

4

**What can individuals
do to develop their own
resilience?**

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.

4. What can individuals do to develop their own resilience?

This part of the resource offers practical guidance on how workers can develop their own resilience. It considers what you might do to:

- a. make a person resilient
- b. recognise the signs that pressure is causing a problem
- c. develop strategies to deal with in-the-moment pressure
- d. develop strategies to deal with long-term pressure
- e. develop a positive outlook

Key learning points

- Personal resilience is about self-awareness, strategies, networks of support and being positive – these are all things that can be developed.
- Personal resilience is underpinned by the ability to manage in-the-moment and long-term pressure.
- Managing pressure begins with recognising when pressure is becoming excessive.
- Too much in-the-moment pressure leads people to misread situations and react inappropriately; repeated often enough, in-the-moment pressure can become a health risk.
- Simple techniques exist to relax, become self-aware and regain control of thoughts and feelings.
- Exposure to excessive long-term pressure results in chronic stress and can produce many negative physical, psychological and behavioural effects.
- Key strategies for managing long-term pressure include addressing the sources of pressure, recognising unhelpful thinking, achieving good work-life balance, respect for personal coping limits, boundary-setting, assertive communication, time-management, building networks of support.
- Research closely associates personal resilience with seven characteristics: Self-management, tolerance of ambiguity (impulse control), realistic optimism, accurate thinking, empathy, self-efficacy, openness.

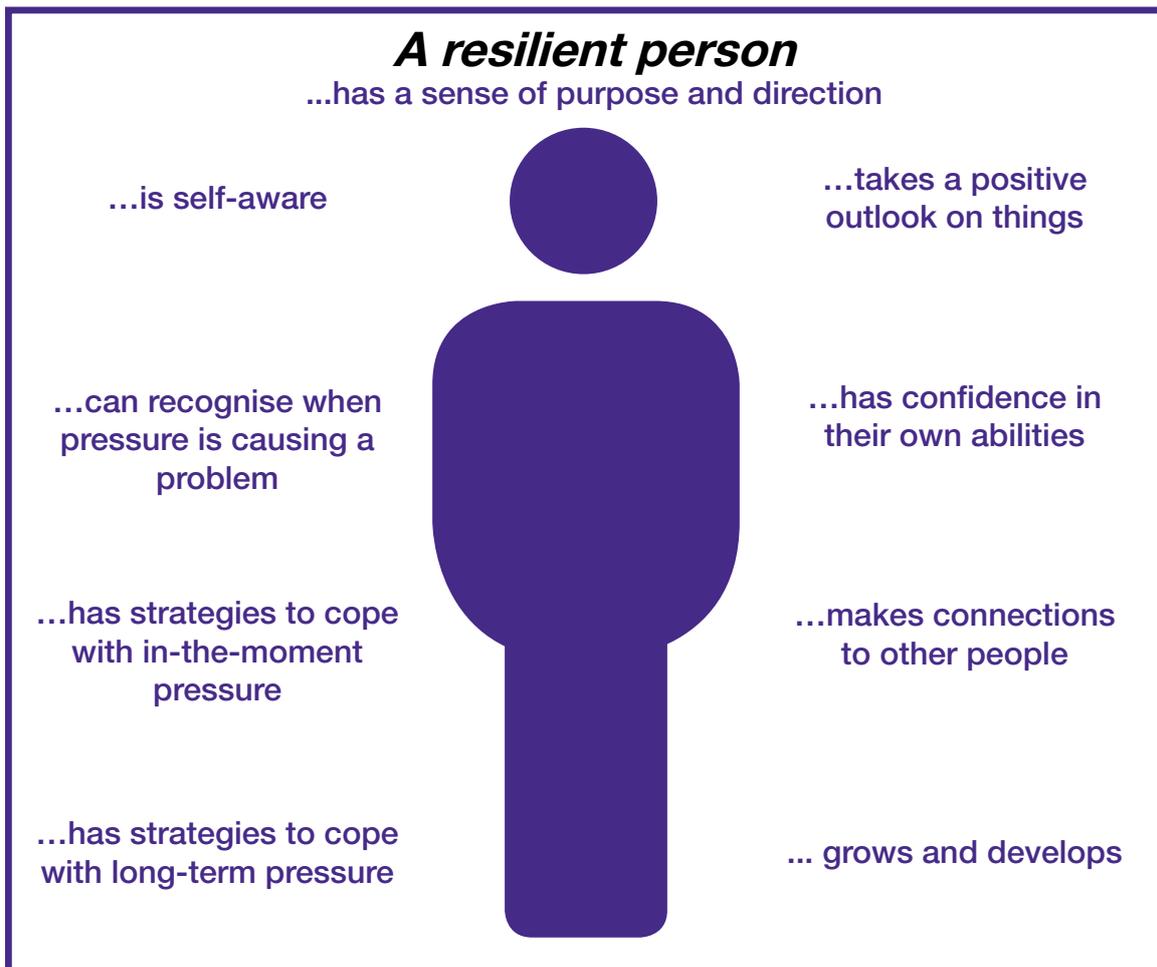
- Focus personal development on emotional intelligence, accurate thinking and realistic optimism to become more resilient.
- Optimism is linked to feeling that what you are doing is worth doing; you have the skills required and are able deal with difficulty.
- Employers can help workers develop personal resilience by reinforcing understanding of the meaning and value of what people do at work; networks of mutual support; learning and development.
- Reflective team learning is an effective way to do this.

