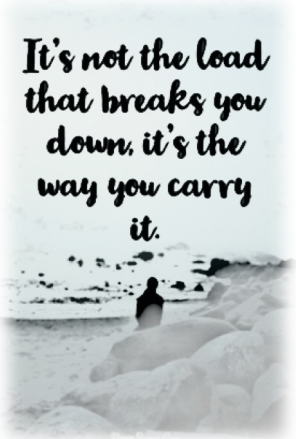
Retaining Resilience – A guide to staying grounded in crisis

We talk about resilience as our ability to bounce back, to adjust, cope, recover from adversity and change. In reality, sometimes bouncing back to the same place is just not achievable. In today's world, and specifically during the C19 pandemic, we're consistently required to adjust and recover from significant changes, whilst accepting that returning to normal won't be the same 'normal' as we perceived it before this crisis. So how do we stay calm and grounded, retain a realistic perspective and not get pulled off track, in this context?

This guide - which accompanies our webinar (***60 Second Resilience)*** and is supported by our best practice session (***Sustaining Resilience***) - provides a simple process to help us stay grounded, whilst our environment is consistently changing. We're here to remind you that you've got this, even when it feels like you haven't!



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60 Second Resilience Plan

It is our experience that 5 core anchors or building blocks underpin resilience :

1. Acknowledging the here and now (thoughts, feelings, body sensations, reality)
2. Regulating our body sensations (physiology comes before thought)
3. Nurturing our body and mind (nutrition, water, sleep, exercise and self-care)
4. Appreciating ourselves and others (recognising what we can do, staying connected)
5. Reflecting on our progress (journaling, committing to a daily practice, retaining perspective)

60 Second Resilience Plan

Our capacity for resilience is reflected by our ability to manage a range of emotions, regardless of the circumstances. This capacity will be impacted by our previous experiences, the range of coping skills that we have at our disposal and most importantly by our perception of current reality.

If we perceive the current situation as overwhelming, long term and impossible to overcome, this becomes our reality. If we're able to consider our situation as a temporary period in time, a storm we can ride out, we have a sense of being able to control the one thing in this moment that is within our power – us. Our breathing, our thoughts, our perspective. This much we always have control over.

The Resilience Spectrum

For us to be clear about where we are with our levels of resilience, it can help to check in with ourselves on our resilience spectrum



OVERWHELM ⟵ ⟶ RESILIENCE

Where are you on this spectrum?

Dead centre, moving towards resilience, moving towards overwhelm?

(Make a point of physically checking in daily with where you are – make a mark on the line so you can keep track of your progress and be present with yourself and your emotions)

Assuming you're experiencing some level of stress or feeling a bit overwhelmed with your day (the kids won't do their home schooling, the toaster broke, a family member is feeling unwell etc); let's work through the process of building your resilience step by step:

1. **Acknowledging** the here and now (thoughts, feelings, body sensations, reality)



- Take a moment to really acknowledge what you're thinking and how you're feeling right now
- Write down all your thoughts and feelings on paper, get them out of your head
- Now notice where you feel the most emotion ***in the body****. Is it tension in your shoulders, a knot in your stomach, heaviness in your legs, clenched jaw or fists etc)
- Write down what you feel and where, making a note of how heavy/light, warm/cold, moving/still this feeling is, so you really have a sense of it

**NB: Our bodies are where we hold our tension and stress. Our physiological state will always pre-determine how we think or relate to a situation. Think back over time, any moment that you have a sense of shock, fear, anger, sadness – somewhere in the body will hold this emotion somatically. Butterflies in the stomach, an aching heart, jelly legs, tension headaches, clenched fists.*

2. **Regulating** our body sensations (physiology comes before thought)



- Now take a moment to notice - Where do you feel ***in the body*** a sense of strength, resourcefulness, control or capability? (eg your breath, your feet on the floor, etc) even the smallest sense of self/wellbeing is what we're seeking here
- Breathe into this stronger and more resourceful part of your body (close your eyes if it helps to focus in the body)*
- What does this do to the original feeling that you had?
- Write down what you're thinking and feeling now – what words do you associate with this new state you're accessing in your body?
- Try different levels of pressure in tensing/releasing the muscles, deepen or soften the breath – find what feels the most helpful for you – make a note of this now

