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Understanding resilience: What is it? Why does it matter?

Greater resilience better care

A resource to support the mental health of adult social care workers

Overview

This resource offers practical guidance to adult social care employers on how to develop resilience within their workforce.

Resilience, the ability to cope with pressure, underpins safe, high-quality, person-centred care and support. Developing the resilience of the people who work for you is one of the keys to retaining workers with the right values and behaviours. It protects the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the people who work for you. It helps them deliver quality services, consistently.

Resilience matters - it is an essential skill for all who work in adult social care.

Use this resource to understand what you and your workforce can do to develop resilience.

The resource has five parts. Each part addresses a question:

- 1. What is resilience and why does it matter?**
2. Who is responsible for resilience?
3. What can I do as an employer to develop the resilience of the people who work for me?
4. What can individuals do to develop their own resilience?*
5. Where can I find out more about resilience?

Look out for these icons which point out key information, questions and activities:



Information to look at



A question to ask yourself



An exercise or activity

*Section 4 is for individuals so they can consider their own mental health resilience.

Note: Resilience is a well-researched area and evidence shows how resilience can be developed. This resource is based on that evidence.

1. Understanding resilience: What is it? Why does it matter?

This part of the resource considers what we mean by resilience, why resilience matters to you and why resilience matters to those around you.

Key learning points

- Resilience is the ability to cope under pressure - it protects against stress.
- There are straight-forward, practical ways to foster resilience, in ourselves and in others.
- Stress is a major issue in adult social care - it undermines the quality of care and support and it damages the mental and physical health of workers.
- Employers have a legal obligation to address stress at work.
- Taking action to foster resilience is prudent, responsible and worthwhile - in addition to protecting yourself and others from stress-related ill health, action to foster resilience will also help to build the positive workplace cultures that support high-quality, person-centred care and support.

What do we mean by resilience?

Simply put, **resilience** is the ability to cope under pressure. A person who copes well under pressure is **resilient**.

Research suggests that the ability to cope well under pressure is based on a **positive outlook**, combined with **strategies** to manage pressure.

What does resilience look like?

Behaviours associated with resilience include:

- understanding and **valuing** the meaning of what you do at work
- doing what you can to get on with the people around you
- taking a problem-solving approach to difficulty
- keeping a sense of perspective (and humour) when things go wrong
- being flexible and willing to adapt to change and to learn
- greeting new situations, new people, new demands with a positive attitude
- drawing on a range of strategies to help you cope with pressure
- recognising your thoughts and emotions – and managing them

- offering support to colleagues when they need it and asking for help when **you** need it
- being willing to persevere when the going gets tough, but also...
- recognising and respecting your own limits, including what you can control and what you can't.

Where does resilience come from?

The way we behave is shaped by a range of factors, including personality and past experience as well as current circumstances and the people around us. All of these things influence a person's resilience.

Are some people naturally more resilient than others?

Some people may have qualities that make them more resilient than others. Resilience is best defined in terms of **behaviour** and **support**. Behaviours can be learned and support put in place – which means that, in practice, there is a lot we can do to help workers **become more resilient**.

That's the focus of this resource.

Why does resilience matter?

Resilience matters for two main reasons. Resilience helps to:

- protect workers from stress
- ensure the quality of services.

Protection against stress

Stress is a significant cause of mental and physical ill health. The Health and Safety Executive describes stress at work as a '*major problem*.'¹ It accounts for about 40% of all work-related illness.² Work-related stress is a particular issue in social care.

Yes, care work is rewarding: we make a positive difference to vulnerable people. It is can also be stressful.

Even in the best of circumstances caring for people is emotionally – and often physically – demanding. Too often and for whatever reasons, circumstances are not of the best, exposing workers to additional pressure: from a morning, for example, when two colleagues are sick and you have to do the work of three people, all the way to witnessing the death of a client.

1 Source: Health and Safety Executive, Work related stress - together we can tackle it. www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

2 Source: Health and Safety Executive, Stress-related and psychological disorders in Great Britain 2014. www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/index.htm

How pressure works

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress at work as *‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work’*.³

Work makes a range of demands on us. These include not only job tasks and targets, but also demands from colleagues, clients and others. These demands create pressure. So long as you feel able to meet the demands, this pressure is manageable and can be motivating. Demands that are difficult to meet, however, generate too much pressure. Too much pressure creates stress.

Resilient behaviours help you manage the pressure, control any stress and meet the demands.



What impact does stress have on quality?

The daily stressfulness of care work undoubtedly contributes to errors and misjudgements, low morale, sickness absence, burnout and worker turnover in the sector – factors that undermine quality in all sorts of ways.

What impact does stress have on people?

Stress-related ill health is damaging and wasteful to all concerned: workers, employers, people who need care and support.

Foster resilience to protect against stress

It's not possible to take all the pressure out of care work - which makes it all the more essential to do what you can to help workers, and yourself, cope with pressure - to become, in other words, more **resilient**.

What's more, the practical steps that foster resilience also help to build **positive workplace cultures** that support high-quality, person-centred care and support.

In fact, the benefits of fostering resilience go well beyond stress management.

³ Source: www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/whatisstress.htm

We have a duty of care to address work-related stress

Employers are required by law⁴ to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and then take action to control that risk. Workers have a duty of care too. That's a measure of how serious the issue is. Use this resource to help you take effective action on stress at work.

What are the benefits of fostering resilience?

For care providers, benefits include significant support for:

- performance and quality, including values-based practice
- leadership and management at every level
- learning, development and positive workplace cultures
- employee engagement and workforce morale
- worker retention
- harmonious and cohesive team working.

Care workers, including personal assistants, benefit from:

- enhanced job satisfaction
- personal development, including
- greater self-awareness and understanding of others (enhanced emotional intelligence) – leading to better personal and working relationships
- enhanced self-management skills (e.g. ability to set limits, coping skills)
- enhanced physical and psychological well-being (e.g. optimism and hope, confidence, solve problems, keep going despite setbacks)
- better decision-making (stress impairs our thinking processes – undermining professional judgement, often just when its needed most).

People who need care and support, including individual employers, benefit from better quality care.

⁴ Health and Safety at Work Act (1974); Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)



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