What makes a person resilient?

Personal resilience is about self-awareness, strategies, support and being positive.

Self-awareness, strategies and support help you to cope. Feeling able to cope builds your confidence and helps you to develop a positive outlook. Confidence and a positive outlook enable you to grow and develop.

You become a source of strength and support for others.



b. Recognising that pressure is causing a problem

Part of coping with pressure is recognising when it starts to become a problem. That means being:

- aware of how you are feeling
- alert to the signs and symptoms of too much pressure.

In-the-moment and long-term pressure

Pressure can be in-the-moment, or long-term. Too much of either kind is harmful physically and psychologically.

Too much in-the-moment pressure makes people misread situations and react inappropriately - with consequences that can last well beyond the moment. Repeated often enough, in-the-moment pressure also becomes a health risk.

Long-term pressure poses a much more serious health risk, as well as undermining people's judgement and behaviour.

How to recognise when pressure in-the-moment becomes a problem

People's reactions vary, but here are typical some typical early signs.

<i>Physical</i>	Digestive problems, nausea, light headedness, dry mouth, heart pounding, rashes or flushing
<i>Emotional</i>	Immediate emotional judgement, short temper, feeling overwhelmed, paranoia
<i>Behavioural</i>	Procrastinating, neglecting responsibilities, nervous habits such as pacing, nail biting
<i>Thinking</i>	Inability to concentrate, seeing only the negative, constant worrying, self-blame, poor judgement



What are your early signs?

Take a moment to think about what your early signs are. If it's helpful, imagine you're a person in a restaurant having their card rejected. What does that moment feel like?

Why it's important to recognise the early signs

Learning to recognise those early signs is one of the most important stages in developing resilience. It enables you to take action before the threat becomes overwhelming.

c. Strategies to cope with in-the-moment pressure

Strategies for coping with in-the-moment pressure focus on simple, but highly effective, techniques to relax, become self-aware and regain control of your thoughts and feelings.

Here some examples that you might find useful.



Relaxation techniques

- **Breathe**
Breathe in for a count of seven, out for 11.
- **Tighten, then relax**
Tighten all your muscles for count of three, then let go. Repeat.
Stress can feel like being squeezed into a little box. We tighten up without realising it - literally holding all the tension we feel. This activity helps you notice that, then relax.
- **Movement**
A quick walk, going up and down stairs, stretching – it doesn't have to be strenuous. Any sort of movement will help you de-stress.
- **Targeted muscle relaxation**
Muscle tension is a very normal reaction to pressure (our word 'stress' comes from the Latin word for tighten) and can contribute to so-called 'stress headaches'. Stomach, shoulders, neck and jaw are all typical places to store tension. Notice where you are tight and consciously relax the muscles. Self-massage (e.g. pressing your fingertips into the muscles in the back of your neck, or your shoulders) is a good way to find and release muscle tension.

