

Fostering Resilience During Times of Chronic Stress

Strengthening Coping and Protecting the Most Vulnerable

Trauma Recovery Innovations

Michele Bedard-Gilligan, Ph.D. & Emily R. Dworkin, Ph.D.

A presentation for the Space Needle/Chihuly Glass Museum



Acknowledgments:

- ✓ Kristen Lindgren, TRI colleague
- ✓ UW Dept of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences
- ✓ Colleagues at:
 - ✓ Center for the Study of Health and Risk Behaviors
 - ✓ UW Center for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress

Goals for today:

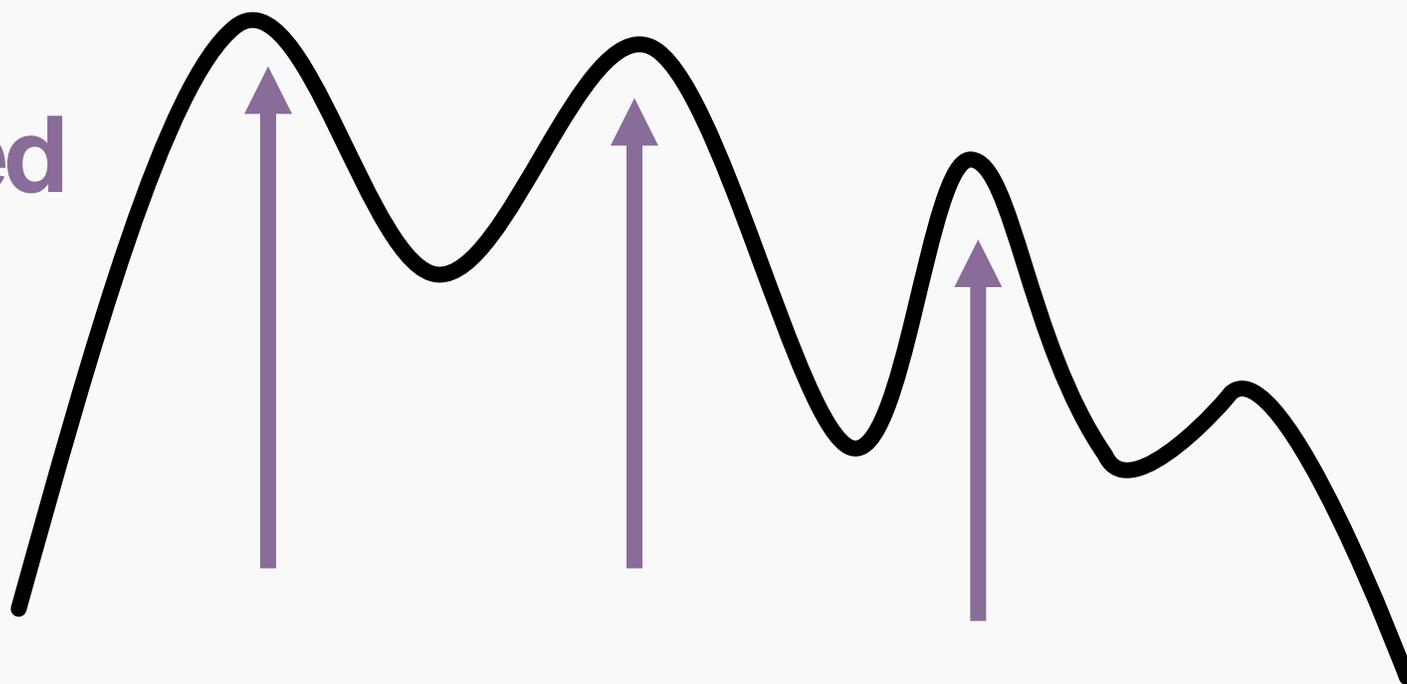
- ✓ **Define** resilience
- ✓ Explain **what you can do** to promote resilience
- ✓ Outline options for those who need **more support**



DEFINING RESILIENCE

We are living in a time of elevated **acute**
AND chronic stressors.

