

Game Changers

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Adversity, personal injury, stress and loss can make you feel as though you have lost touch with yourself, but the truth is that adversity introduces us to our real selves. When you survive something traumatic or difficult, you have the opportunity to increase your personal power, strength of character, and ability to contribute to the greater good based on how you react to and rebound from the adversity.

You're strong and brave and amazing, or you wouldn't have made it this far. Surviving takes courage, intelligence, and personal power. Resilience can help you move beyond survival and into building an empowered lifestyle. Resilience is the ability to get back up when you get knocked down. You can build your resilience.

Here are some strategies you can use to build resilience and personal power:

Get Connected and Stay Connected. Don't try to recover from adversity or tragedy on your own. You don't have to suffer in isolation or try to suppress your feelings of hurt, anger, grief or fear. Seek expert help from a licensed competent therapist, doctor, clergy, or counselor. Find a support group and a mentor and start building a network of people who understand what you've been through. You can tell your story to individuals who have had a similar experience, and listen to others' accounts of their experiences and how they came back from them. And when you're ready, get started helping others and complete the healing cycle!

Review All Your Experiences, Take Courage, and Ask Yourself, "What's Next?" Allow yourself to review past events and reinterpret them, drawing strength from all your experiences. As you look back at your life, step back and look at yourself objectively, as if you're watching a movie. Give yourself credit for strength, grace, and other admirable qualities, and refrain from judging yourself or others. Find courage where you can, humor where you can. Find your life story, or you may want to think of it as a "life movie" where you are the director. Cast yourself as the hero in an Oscar-winning comeback story, and write a powerful third act with a triumphant ending.

Having a Bad Experience Does Not Make You a Bad Person. If something bad has happened to you, it's easy to want to blame yourself, or to revisit the memory and try to beat yourself up with thoughts such as, "If I only hadn't..." or, "It happened because I..." or "This is all my fault." Of course, it's healthy to take responsibility for bad judgment that brings you into harm's way, or to look at your part in situations, but don't blame yourself. Sometimes bad things happen for no reason at all, and many things in life are beyond our control. The one thing you definitely have control over is your attitude, and how you think about yourself, other people, and life in general. Keep a positive outlook, and be your own best friend.

Focus on the Present Moment, Refuse to Live in the Past. You can't change the past, and the only way you can affect the future is in this moment, right now. Focus on the present moment, knowing that you have the power, in the now, to create positive thoughts and feelings about yourself. The key to your destiny and your own happiness can be found in the present moment.

Make a conscious decision to access the power of the present moment to feel good about yourself, your life, and your future. Practice respecting, loving and appreciating yourself.

Make an Action Plan for the Present and Future. Resilience involves taking positive action. Action is empowering and motivating. People who are resilient are flexible, optimistic and hold a clear vision of where they want to go and what they want to accomplish. Set measurable, do-able goals, and when you accomplish those goals, celebrate them. It's okay to move ahead with baby steps, as long as you recognize the importance and value of each small step forward. Be optimistic and keep hope alive.

Use Mantras, Positive Affirmations and Visualization to Build Your Self-Image and Recognize Possibilities. These are tools you can employ to increase the levels of "feel good" neurotransmitters in your brain. A mantra is a short phrase that you use to focus on the positive and keep yourself balanced. I used, "I'm healing," "It's temporary," and when I first quit drugs, my favorite mantra was, "There's hope after dope." Affirmations are self-enhancing statements, written in present tense, that you read aloud to yourself right before you go to sleep at night. Visualization is the conscious act of "seeing" the things you want to have happen in your life, and feeling a strong positive emotion while you're visualizing. Also, when you visualize, "see" it as though you already have it and feel how good that feels.

Always Use Positive Self-Talk. Become conscious of the words you speak, and of the dialogue within your mind. Keep up a constant inner pep talk. Tell yourself you're strong and getting stronger, happy and becoming happier. Constantly tell yourself good stories. We often create our inner lives with our own words.

Practice Mindfulness Meditation to Improve Your Consciousness in the Present Moment. As you begin to appreciate the power of the present moment, concentrate on developing your "now awareness." Mindfulness meditation is a powerful tool that can help you reduce and manage stress, elevate your mood, relieve anxiety, and increase your confidence and self-esteem. Mindfulness meditation can be practiced in a number of ways and need not be complicated.

One way to do it is to sit in a comfortable chair with both feet planted firmly on the floor. Relax, breathe slowly, and simply observe your body, the level of tension or relaxation in different muscle groups, for instance. Observe thoughts as they pass through, like clouds across the sky. Observe any emotions that may be present, either in response to a thought or for no apparent reason at all. The purpose is to simply observe without judging or reacting, in the moment.

Another way to practice mindfulness is to take a walk outside in nature, consciously experiencing the world through all the senses. Or watch a sunset or sunrise and focus all your consciousness in the present moment as the sun sinks or climbs over the horizon and the landscape is illuminated or drenched in shadow. As long as you fully inhabit the "now." At first you may only do a minute at a time, but the idea is to increase the duration to ten minutes, sometimes more.