**NB: Sometimes if we find it hard to access this feeling of strength or resourcefulness, just softening and accessing our breath (longer inhales filling out to the bottom of the stomach, longer exhales concaving our stomach and lungs fully) will help us to get in touch with where we feel it – curling our toes, clenching the inside of our legs, sitting up straighter – these can all help access a feeling of resourcefulness in the body.*

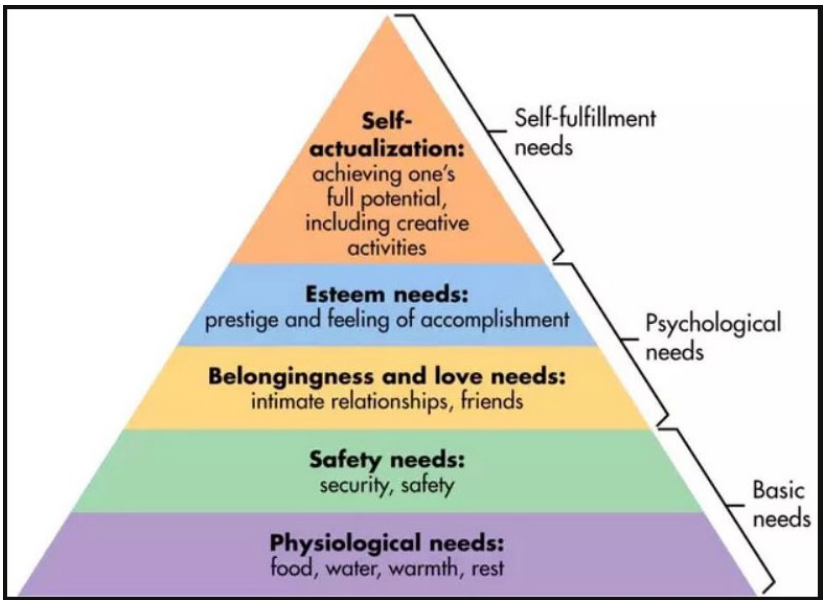
3. **Nurturing** our body and mind (nutrition, water, sleep, exercise and self-care)



- What does 'nurture' mean to you? How do we nurture plants, babies, those that we love and care for?
- Are you 'nurturing' you? Do you take care of your own needs as well as you do others?
- If when you answer these questions, you're aware that you're neglecting your own needs, this is a time to consider your own self-care – how you can fulfil your own fundamental needs day to day.
- Take a moment to write down all the things that you can do to nurture yourself. Consider the 30 Second Nurture Activities at the end of this guide – ***pick at least 1 that you can do every day and choose to commit to this for 21 days.***
- If you can, find a Nurture Buddy to do these activities with you – ***check in daily with your buddy to encourage each other to stay on track with self-care***

NB: If a part of you thinks that self-care is something that's indulgent, unnecessary or that you need to 'man up', think again! ***Self-care is a critical part of social emotional wellbeing*** *and ensures that our basic human needs are met, that support core mind and body functioning. Think of this as* ***your oxygen mask – if you don't have yours on, you can't help anyone else with theirs!***

Maslow's hierarchy of needs reminds us that we all have basic human needs that – if remaining unmet – will cause us to struggle to retain a sense of power, control and calm in our lives.



(Source: McLeod, S. A. (2018, May 21). Maslow's hierarchy of needs)

Recent research into Maslow's hierarchy confirms that in today's world there is a greater interdependence between these needs, to retain a sense of wellbeing in our lives. This new perspective suggests that social connection and a sense of self-actualisation through social means is a greater indicator of personal wellbeing and happiness, so the pyramid flattens into a circle of self-care needs, rather than a hierarchy. It's important for us to be aware of how we meet our own needs as this is a fundamental part of retaining personal resilience.