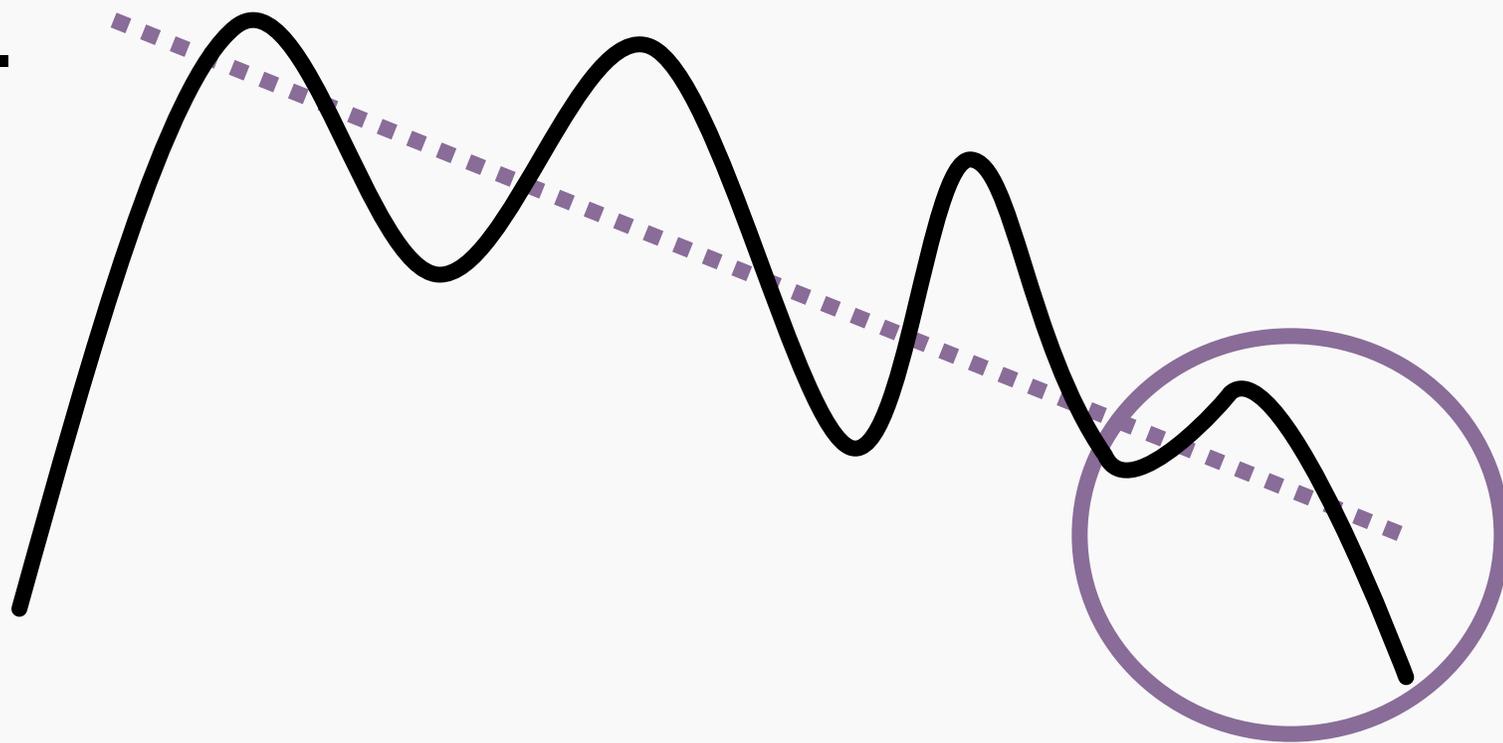
Everyone is being
exposed to **repeated**
periods of acute
distress.



Resilience is the process of **adapting well** in the face of **adversity**.

Resilience is the **most common outcome**.