Techniques to manage thoughts and emotions

- **Step out of the stressful situation**
Literally walk away and give your attention to something else, even if only for a moment. It gives you a chance to calm down and regain control of thoughts and emotions.
- **Talk to a colleague**
Talking about thoughts and feelings can help to release tension. All your colleague need do is listen and make sympathetic noises while you talk. Putting things into words to another person gives you distance and helps you calm down. This person is part of your support network.

Mindfulness

You may have heard of mindfulness. It is a technique derived from meditation that has recognised therapeutic benefits. The essence of mindfulness can be summed up in three words, **be here now**. The object of mindfulness is to become as fully present in the moment as possible. That means standing aside from the thoughts (worries, upsets, plans etc) that normally absorb and preoccupy us. Mindfulness lets us step off the merry-go-round, so to speak, and just **be** for a moment. To do that, you have to disengage from your worries and upsets. That gives you both a break and some distance, helping you regain perspective and a deeper sense of self.

Mindfulness training is about acquiring techniques to focus your attention in that way.

- **Notice what you are feeling**

This is a mindfulness technique to help you manage emotion. Ask yourself, ‘What am I actually feeling?’ Identify the feeling (or feelings) – anger, fear, embarrassment, whatever. Don’t judge yourself, don’t fight your feelings. Just observe and accept them. Whatever they are, those are your feelings. Taking that step back, becoming aware of your feelings and accepting them puts you back in charge and lets you move on (see ‘mindfulness’ for more on this).

- **Break the cycle**

When you find yourself ruminating, caught up in a cycle of negative thoughts, deliberately turn your attention to something positive (e.g. a good memory, something good you’re going to do, anything that makes you feel positive about yourself). This is a distraction/affirmation technique, the mental equivalent of stepping out of the situation – into a place that reaffirms the good things in your life.

- **Problem solve**

When you find yourself worrying about something coming up, something that seems overwhelming, stop and ask yourself, ‘What do I actually need to do about this?’ Mentally rehearse how you will deal with the situation. Think it through logically. If you will need help, think who you will ask. This is a problem-solving technique, designed to put you back in charge.

- **When worrying is the problem**

If you find yourself worrying about a problem that really is outside of your control, make a conscious decision to stop ruminating on the problem itself and focus instead on your feelings. Mentally, take a step aside and observe your feelings. Acknowledge your feelings, accept them and then make the conscious decision to think about something else. If your worries creep back in, just repeat the process.

Seeking help is a strength, not a weakness

Being resilient is **not** about being self-sufficient. Resilience is about thriving under pressure. Sourcing help when you need it is a **very** resilient behaviour!



Here’s a question for you. Why do we so often feel that asking for help is somehow ‘cheating’?

Practise the techniques as a team

The techniques described here are mostly quick, straight-forward and do-able anywhere. Often the trick is simply having the presence of mind to use them when you are caught up in the pressure of the moment. Team learning helps to make them a shared resource: colleagues can prompt each other.

Use reflective discussion to support self-awareness

The techniques depend on and also promote self-awareness, i.e. the ability to observe your own thoughts and feelings. Reflective discussion can support this, not least by helping people develop the language they need to analyse thoughts and feelings.

How to recognise when long-term pressure becomes a problem

Exposure to too much pressure over an extended period results in chronic stress. Chronic stress can produce a wide range of effects.

People can feel:

- tense, agitated, irritable, tearful, moody, helpless, anxious, depressed
- weary, physically and mentally
- apathetic, withdrawn
- distracted, unable to concentrate.

They may experience problems with:

- relaxation, sleep
- judgement, memory
- muscle tension, headaches, dizziness, nausea, stomach problems
- frequent colds, minor infections.

Often people:

- worry constantly, see only the negative, feel lonely and isolated
- eat too much or too little
- use caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs to help them cope
- put things off.

How pressure affects teams

Feelings are infectious, behaviour is contagious. Too much pressure on one or more of its members affects the team as a whole. Signs to be aware of include:

- conflicts and unhappiness
- sickness absence
- poor performance, complaints and grievances
- people quitting.



How are you coping at the moment?



Develop your self-awareness with a widely used self-assessment test.

