



*Fostering Psychological
Resiliency Following
Adversity*

October 28, 2016

Dr. Mark E. Sementilli
marksementilli@verizon.net
410-262-Head



Training Objectives

- Identify characteristics & behaviors common to psychological resiliency
 - Identify healthy and unhealthy psychological responses
 - Teaching strategies for building resiliency
- 

Initial Comments

- If not for the grace of ...
- What am I'm seeing?
- From learned helplessness to ...
- I'm not saying it's easy, but...
- Not rocket science...
- "That's me"

Losses & Challenges

- Independence - dependence
- Financial – stressor
- Career, leisure, social
- Health – chronic condition
- Relationships - altered
- Identity – the “what” we do makes us
- Roles - reversals

Definitions

- Phenomenon whereby individual show positive adaption in spite of adversity
- Capacity to withstand stressors, to move forward & minimize pathology
- Adversity exposure & positive adjustment
- Positive adjustment & adaption

Resilience vs. Recovery

(Bonanno, 2004)

Resilience

- More than lack of psychopathology
- Maintain relatively stable, healthy level of psychological functioning

Recovery

- Temporary functional disturbance with return to prior near capacity level

Neurological Recovery

“ Should not be measured in terms of regaining what one had before the event, but the progress one attains and the adjustment one makes in being able to go forward with what one has left.”



*“ Barn’s burnt down
Now I can see the moon”*

Masahide (1657-1723)



History of Resilience

- Emmy Werner ... 1970s
- Masten ... 1980s
 - poverty, neglect, abuse, chaos
- Research focused on;
In what way are survivors different?
- What are the protective factors?

Protective Factors in Children

- Optimistic - future
- Self-efficacy – survival belief
- Hardiness – active, change
- Personal competencies - achieve
- Cohesive family – seek stability
- Coping skills – seek solutions

Resiliency & Research

- Increased s/p 9/11 & war
- Is ordinary, not extraordinary
- Not one specific trait
- There is no single path
- Psychological distress common



Prior Assumptions

Erroneous Assumptions
Challenges To



Erroneous Assumptions

(Bonanno, 2004)

Bereavement theorists suspicious

- Delayed grief is anticipated (76%)
- Strong psychological response is the norm (acute or chronic grief)
- Rare dysfunctional personality (65%)
- Defense mechanisms

Challenges To Resilience Doctrine

(Bonanno, 2004)

- Innate trait?
- Is resilience common?
- Is distinct from recovery
- More than an absence of psychopathology
- Can it be fostered?



Psychological Influences

Healthy vs. Unhealthy
Personality Influences



Being Resilient

“Being resilient does not mean that one does not experience difficulty or distress or that life's major hardships are not difficult and upsetting. Rather, it means that these events, although difficult and upsetting, are ultimately surmountable.”

Adult Coping Strategies

(Anderson et al., 2008)

- Acceptance (99%)
- Positive Reframing (94%)
- Active Coping (93%)
- Emotional support (89%)
- Humor (89%)
- Religion (74%)
- Negative: disengagement (28%)
 substance/alcohol (15%)



Resiliency, A Journey Of

- Emotional pain & hardships
 - Behaviors, thoughts & actions
 - Revelations about self - life
 - Acquiring knowledge
 - Hope, perspective & persistence
- 



Are you in any pain?

"I suffer from reality."



Those at Risk

- Hx mental illness
- Prior life traumas
- Poor support system
- Lower SES (financial supports)
- Lower education (problem solving)

Denial vs. Anosognosia

Denial

- Primitive defense mechanism used to keep threats out of consciousness

Anosognosia

- Neurological based “denial of illness”
- Right hemisphere & frontal lobe
- Acute & severe ABI

Unhealthy Responses - prolonged

- Denial – insert joke
- Avoidance – out of sight...
- Blame - projection
- Anger – you, it becomes
- Self-destruction – plenty of options
- Victimization – listen carefully

Positive Emotion & Laughter

(Bonanno, 2004)

- Previously dismissed unhealthy denial
- Mechanism;
 - quieting or undoing negative emotion
- Laughing & smiling reflect better adjustment (dark/gallows humor)
- Results in greater social supports

Recognize Complicated Grief

(Columbia School of social Work)

Strong emotions:

- Loneliness
- Yearning-longing
- Anger-bitterness
- Empty-meaningless
- Disbelief-numb

Strong behavior:

- Disruptive thoughts
- Isolation
- Agitation
- Feel, see, smell, touch
- Magical thinking

Complicated Grief

- Grieving all consuming at first, then
- 10% experience complicated grief
- Sx severity increase & disabling
- Predisposing factors:
 - female
 - those who pass quickly or suicide
 - multiple losses short period of time
 - parents losing children

Personality Influence

Personality

- Overachiever
- Dependent
- Insecure
- Grandiose
- Borderline

Response Style

- Resistance
- Paralysis
- Magnification
- Denial
- Disorganized

Coping Styles

Adaptive

- Active
- Interpersonal
- Problem focused
- Positive affect

Non-productive

- Avoidance
- Passive
- Worry
- Blame



The What

Surrounding Assets

Hardiness

Common Characteristics

Post Traumatic Growth



What Promotes Resilience?

(Bonanno, 2004)

Surrounding Assets

- Role model
- Support system
- Education
- SES
- Psychological flexibility

Hardiness

(Bonanno, 2004)

- Buffer to extreme stress
- 3 crucial elements;
influence, meaning, learn
- Stressor perceived as less threatening
- More apt to use;
 - active coping
 - social supports
 - information

Hardiness

(Maddi, 2002)

3 Key Beliefs:

1. **Commitment** -to be involved
2. **Control** - to influence outcome
3. **Challenge** - opportunities

Common Characteristics

- Where there's a will ... attitude
- See small windows of opportunity
- Deep rooted belief in "meaning"
- Has wide comfort zone
- Can take a punch
- See problems as challenges - opportunities

Common Characteristics

- Problem solving skills
- Seek assistance
- Maintain social connections
- Self-disclosure to family
- Survivor identity, not victim
- Assisting others

Post Traumatic Growth

- Relating to others
- New possibilities
- Spiritual growth
- Appreciation of life
- Meaning & purpose
- Self discovery
- Priorities change



The How

- Transactional Model
 - Resilience Factors
- 



What keeps you going?

“If there is a tomorrow there is a way out, an opportunity, you just have to find it.”



Building Resilience

(APA)

Connections: Primary Factor

- Broad relationships
- Seeking assistance
- Social supports - universality
- Assist others
- Role model



*“Call on God, but row away
from the rocks”*

Hunter S. Thompson



Building Resilience

Proactive

- Move toward goals – short & long
- Something regularly
- What can I accomplish today
- Decisive action
- Long term perspective

Building Resilience

Self-Discovery

- Learn about oneself
- Experience growth
- Expression & catharsis
- Heightened appreciation

Building Resilience

Nurture Self: Strive for balance

- Leisure, productive use of time
- Exercise – physical, cognitive
- Celebrate success
- Stress management
- Nutrition, sleep, health

Resilience Summary

- Not a birth trait
- It is common
- An ongoing process
- Can be fostered
- Active, not passive
- Often involves emotional pain
- Behaviors, thoughts & actions

Places to Seek Help

- Support groups
- Publications
- BIAM: 800-221-6443
- MPA: 410-992-4258
- DORS: 888-554-0334
- APA: 800-964-2000

www.APAHELPCENTER.org