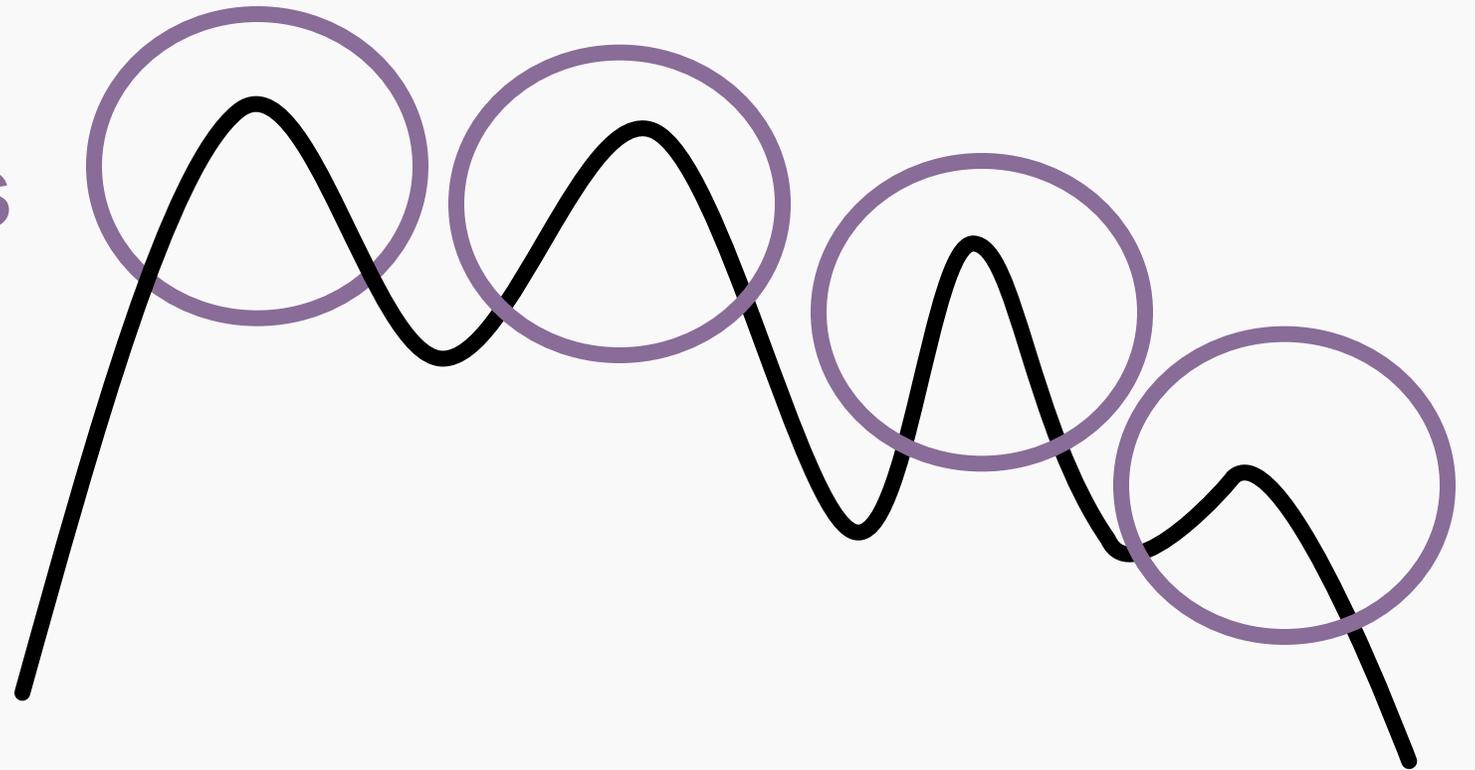
We expect **most people to be resilient** during & following disasters.



But resilience is **variable** and **nonlinear**.

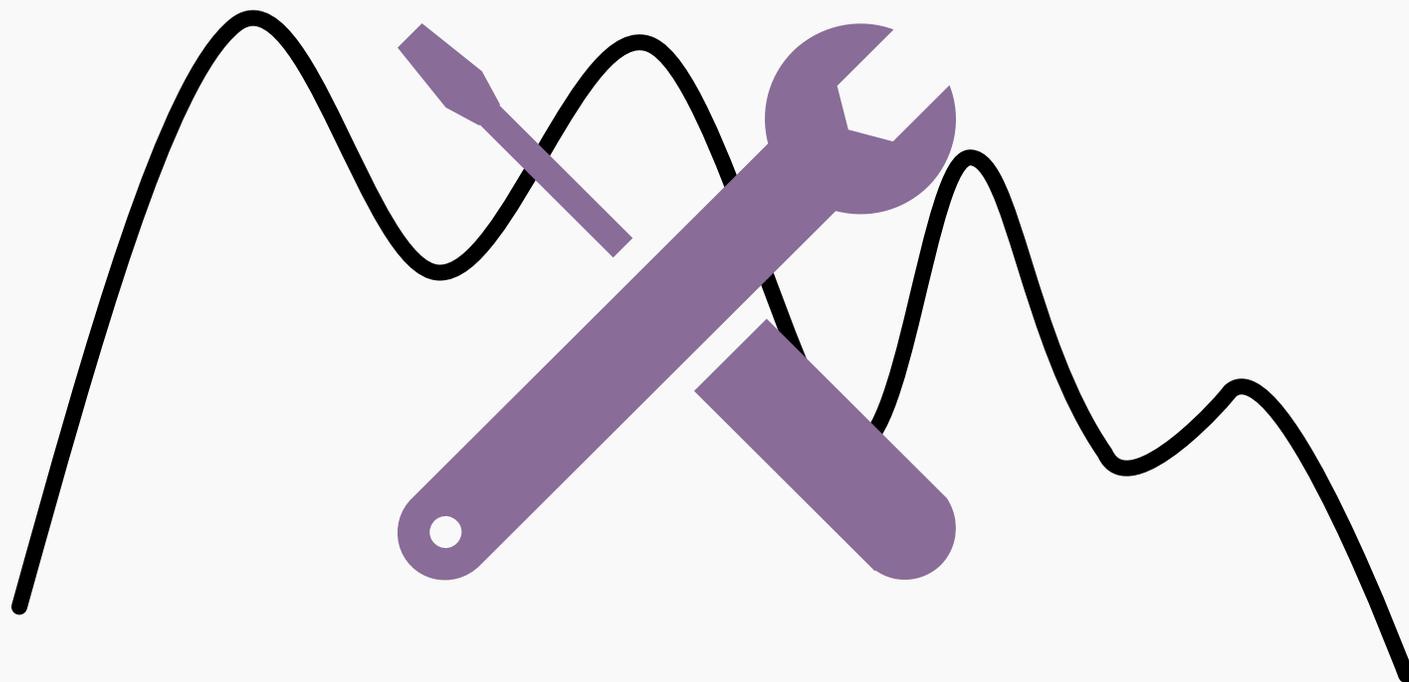
It **doesn't** mean
there's **no distress**
along the way.