At work in the last month, how often you felt...	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Fairly often	Very often
1. Upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	0	1	2	3	4
2. Unable to control important things in your job?	0	1	2	3	4
3. Nervous and 'stressed'?	0	1	2	3	4
4. Unsure about your ability to handle problems in your job?	0	1	2	3	4
5. Things are not going your way?	0	1	2	3	4
6. You can't cope with all the things that you have to do?	0	1	2	3	4
7. Unable to control irritations in your job?	0	1	2	3	4
8. You aren't on top of things?	0	1	2	3	4
9. Angry because of things that are outside your control?	0	1	2	3	4
10. Difficulties are piling up so high that you can't overcome them?	0	1	2	3	4
<i>Add up your scores in each column</i>	<input type="text"/>				

Now add all your scores together for an overall score

Interpret your score

- 0-10** You feel able to cope with pressure at work – you may be practising resilient behaviours already.
- 11-14** You are coping with pressure at work most, but not all, of the time – start developing your resilience now.
- 15-18** You are only coping with pressure at work some of the time – this may be affecting your judgement, behaviour and relationships at work; over time, feeling like this may start to affect your health.
- 19+** You feel overwhelmed by pressure at work – feeling like this will affect your judgement, behaviour and relationships at work; it is likely to damage your health.

If you are worried about your health, see a doctor. This questionnaire is not a professional diagnosis.

[Attribution:] Adapted from the Perceived Stress Scale developed by Dr Sheldon Cohen, Carnegie Mellon University <http://www.psy.cmu.edu/~scohen/>

Strategies to cope with long-term pressure

Strategies to cope with long-term pressure aim to help you develop **sustainable ways** to manage work demands. They combine techniques that help you to manage pressure with personal development to equip you with the attitudes, skills and knowledge associated with resilience. **Self-awareness** is a key component of the strategies.

Physical health and wellbeing

Eating a healthy diet, not smoking, taking regular exercise and getting enough sleep provide the foundation for personal resilience. In addition to protecting your body from the effects of stress, they help you maintain emotional balance and optimism.



Do you know how to look after yourself?

What foods should you eat to ensure an adequate supply of energy throughout the work day?

How many hours' sleep do you personally need to feel rested? How often in a week do you sleep that number of hours?

How much exercise should you be taking in a week? How often do you take it?

Identify three realistic changes you could make to improve your lifestyle. Are you going to make these changes?

NHS guidance

- [Healthy eating](#)
- [Sleep](#)
- [Exercise to combat stress](#), and
- [Fitness activities](#)

Mental health and wellbeing

Factors associated with psychological health and wellbeing include:

- connection to other people
- physical activity
- doing something new
- taking an interest in your surroundings
- doing things for other people.

Why are these things helpful?

They build a person's confidence in their ability to flourish in the world in a positive way.

Work-life balance

Life outside work has its own pressures, which can lead to conflicts between your roles at and outside work. Establishing a boundary between work and home is key to establishing a sustainable work-life balance and helps you manage role conflicts. What constitutes a good work-life balance is individual to you and changes over time, but it should ensure space to unwind properly, physically and psychologically.

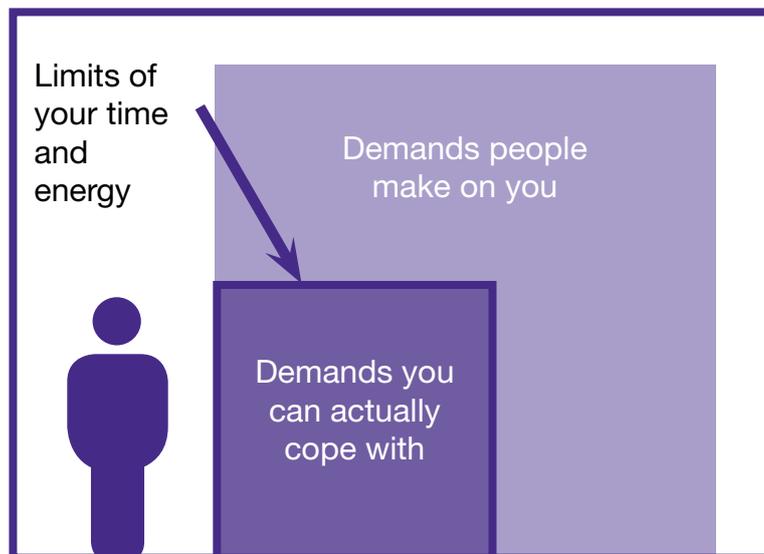
Try to dedicate some time every day to an activity that gives you both exercise and a moment to yourself. That protects your health and helps stop emotions from different parts of your life spilling over.

