

The GROWN-UP guide to building



It's a term we hear a lot these days, especially when it comes to younger generations. But how can older adults develop the skills to better cope in challenging situations and boost wellbeing?

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ADULTS OFTEN TEACH kids about the benefits of resilience, but when it comes to their own lives, rebounding from setbacks can be a work in progress.

Putting resilience to the test are relationships with spouses and friends, whether that be changing dynamics, such as friends growing apart or moving away, or negative patterns with loved ones that are challenging to break.

The way we encourage children to roll with life's ups and downs has a lot to lend itself to older adults. And there are plenty of good reasons to self-reflect and build skills. Research shows psychological resilience is powerfully associated with health in later life and there is also evidence that high resilience is linked with positive ageing, longevity and lower depression. So the earlier you can set the wheels in motion, the better.

DEFINING RESILIENCE

It's a term thrown around a lot these days, but what is resilience? It's being able to cope and positively adapt to stress or misfortune, handle adversity and rebuild after a catastrophe, according to Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA). It includes having self-confidence in your strengths and abilities, problem-solving skills, an ability to handle strong feelings and impulses, a positive outlook on life and a feeling that you are in control.

What does this mean in practice? It's more than just painting on a smile for appearances, because many are struggling to cope underneath, says emotional resilience expert and author of *It's in Your Hands*, Dr Jane Foster.

"Resilience is really a combination of emotional intelligence – which is understanding and managing your emotions while being understanding and empathetic towards others – and being tough when things get rough."

Dr Foster describes life as having rough and smooth roads. Sticking to



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Emotional resilience expert

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smooth roads might be less eventful, but you're not going to boost your coping skills if you never come up against a challenge.

"We continually pick people up off the rough roads and place them on the smooth ones, thinking that it will make their lives better. But the rough roads help us gain resilience and become more emotionally intelligent."

So what are the tools that help build resilience for life and our relationships? Dr Foster offers the following tips.

1. Take responsibility

An important part of resilience is taking responsibility for your emotions. You can't change other people or the circumstance you're in, but you can change the way you respond.

"That means moving away from thoughts like, 'you make me angry' and 'it's your fault', because you're giving the emotional steering wheel to the person or circumstance. You need to regain control. Instead, you might say, 'I am choosing to feel really angry now because what you said was inappropriate'. So rather than being a victim, you will feel more in control."

2. Change your language

Changing the way you speak can create an entirely new mindset and positively impact resilience. "It's language which changes your neural pathways. And when you can change your neural pathways, you're creating a new default; a new pattern in your brain. I want this building of emotional resilience to be a long-term solution, not a quick fix."

To help with this, Dr Foster returns to the concept of rough and smooth to describe emotions and situations. "There are no good or bad feelings. Instead, they are rough and smooth. 'I made a rough choice' or 'that was a rough moment'." Why? Because the language takes away that blame and judgement, which is where so much stress comes from.

3. Fill (or empty) your glass

Take an audit of your daily challenges and the steps you find most useful in easing pressure. Dr Foster refers to these as TEPs (trigger extra precaution) and PETs (personal emotional tool).

Your TEPs might be your alarm going off in the morning, chores, bad traffic, feeling lonely or unsure of how to fill your day. When accumulated, these small things can be quite a weight to bear for some, because no-one has taught them how to empty their glass of stress.

To help empty that glass are the PETs, which can include exercise, meditation, gardening, looking at old photos, taking a bath, or doing something for others.

"They allow you to detach from the TEPs and access a creative response," she says, adding that regaining control means you are working on your resilience and increasing your emotional intelligence. "This is when your driving skills really improve."

While there are plenty more areas to work on to help build emotional resilience, these tips offer a positive starting point. A little work might go a long way in helping you navigate the ups and downs of life and the relationships you hold close. ●