We **don't** have to
like it.



Resilience requires **effort, persistence,**
and **patience.**

It can be **acquired**
and **learned.**



Those who are **most vulnerable** may need more support.



Some of us are affected **more than others.**



Bolstering the
community helps
us all!



What it means to be **resilient**.

“It’s to be adapting and accommodating, rather than resistant to, the suffering. I think that’s what it is to live through hardship for sustained periods of time.”

- Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Columbia University



PROMOTING RESILIENCE

Strategies to promote resilience focus on 3 A's.



- ✓ Assessing
- ✓ Accepting
- ✓ Adapting

Assessing

Regularly **assessing** one's well-being & needs is crucial.

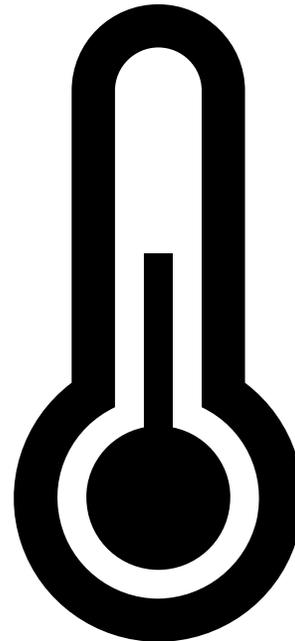
Do regular emotional and behavioral temperature checks.

Eating healthy?

Sleeping well?

Staying active?

Seeing friends/family?



Positive feelings?

Negative feelings?

Negative thoughts?

Substance use?

Regularly **assessing** one's well-being & needs is crucial.

Ask yourself regularly:



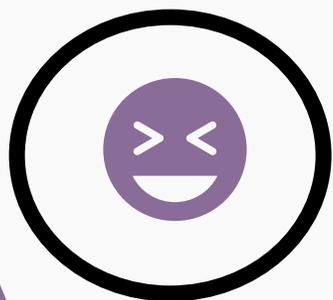
In what ways are my needs **NOT** being met?

In what ways are my needs being met?

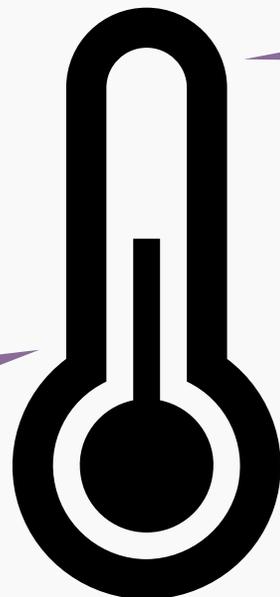


Regularly **assessing** one's well-being & needs is crucial.

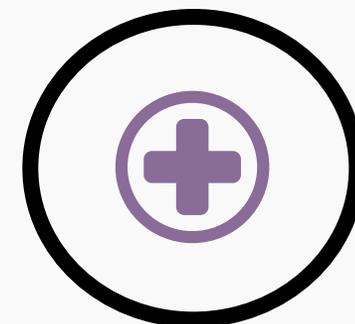
Prioritize your needs.



In what ways are my needs **NOT** being met?



In what ways are my needs being met?