Limits and boundaries

Care work is just as emotionally **rewarding** as it is demanding. The rewards come from helping people, which makes one feel important, valued and good. That makes it hard to say 'no' and all too easy to say 'yes', when you're asked to do something. The more you say, 'yes', the more you and others expect you to say, 'yes' and the harder it gets to say, 'no'. There are, however, just 24 hours in the day and only one of you, so where does it end?

To manage long-term pressure you have to recognise and respect the limits of your time and energy.

Recognising your limits.



What are your limits?

Use the following exercise to become more aware of your limits. If possible, do the exercise with a colleague.

Observe yourself over the course of a week. Notice when you feel pushed beyond your limits.

At the end of each day, reflect on what happened. Think through:

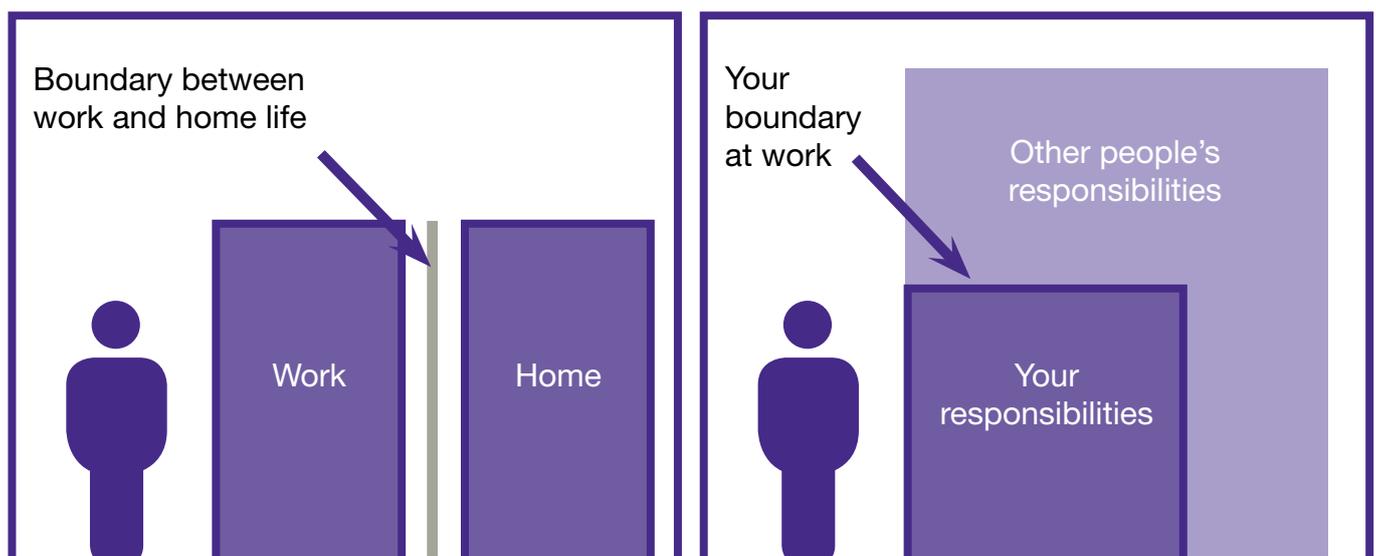
- The situation – what happened, what led up to it, who else was involved, what state were you in at the time?
- How it affected you – what buttons it pushed, the thoughts that went through your head, the feelings you experienced, how you reacted physically?
- The demand – what was actually being asked of you?
- How you responded – what options you felt you had at that moment, how you chose to respond, what prompted you to respond the way?
- What the result was – for you, for others?
- What other ways you could have responded?
- What you can learn from the experience about your limits and how to respect them?

Jot down your conclusions – just in bullet form. At the end of the week, get together with your colleague and explain to each other what you have learned about recognising and respecting your limits.

Note: Talking things through with another person is important. It gives you another perspective and deepens your understanding. If you can't do this with a colleague, do it with a friend or family member.

