

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES DURING THE PANDEMIC



Reaching Families

Developing Resilience

Resilience is described as the ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events. Being resilient doesn't mean you don't experience stress, emotional upheaval, and suffering. Instead it means you have developed behaviour patterns and mental processes to protect yourself and manage the negative effects of stressful experiences.

The Covid-19 pandemic has put parent carers under tremendous stress, as they cope to home school and care for their children with limited resources and support. So here are some tips to help boost your confidence, and strengthen your resilience so you can thrive.

Resilience Resources

Researchers have identified four key elements of resilience which can help you cope when faced with adversity and challenges. These are Adaptability, Confidence, Purpose, and Social support.

These are called your Personal Resilience Resources (PRR), so let's explore how you can strengthen your PRR for your benefit and your families.

Learn to Adapt

Survival in crisis and at any challenging time is dependent on our ability to adapt and come to terms with our circumstances. So here are some ways to help you manage change and transitions successfully:

- Try and remember life is 10% of what happens to you and 90% of how you respond to it
- Focus on the things you can control and not the things outside of your control
- Try and go with the flow of each day as it arrives, rather than struggle against the tide
- Build on your positive coping strategies and remind yourself what has worked in the past
- Pause and think before you react and decide if the battle is really worth fighting right now
- Rethink your environment and find ways to maximise your living space and outside view
- Practice Mindfulness as it can help increase your ability to regulate emotions, decrease stress, anxiety and depression
- Looking after your Health and Wellbeing is essential for adaptation. Watch online for exercise tips and remember that a 20 minute walk can improve your mood for a whole day.

Treat each day as a fresh start and offer yourself compassion and kindness – you are doing the best you can in exceptional circumstances.

Be Confident

Whenever we have a set back in life, disappointment or difficulty, we often experience a drop in our confidence and self-esteem. Our emotions can change rapidly when we are stressed, upset, or low, so you can be up one minute and down the next, just like an emotional rollercoaster. Here are some tips to help strengthen your confidence and boost your resilience:

- Find a time each day to pause and reflect on the following questions:
- What is working well for me, when do I feel at my best and what do I enjoy?
- Then pause and reflect and ask your-self: what is not going so well, when did this happen and how might I change it for the better?





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- If I can't change it, then reflect on who can help me, and who has helped me before?
- Make a decision to act on these changes and seek support – as others do want to help you
- Next, refocus on your positive experiences and remind yourself of how good you felt then (Psychologists recognise we all tend towards a negative memory bias, so keep the positives in mind, and let go of the negative thoughts)
- Remind yourself of past achievements and successes, when did you feel at your best/happiest? Good memories invoke positive feelings and remind us of better days and our potential
- Think about how you could build more positives in your day and fewer negatives
- What motivates you, and what do you do easily and spontaneously without effort? Can you find a way to connect with these experiences and positive benefits?
- Remind yourself of compliments and positive messages from friends, family and colleagues, and remember that how you see yourself may not be how others see you
- Boost the confidence of others by showing appreciation and say thank you? Send a message to someone who has helped you or is helping you now
- Practice 'gratitude' - It can be as simple as saying 'you make me smile' or 'thank you for just being there'. Gratitude is a unique quality linked to compassion and forgiveness which boosts resilience by connecting you to positive feelings which reduce stress, isolation, negativity and depression
- Complete a Strength Finder exercise and identify your strengths by reflecting on activities you enjoy so much you sometime lose sense of time and come out feeling invigorated
- Are there things you no longer do that once boosted your confidence and have too little time for that you could take up again?

Remind yourself that your past is behind you, your future before you, so take hold of the present, it is your gift, and enjoy the moments of today and celebrate all whatever is good around you.

Have Purpose

Sometimes it can take a life crisis, such as the pandemic, to jolt us into reality. Whilst these times are often full of stress they can also help us question what is really important to us? Otherwise we can just drift along in life's stream of activity without focusing on the people and things that really matter to us. During the pandemic you may have had time to think, take stock of your life, and consider what changes you will make in the future. Life changing events help by sharpening our sense of focus and purpose, helping us to realign our values and goals to move forward. So pause and reflect on:

- What do you consider gives you a sense of purpose in life?
- Who and what really matter to you?
- Where do you feel you are heading, and is this where you want to go?
- What do you find really meaningful in life?
- What is your passion, and what/who inspires you?
- If you can't think what motivates you, then think about what you can't stop doing!
- What are you naturally good at, or what do you enjoy doing the most?
- What are/were your dreams and is it time to make new ones or get back on track?
- Reflect on where you want to be in 5 years time
- If there are obstacles, think about how you can get round them
- Set-backs and diversions may help you reach a better destination
- What steps do you need to take to start paving the way towards your goals?
- What changes can you start to make today to help you plan your future and resource yourself?
- Ask yourself what would I do if I knew I could not fail?