Accepting

Acceptance means changing what we can and tolerating the rest.

Is this a problem you can do something about?

YES

NO

What are your options for solving the problem?

Let the problem go and focus on something else.

Is there anything you can do right now?

YES

NO

Do what you can, then let the problem go and focus on something else.

Make a plan, then let the problem go and focus on something else.

Acceptance means acknowledging the new normal and your reactions to it.



Notice where your reality has shifted and work to accept:

Unavoidable changes

Negative emotions

Loss of control

Uncertainty & ambiguity

Acceptance means acknowledging the new normal and your reactions to it.



Also notice:

How you coped

Your strengths

Your resources

Acceptance means acknowledging the downsides & upsides of the new normal.



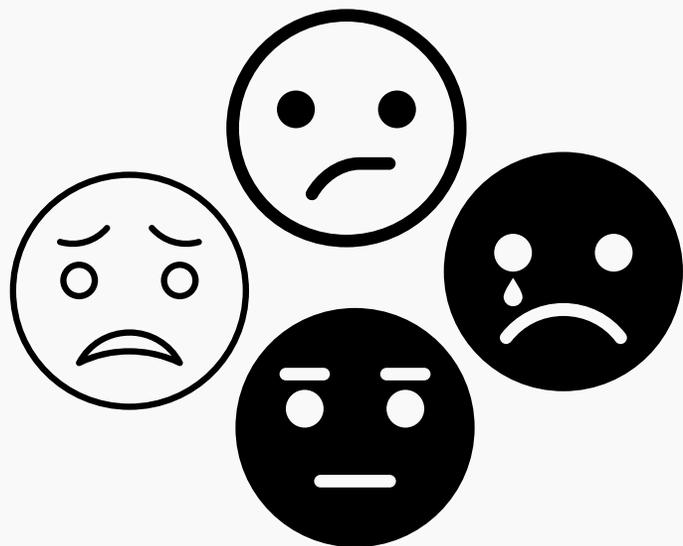
Also notice:

Losses and gains

Both... and....

Acceptance means embracing emotions—even the ones we don't like.

Emotions like grief, anger, sadness, fear, and guilt are appropriate when they match the situations we're in.



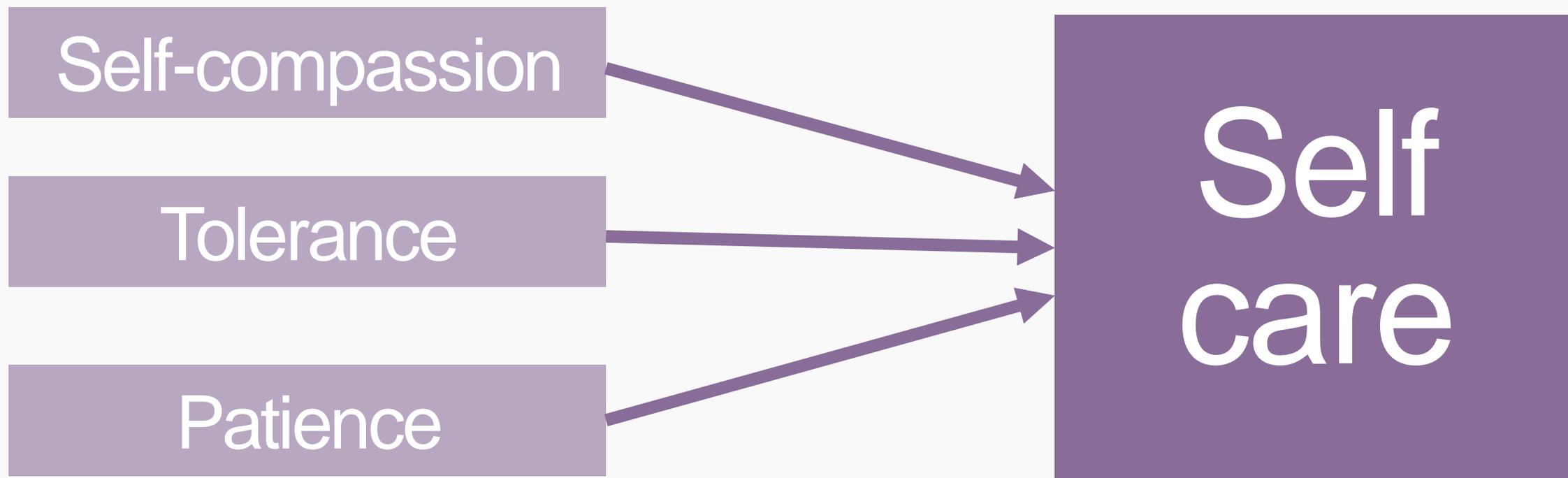
They serve useful functions.