Boundary-setting

Boundaries between work and home help protect your work-life balance. Boundaries at work between you and your colleagues help to keep your job manageable. Well-managed boundaries enable harmonious team working and greater understanding of self and others.



In theory, boundaries at work are clearly defined by job descriptions, policies and procedures. In practice, the unpredictability of work makes them fuzzy. A colleague has to go home early and asks you to cover. A client needs help so you stay on after regular hours. Emails arrive after work hours. Boundaries blur.

It's worth the effort to keep reminding yourself and others exactly where your boundaries are. Unpredictability and uncertainty are major sources of stress. Being clear about boundaries directly addresses that uncertainty; it makes the unpredictability much easier to manage. 'I'd really like to help, but I can't swap shifts this weekend.' Or, 'It would be great to go out for a drink with you all, but I can't tonight.'

Boundary-setting is not about being rigid and inflexible when colleagues ask for help that takes you beyond your boundaries. Work is very much about mutual support and reciprocity. Boundary-setting simply makes it clear to all concerned when you are being asked to step beyond your limits and puts you in charge of the decision.

Assertive communication

Communication underpins boundary-setting and the negotiation with colleagues that enables you to stay within your limits. Use the techniques of assertive communication to keep negotiations friendly and constructive.

Use reflective discussion to support boundary-setting

Use team reflective discussion to reinforce shared understandings of where boundaries lie and appropriate ways to negotiate them, including assertive communication.

Time-management

Boundary-setting aims to address some of the unpredictability and uncertainty that gives rise to stress at work. Effective time-management helps you maintain boundaries and can extend the limits of your time and energy, which again makes it a little easier to deal with the unpredictability and uncertainty of work.

Networks of support

Research has found that support networks offer important protection against stress. Building networks of support is a resilient behaviour.

It is useful to recognise two types of support at work, the formal and the informal. Formal support comes from management systems, including stress management, people management and quality management systems. Ensuring support to manage long-term pressure is the explicit goal of stress management; it's a central concern of people management. Quality management systems come at the issue from a different perspective, but they are no less dependent on support networks. The better you understand these systems, the more support you can draw from them.

Complement formal support by building your own, informal support networks. These require

an investment of time and effort – by definition - support networks require reciprocity – but the investment is well worth making. Informal networks help you manage pressure in two ways: on a practical level; they are a problem-solving resource, on a more general level; they provide reassurance and help make work feel safer. Assertive communication, interpersonal skills and empathy all help build and sustain informal networks.

Use reflective discussion to reinforce support systems

Use team reflective discussion to reinforce shared understandings of how formal support systems function and identify ways to improve them. Use it also to reinforce the importance of mutual support and reciprocity through informal networks.

Bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment can be significant sources of workplace stress and will undermine efforts to build resilience. Forms of bullying include excluding people, belittling them, gossiping about them, humiliating them, giving them unachievable or meaningless tasks, undervaluing them.

Bullying and harassment damage victims and also others exposed to the process. If you experience or witness bullying or harassment, report it. There are well-established ways of dealing with.

For more on bullying and harassment see the [Health and Safety Executive website](#).

Personal development to build your resilience

Research has identified seven characteristics at the heart of personal resilience.

Seven characteristics of personal resilience

People behave resiliently when they:

1. are able to identify and manage their thoughts and feelings.
2. tolerate ambiguity – in other words, they can live with the fact that there are uncertainties in a situation; that ability allows them time to assess the situation before they respond, allowing them to act thoughtfully.
3. take a positive approach – in other words, they take a realistic view of people and situations and then try to make the best of things; this has been called being realistically optimistic.
4. think accurately about events and their causes – this is essential for problem solving, but it also greatly affects how a person interprets events, which affects how they see themselves and everything around them.
5. are sensitive to other people's emotions – helpful in all sorts of ways, not least in communicating with people and in building networks of support.

6. have confidence in their ability to solve problems – they make a realistic assessment of their strengths and their weaknesses; they make good use of their strengths and they do not dwell on their weaknesses (in other words, they take a positive approach to themselves).
7. are willing to run the risk of failure in order to grow – they accept that failure is part life and fear of does not stop them from exploring new directions.

