved ones• Changes – big/small?• Conflict?

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