Communicate needs

Enable us to move forward

Propel us to make changes

Acceptance means acknowledging
that this is hard!



Adapting

Adapting means intentionally coping and engaging.

“Avoid avoiding!”

1

**Keep your normal
routine**

2

**Add positive
activities**

3

**Engage with
reactions**

Adapting skill #1:

Keeping your normal routine



- ✓ What is **important** for you to do that you feel like avoiding?

Daily basic needs

Role obligations

Activities and self-care

- ✓ What would you be doing **if you were feeling better?**

Adapting skill #2: Adding positive activities



Create

- Draw a picture
- Paint a portrait
- Take a photograph
- Doodle / sketch
- Organise photographs
- Make a photograph album
- Start a scrapbook
- Finish a project
- Do some sewing / knitting



Kindness

- Help a friend / neighbor / stranger
- Make a gift for someone
- Try a random act of kindness
- Do someone a favour
- Teach somebody a skill
- Do something nice for someone
- Plan a surprise for someone
- Make a list of your good points
- Make a list of things or people you are grateful for



Plan

- Set a goal
- Create a budget
- Make a 5 year plan
- Make a 'to do' list
- Make a 'bucket list'
- Make a shopping list



Write

- Write a letter with compliments
- Write a letter to your politician
- Write an angry letter
- Write a grateful letter
- Write a 'thank you' card
- Write a journal / diary
- Write your CV
- Start writing a book



Self care

- Take a bath
- Take a shower
- Wash your hair
- Give yourself a facial
- Trim your nails
- Sunbathe (wear sunscreen!)
- Take a nap

Adapting skill #2:

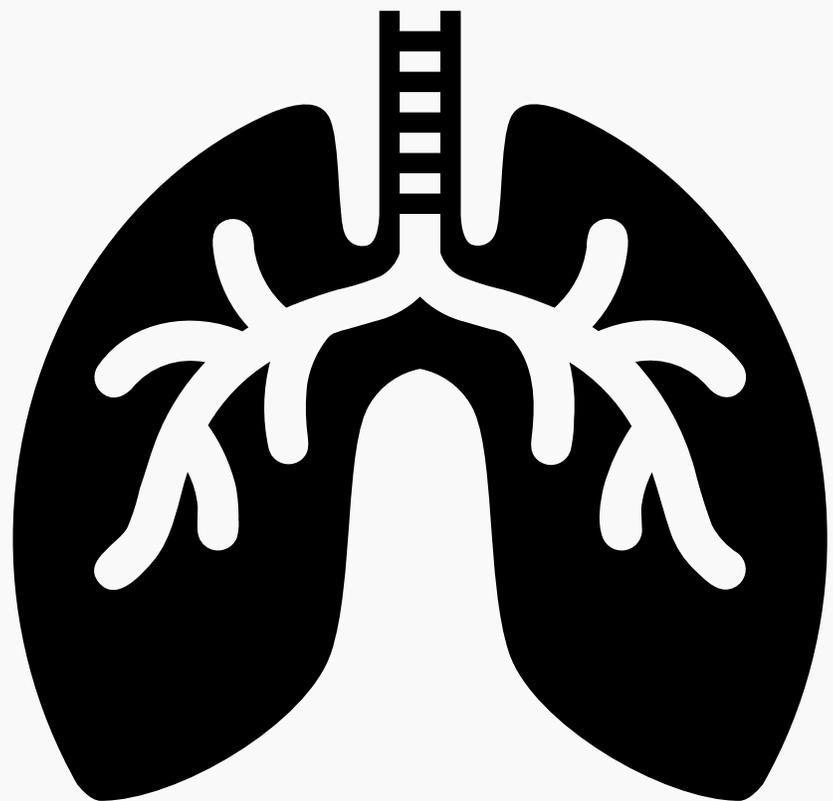
Adding positive activities

Build social and community connections.

- ✓ Who are your **most important connections**?
- ✓ With whom can you **share your feelings**?
- ✓ With whom do you **want to be in touch**?
- ✓ Who might need **your help or support** right now?
- ✓ Consider what is **missing or needs to be changed**.