Personal resilience in a nutshell

You behave resiliently when you:

1. manage your own thoughts and feelings
2. assess a problem before you try to resolve it
3. are realistically optimistic
4. think accurately about things
5. are sensitive to other people’s emotions
6. are confident in your own ability to solve problems
7. are willing to embrace the new in order to grow.



How resilient do you consider yourself?

Where would you place yourself on a resilience scale? Consider each of the questions below, then decide where you sit on the line between ‘not much’ and ‘a lot’.

Afterwards, ask people who know you well if they agree.

One more question: If you think about yourself **at** work and **outside** work, is there any difference in where you are on the lines?

Figure 6. Resilience self-assessment scale.

<i>To what extent are you</i>	<i>Not much</i>	<i>A lot</i>
1. In touch with your thoughts and feelings?	—————→	
2. Able to live with an unresolved problem?	—————→	
3. Positive and optimistic about life?	—————→	
4. Able to think accurately about things?	—————→	
5. Sensitive to how people around you are feeling?	—————→	
6. Confident of solving problems?	—————→	
7. Willing to embrace the new in order to grow?	—————→	

What can you do to develop your personal resilience?

To develop the seven characteristics, focus on three areas of personal development:

- emotional intelligence
- accurate thinking
- realistic optimism.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a measure of:

- self-awareness – the ability to identify your feelings
- self-management skills – the ability to control your feelings
- empathy – sensitivity to other people's emotions
- interpersonal skills – ability to connect with other people and sustain constructive relationships.



Can you see how developing emotional intelligence might help you behave in resilient ways?

How do you develop emotional intelligence?

There is a great deal of detailed and helpful information on emotional intelligence and how to develop it. In the end, however, it boils down to noticing and reflecting on your own and other people's reactions and responses to things.

Discussing thoughts and feelings with other people will help you both notice and reflect.

Discussing emotions safely

Care work involves contact with strong, sometimes difficult emotions. Helping people to develop the language and confidence to identify and express difficult emotions is valuable, but should always be done in a safe environment.

Resilience building tips

- Notice the clues (physical, emotional, thinking or behavioural) that you are finding in-the-moment pressure difficult to cope with and use a technique (such as 7/11 breathing) to help you manage it.
- Practice identifying your feelings and emotions. Ask yourself what it is you are actually feeling. If possible take a few moments to watch the emotion without trying to change it.
- Notice how the people around you affect your feelings. Is the effect positive?
- Make it a habit to pause for thought before forming a judgement or reaching a decision, particularly when you feel pressured. What is the reality of the situation? What might an outsider make of it?
- When faced with a problem, look at it from as many different perspectives as possible. What factors are involved? Is a problem that can be solved, or not? Are you spending too long ruminating about it. If it is possible to solve, then how? Who can help you?

- Make a point of asking yourself what the people around you are feeling and why. What might the situation look like from their perspective?
 - When listening to someone, give them your full attention. Try not to interrupt. When they have finished, summarise what you have understood back to them to check your understanding - and to show them you want to understand them.
 - When helping people solve problems, ask them questions to help them arrive at their own solution, rather than coming up with your own solution for them. Simple, sympathetic questions are best: *That sounds tricky. Have you had to deal with anything like that before? What did you do? What seems the best course of action now? Who might be able to help you?*
 - When something doesn't work out as planned remember FAIL – it stands for First Attempt In Learning. If we got everything right first time around, there wouldn't be much learning involved. Reflect on what you can learn from the experience.
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Accurate thinking

How you **think** about something helps to determine how you **feel** about it and what you choose to **do** about it. That makes it essential to think as **accurately** as you can, particularly when dealing with any sort of problem. Problems bring pressure and, put under pressure, people often fall into patterns of thinking that confuse rather than clarify.

Develop your ability to think accurately by observing your own thinking patterns and questioning your conclusions.

Inaccurate thinking

Have you ever watched a friend jumping to a false conclusion, or worrying seriously about something that was highly unlikely to happen, or reading far too much into someone's chance remark? They get so caught up in the thing, they lose all perspective.