4. **Appreciating** ourselves and others (recognising/validating what we can do, staying connected)

- What does 'validation' mean for you? Where do you gain appreciation and recognition?
- Do you appreciate and recognise you for you? Would you speak to others the way you sometimes speak to yourself?
- If you're unkind to yourself, think about who's voice is chastising you. It may be time to change this voice to a more encouraging voice – the tone you use with a small child or a loved one. Choose to give your subconscious mind more encouraging messages – '*You've got this'; 'You're doing the best you can with what you have – it's always enough'* – ***try out a kinder tone for the next 21 days and choose to appreciate you for the value you bring.***
- Ask 5 people close to you to tell you - *What 3 words sum up the value you bring, your strengths, positive characteristics and qualities?* ***Create a collage or colourful image of these words that you can acknowledge daily*** – on your phone/your fridge door, etc – that reminds you of the value you bring to others. Choose people to respond to this message that you know value you and love you for who you are, without judgement.

*If you made a Nurture Buddy, you can also **check in daily with your buddy to appreciate what you've done well today.** If you prefer, do this as a ritual over dinner in the evening with family or friends to retain a sense of appreciation for how well you're doing, as opposed to focusing on what you're not doing. Our focus creates our reality, so what we focus on is important for our emotional wellbeing.*

5. **Reflecting** on our progress (journaling, committing to a daily practice, retaining perspective)



- Take time daily to notice what's working for you to help you have a greater sense of stability, and personal resilience, what enhances your capacity to manage better – to bounce back quicker daily.
- Ideally, ***create a written journal or a voice recording of what works for you for the next 21 days*** , keep connected to what parts of the process bring a positive impact. By saying out loud or committing word to paper, we create space in the brain for new thinking and enable us to let go of having to hold the process in our mind. We create a framework for us to follow.
- Reflect with your Nurture Buddy on the finessing of the process to keep you on track and recognise how well you're doing
- Ask yourself some positive and intentional questions:
  - What will I do now, if I know that I can't fail?
  - What encouragement would I give to a loved one, in this situation, that I can apply to myself? What am I grateful for in my life today?

So often in life, we forget to review our progress – what went well, not so well – so that we can ensure we're more successful moving forward. Reflection is an incredibly powerful tool, both for refining our skills and recognising where we want to focus our attention.
Pay attention to the good stuff – the thoughts that motivate you and remind you or your capabilities. These help us build a stronger personal resilience practice.

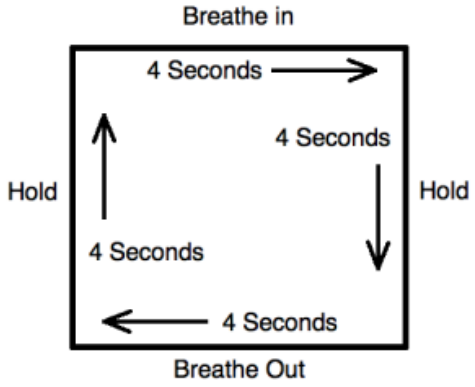
Remember – you are the most powerful resource you have available to you! You've got this!

60 Second Resilience Plan

30-60 second nurture activities

Breathing exercises

1. **Box breathing** Holding in the breath has been found to increase our tolerance of distress in anxious situations. Simply, breathe in for 4 counts, hold your breath for 4, exhale for 4 and then hold your breath for 4 and repeat.



2. **Elongated Exhale** When we exhale we activate our parasympathetic nervous system, which is a calming process. If we exhale longer than we inhale, we become less anxious eg inhale for 4 counts, exhale for 8 (or similar).
3. **Humming Bee breath** Putting your hands over your ears, so you can fully hear/feel the noise in your mind & body, deep in-breath and hum like a bee as you breathe out. This is a great way to reset your mind and body. Focusing on the sound and where you feel it in your body enables your brain to have a few seconds rest, whilst also oxygenating your whole body. Repeat 6-9 times ideally.
4. **Chanting breath** Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, chant the word 'Om'. This is a yogic symbol (a Hindu word embodying creation, liberation and preservation). If you prefer to chant a different single-syllable word, that's also enabling you to be present to your breath and the sound, this is also calming.
   Whilst it can help to put your hands together over your chest and drop your shoulders, to relax your neck whilst chanting, you could also put one hand on the chest and one on the stomach to notice the movement of the breath and your heartbeat, as this allows you to monitor your own physical movement.