Adapting skill #3:

Engaging with your reactions



Breathing

Get **comfortable**

Breathe in through your nose for 5, expanding your belly

Hold for 5

Exhale slowly for 7 while you say a soothing word

Adapting skill #3:

Engaging with your reactions



Writing Exercise

Set aside **30 minutes**

Write about **whatever is distressing you**

Give yourself space to **feel your emotions**

Consider the **things you did to help yourself or others**

Repeat, building in **new helpful thoughts**

Adapting skill #3:

Engaging with your reactions

Notice your thoughts without judgment.

Situation → Distressing Emotions

Notice:

What thoughts go along with the situation & emotions?

Situation → Thoughts → Distressing Emotions

Adapting skill #3:

Engaging with your reactions

Distinguish between helpful and unhelpful thoughts.



HELPFUL WORRY THOUGHTS

Help you to get what you want

Help you to solve problems in your life



UNHELPFUL WORRY THOUGHTS

Leave you feeling demoralized, upset, or exhausted

Get in the way of living the life you want to lead

Adapting skill #3:

Engaging with your reactions

Evaluate your unhelpful thoughts instead of treating them as facts.

Ask yourself: What would be more helpful thoughts?
What would I say to a friend in this situation?

I might feel bad for a while, but I'll probably feel better with time.

Even if I don't feel better, I know I can get help if I need it.

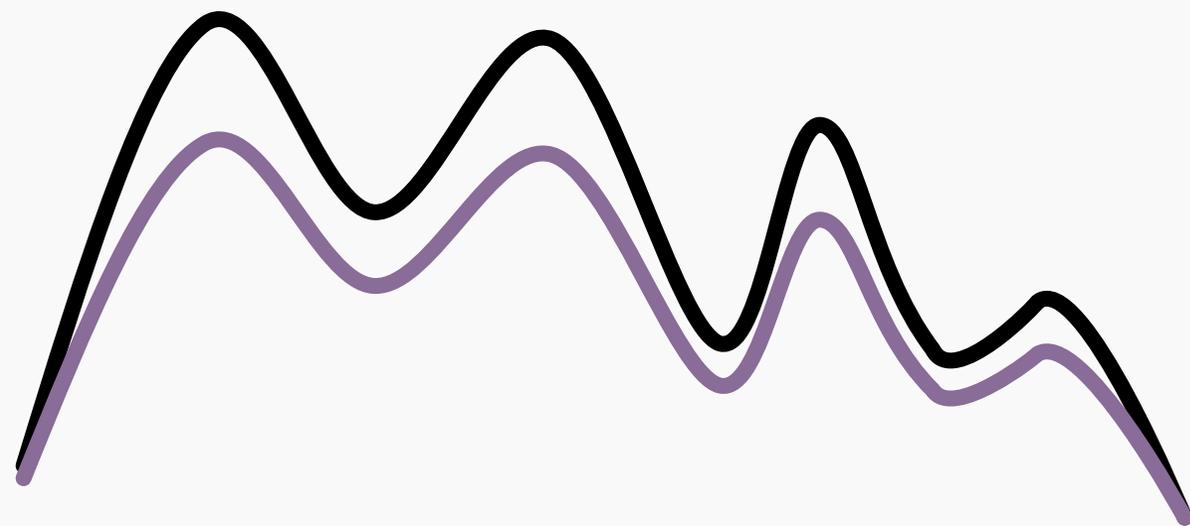
We can play a role in **helping those who depend on us adapt.**

- ✓ **Communicate** calm, compassion, and respect
- ✓ **Listen** to concerns while **maintaining** appropriate boundaries
- ✓ **Share** information openly and honestly
- ✓ **Help** troubleshoot challenges

Assessing, accepting, and adapting can promote long-term resilience.

Remember that **resilience** is the most common outcome.