Ways to think inaccurately

- **Filtering** out the positive to focus on the negative - for example; ignoring three nice compliments to focus on one minor criticism.
 - **Personalising** i.e. making every problem about you - for example; something goes wrong at work and you immediately assume people will blame you, even though it had nothing to do with you.
 - **Awfulising** and **catastrophising** i.e. automatically assuming that every small problem will turn into a major disaster.
 - **Polarising** i.e. seeing everything as either good or bad, right or wrong, with no middle ground - for example; one colleague is completely wonderful, another is totally useless.
-

Challenge inaccurate thinking to reach balanced conclusions

Imagine you are walking down the road and you spot a colleague from work walking past on the other side. You smile and call out to your colleague, but they ignore you completely and turn the corner.

What thoughts go through your head? Are they more like pattern A or B?

<i>Pattern A thoughts</i>	<i>Pattern B thoughts</i>
'What have I done?'	'She doesn't want to know me anymore.'
'No-one really likes me at work.'	'She looked really pre-occupied. I'll speak to her tomorrow and ask if everything is ok.'
'I wonder if she heard me.'	'Maybe that wasn't her after all.'

Pattern A thoughts belong to a category called Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANT). Pattern B thoughts are consistent with **balanced conclusions**.



Thought challenge

Use this thought-challenger exercise to develop your ability to think accurately and reach balanced conclusions.

The table below provides you with a template, using the colleague event as an example.

Choose other events to explore how you can challenge ANTs and come up with more positive (and likely) interpretations. Recording your feelings helps show how this makes you feel more confident, in control and better able to cope.

Event: Colleague ignores you

<i>Automatic Negative Thought</i>	<i>How it makes you feel</i> <i>(1= mild; 10=intense)</i>	<i>Other possible interpretations of what happened</i>	<i>Balanced conclusions</i>	<i>How it makes you feel</i> <i>(1= mild; 10=intense)</i>
She doesn't like me	Sad 8 Hurt 9	They just didn't see me	It could be that they just didn't see me	Sad 4 Hurt 5
I have done something wrong	Anxious 7	They had something on their mind They need glasses	Maybe there is a problem that I need to talk to them about	Anxious 3

Use reflective discussion to develop emotional intelligence and accurate thinking

Use reflective team discussion to help workers to develop emotional intelligence and accurate thinking.

Realistic optimism



Here's a proposition: '*We only have one life so it's important to make the most of it.*'
Would you agree with that?

Now consider this idea: The things we can change, we should. The things we can't change, we must accept.

- Realistic optimism means seeing things as they are, accurately, then making the best of them.
- Realistic optimism is **not** about wishful thinking. It's certainly not about ignoring problems. Making the best of things might mean you make radical changes to a situation – or that you leave the situation altogether.
- Realistic optimism is about engaging with life positively and constructively.
- It's about taking personal responsibility for your choices.
- It's about taking a problem-solving approach to difficulty.
- It's about looking for solutions.

Making the best of a difficult situation

A difficult situation presents you with two basic options and then a choice.

Two basic options ... *Change the situation or change your response to the situation*

1. Change the situation

*Can I change the situation? Yes – how?
Can I alter it to make it manageable?
No? Then can I avoid (or leave) the situation?*

Then a choice...

Alter it, or...

Avoid it

No – then you have to...

2. Change your response to the situation

Can I make the situation manageable by changing my behaviour? No? Then I just have to accept it and stop worrying.

Then a choice...

Adapt to it – change your behaviour, or...

Accept it and stop worrying

Reframing

In Hamlet, Shakespeare wrote, *'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.'*

Re-framing thoughts doesn't change the situation, but it can show you the situation from a different perspective. Seeing it from a different perspective may change your **understanding** of the situation.

Thought: *'I've worked here so long, how boring is that!?'*

Reframe: *'I'm one of the most experienced people here, how great is that!?'*

Conclusion: *'On balance, I get real satisfaction from being here.'*

You can feel different ways at the same time about a situation, of course. Realistic optimism allows that. The important thing is to understand things from as many perspectives as possible. That helps you draw **balanced conclusions**.

How do you develop realistic optimism?

Emotional intelligence and accurate thinking both help to develop realistic optimism.

At its heart, however, optimism comes from feeling that

- What you are doing is **worth doing**
- You have the **skills** required
- You can **deal** with the problems and difficulties you are going to encounter.

The best way to develop those feelings is to:

- understand your role and its value; that means talking about what you do with colleagues and clients
- build networks of mutual support
- take every opportunity to learn and develop.



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