Why breathing, humming and chanting ? Basic vocalizing activates your parasympathetic nervous system, calming you down. The vagus nerve is a long, critical nerve, stretching from your brain down your neck, chest, lung cavity and abdomen, connecting the brain stem to the body. It's associated with many physical functions including swallowing, taste, digestion and heart rate. Activating this nerve basically tells your brain all is well, stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system to relax you. Your voice box (larynx) is connected to your vagus nerve. Subsequently, when you hum or sing, you naturally activate it. On top of this stimulation, humming requires you to control your inhalations and exhalations. Experts know that, even without humming, the vagus nerve links to respiration, and that slowing down exhalation has a positive effect for calm, activating the parasympathetic nervous system. [Source]

Shoulder mobility exercise Helps to release tension. Sometimes, high levels of stress and anxiety restrict our breathing. ***These exercises*** not only release tension but help to loosen up your diaphragm to ***enable deep breathing*** (examples here).

Balance exercises Try balancing on one foot or place a tennis ball on a book, hold it with one hand and slowly move your body into different positions (rotating, moving up and down) while keeping the ball balanced on the book. This gently releases tension in the body/diaphragm and also ***enables deep breathing,*** whilst calming the mind,

Grounding and Mindful '5 Senses' exercise Being present (as opposed to speculating about the future or attaching to the past) can be hard if we're overthinking. A quick & easy way to get present and calm in the here and now is to focus on:

- 5 things you can see (textures, colours, details in pictures, plants, flowers etc)
- 4 things you can hear (birds, traffic, footsteps, dogs, children, breathing, rain etc)
- 3 things you can touch (feet on the ground, hands in your lap, clothes on skin etc)
- 2 things you can smell (food cooking, perfume, flowers, cut grass, fresh air etc)
- 1 thing you can taste (morning coffee, afternoon tea, toast, chocolate! etc)

This is really useful for adults and young people who struggle to focus on non-tangible/ non sensory activities.

Bouncing a ball Rhythmic, repetitive activities are good for reducing the fight/flight/freeze response in the body. Bouncing a ball, juggling, throwing/catching (safely within your own home) creates a rhythm which is good for steadying breath and heart rate. Create a rhythm -play with options eg. catch with your left/right hand only, clap once before catching the ball, clap under a knee before you catch etc. Make it fun, keep the rhythm.

Shaking and Wiggle exercise Shaking is the natural way to release tension and return the body to its normal homeostasis (an internal stable state). Shaking is a primal impulse to a stressful situation. This website offers some good guidance and practical tips on 'shaking the stress away'.

Eye yoga involves focusing on objects close at hand and far away. It also involves moving your eyes from the left, upward, to the right, and downward. These small, purposeful movements can help calm your body down. Find out more about eye yoga here.

Tennis ball rolling Sit/lie in a comfortable position. Scan your body, with your eyes closed, to identify areas that feel tight and 'stuck'. Now, roll the tennis ball on that spot - eg. putting the tennis ball under your shoulder blade, laying on your back. Move around with the ball to find the point where the pressure is most intense. Breathe into the pressure, relax into it, allowing the tennis ball to do the work of breaking up the tension. More info here.

Drumming Well known to reduce anxiety and soothe the nervous system. We respond with our bodies and our limbic system to rhythms, so taking part in anything rhythmic or with a regular beat activates our parasympathetic nervous system. No drum to hand? Improvise! Pots, pans, wooden spoons, tapping your fingers to beat out a rhythm still works. Try this website for more information.

Pillow Beating Frustration, anger and resentment can accompany feelings of anxiety. Sometimes we just need an outlet for these feelings, particularly when we're stuck inside for long periods of time. Just pummelling pillows for a few seconds can be enough to release tension and provide an outlet for adrenaline/cortisone that would otherwise remain in the body.

References

Apps:

Mindbell App

- **Appstore:** https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/mindfulness-bell/id380816407
- **Google Play:** https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.googlecode.mindbell&hl=en_GB

Gratitude journal

- **Appstore:** https://apps.apple.com/us/app/gratitude-happiness-journal/id1372575227
- **Google Play:** https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.northstar.gratitude&hl=en_GB

Headspace https://www.headspace.com/

Calm https://www.calm.com/

Articles:

Basic vocalizing https://www.inc.com/wanda-thibodeaux/this-might-be-simplest-scientific-way-to-get-rid-of-stress-youve-ever-heard-of.html

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Videos:

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Shaking and wiggle exercises https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/therapeutic-tremoring-shake-off-stress-and-trauma