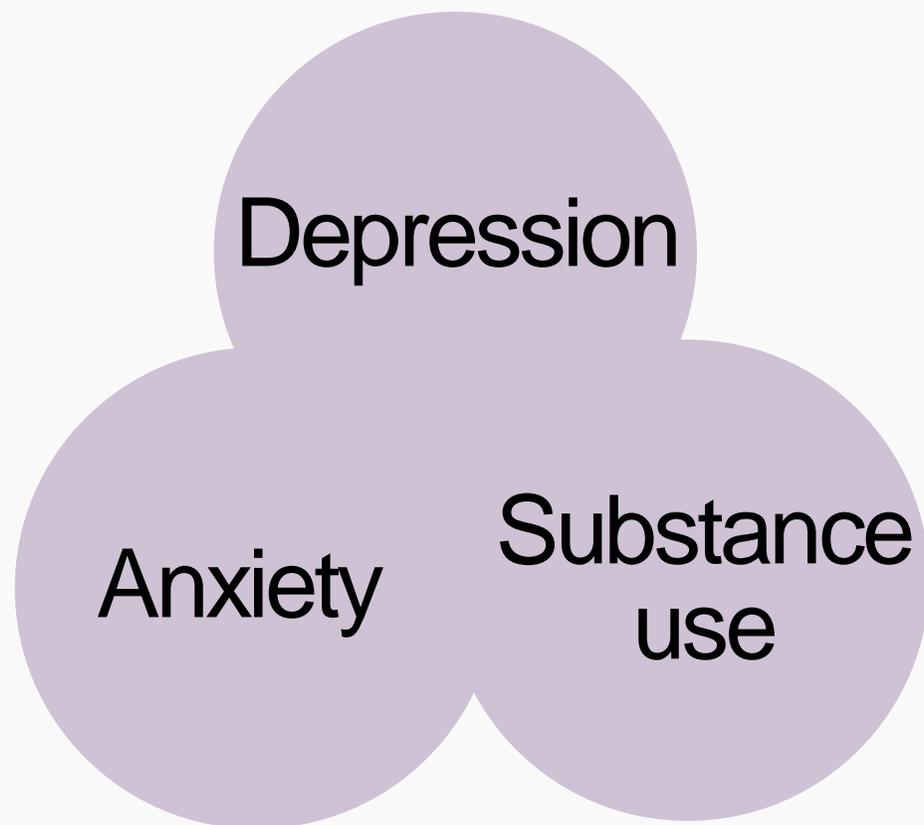
Working to cope effectively with crises will **promote future resilience**.





**FOR THOSE
WHO NEED
MORE SUPPORT**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) following trauma is **effective at reducing symptoms.**



- ✓ Time limited
- ✓ Present focused
- ✓ Structured and skills oriented
- ✓ Practice outside session
- ✓ Delivered by a trained professional

We can play a role in **connecting those who depend on us to resources** as appropriate.

- ✓ **Normalize** the need for support
- ✓ Know your **limits**
- ✓ Respect personal **boundaries**
- ✓ Know **what's available** and **who to ask** for help



LAST THOUGHTS...

To increase resilience in your community, **look for the helpers and be a helper.**

- ✓ What you do for yourself and those around you **makes a difference.**
- ✓ Finding ways to **make meaning, engage others,** and **foster compassion** is important.

RESOURCES



COVID Support Program (page includes handouts and guides)
<https://psychiatry.uw.edu/clinical-care-consultation/covid-19-resources-for-mental-well-being/>

COVID Coach App:

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/COVID_coach_app.asp

CDC Resources on Managing Stress:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Contact Emily & Michele: TRIHEAL@uw.edu

Building Your Resilience

Do regular emotional and behavioral temperature checks. Ask yourself:

- How is my mood?
- Am I keeping a healthy routine?
- In what ways are my needs being met?
- In what ways are my needs NOT being met?
- Which 2 or 3 of my needs are most important to me?



Acknowledge that this is hard!

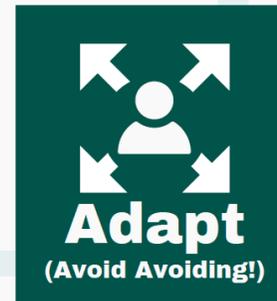
It's normal, expected, and even helpful to have negative emotions in difficult times. It can be helpful to sit with those difficult emotions instead of trying to push them away.

Change or let go.

Identify the things about your circumstances that you can change and make a plan to change them. Then let the rest go and focus on something else.

Keep your normal routine

- Consider what's important for you to do that you feel like avoiding (daily basic needs, role obligations, activities and self-care).
- Consider what you would be doing if you felt better.
- Keep these things in your schedule as much as possible!
- Consider ways to stick with it when you feel like avoiding.



Add positive activities

- Think about activities you would enjoy if you felt better. Set a goal to do one of these activities in the next week.
- Find something you can do in the next week to maintain or strengthen your connections with others.

Engage with your reactions

Breathe

- Breathe in through your nose for 5 beats, expanding your belly.
- Hold for 5 beats.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 7 beats.
- Repeat.

Rethink

- Notice your thoughts without judgment.
- Ask yourself whether the thought is helpful.
- Evaluate your unhelpful thoughts instead of treating them as facts (What would be more helpful thoughts? What would I say to a friend?).

Write

- Write about whatever is distressing you for 30 minutes.
- Give yourself space to feel your emotions.
- Consider the things you did to help yourself or others.
- Repeat, building in new, more helpful thoughts.