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Want a miracle then try the Miracle Question Test

Suppose you woke up one morning and by some miracle everything you ever wanted had actually happened - your life had turned out exactly the way you wanted it. Think about it now and consider:

- What will you notice around you that let you know that the miracle had happened?
- What will you see?
- What will you hear?
- What will you feel inside yourself?
- How would you be different?

The Miracle question requires you to think about exactly what it is you want from life. You must know what you want first before you can have any chance of getting it. The miracle is that if you do know what you want, decide what you want, and visualize it clearly, that will start to motivate you, so you can achieve it.

Support Network

Research shows that when we connect with others in trusting, intimate and affectionate relationships that our emotional wellbeing increases dramatically. We need each other to survive, and in a crisis situation we are reliant on the support of others to help provide, care, and resource us. We may also be providing vital support and care for those dependent on us, so making sure we have enough support can help us stay on top of things, feel positive and keep going. So here are some tips you can use to rethink your social support.

Map your social network

- Think about your social network and map it out to assess the social and emotional resources open to you. It may sound a bit clinical but it's good to reflect and decide if some friendships are really worth the hassle or if it's time to forge new ones and move on
- Group your networks into 'trust network' (who you can confide in), 'information network' (who can help), 'social network' (who you and your family like being with), 'work network' (who can help your career).
- Then review your networks and decide if there are gaps you would like to fill, or changes you need to make to expand or reduce your connections.
- Take time to reflect as some relationships are just for a season, and that season may have passed.

Be a good listener

Active listening is a special skill and everyone likes someone to listen and really hear how they feel. Cultivate the art of good listening, put away technology and distractions and really listen to the other person and their concerns, with your full attention. Listening like this is a rare gift, as it helps build trust, establish empathy, and helps us find solutions, and recognise the commonality of our shared human experience. As they say, 'a problem shared is a problem halved'.

Develop Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional intelligence can help you become more self aware and can develop your resilience by increasing your ability to manage your emotions. There are four areas of EI:

1. Self-management – You are able to control impulsive feelings and behaviours, manage your emotions in healthy ways, take initiative, follow through on commitments, and adapt to changing circumstances
2. Self-awareness – You recognize your own emotions and how they affect your thoughts and behaviour. You know your strengths and weaknesses and have self-confidence





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3. Social awareness – You have empathy. You can understand the emotions, needs, and concerns of other people, pick up on emotional cues, feel comfortable socially, and recognize the power dynamics in a group or organization
4. Relationship management – You know how to develop and maintain good relationships, communicate clearly, inspire and influence others, work well in a team, and manage conflict

Reflecting on the above may help you decide where your strengths and weakness lie. Are you able to control or recognise your emotions, do you have empathy for others and know how to make good relationships? If you need help with these then seek support from your trust network, or speak to a Counsellor, a GP or another health care professional or look at the NHS resources below.

Solution Focussed Thinking

Remind yourself of these home truths whenever you need a confidence boost or experience a setback:

- If it isn't broken, don't fix it
- If it works, do more of it
- If it's not working, do something different
- Small steps can lead to big changes
- No problem happens all the time; there are always exceptions that can be utilized
- Your future is both created and negotiable, and is in your hands
- Your value doesn't decrease because of someone's inability to see your worth
- This too shall pass!

Summary

Having a sense of direction gives our lives more meaning. When you have clear goals you feel more confident and can cope better with set-backs. When we adapt to life changes we can reach out to others and feel more connected.

So take this opportunity to review your progress, gain a sense of journey, and inspire and motivate others. Being purposeful helps you become more resilient, authentic and intentional about what you do, who knows what you are capable of!

Further reading and useful links

- **Reaching Families services during the pandemic, including counselling & befriending -** www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/stayconnected.html
- **NHS mental health apps -** www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health
- **NHS self-care leaflets online -** www.web.nhs.uk/selfhelp
- **Article on Emotional Intelligence -** www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-eq.htm
- **Blog on coping with the pandemic -** www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/how-i-m-coping-with-the-pandemic
- **Resilience toolkit -** www.mindtools.com/blog/offers/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/08/ResilienceToolkit-1.pdf
- **NHS information on types of talking therapies -** www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/types-of-therapy
- **Article on confidence -** www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/confidence.html
- **Bereavement Support -** www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/traumatic-bereavement/traumatic-loss
- **Mindfulness videos -** www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUeEnkjKyDs

