

Five steps to resilience

Got stress? Bounce back by working through these five steps. Try out the various methods described below each step. Find what works for you.

1 Recognize my triggers

How can I catch myself when I am not feeling resilient?

Identify your triggers. Think about situations where you tend to feel difficult emotions. What kinds of things trigger you? What are your pet peeves? How do you typically react?

Where am I? Check in with yourself to see if you are “above the line” (resilient, coping well) or “below the line” (not coping well). Sometimes, awareness is all you need to self-correct.

Mutual support. Reach out to others close to you to share how you’re feeling in difficult situations. Check in with others and ask them how they are *really* doing and then show them you’re really listening.

Catch-and-switch. Use awareness to **catch** (step 1) yourself in your non-resilient state. Then **switch** (step 2) to the here-and-now with curious, mindful, accepting, open awareness.

Name your evil twin. When you’re below the line, who are you? Negative Ned? Fearful Fred? Controlling Karen? Playfully catch yourself in one of your below-the-line personas.

Cognitive distortions are biased perceptions we take on, especially under stress. Learn to spot them. They’re easy to see in others, less so in ourselves.

2 Regain my composure

What can I do to regain and maintain greater equanimity and composure?

Hit pause and reset. Take a minute to step away. Breathe slowly. Drink water. Stretch.

Self-compassion. Self-criticism and blame push you further below the line. Reflect on what a wise and kind friend would say or do for you in this situation. Then treat yourself like that.

The resilience challenge. Recognize and accept “the resilience challenge” when problems arise. Make it a game. Relax and regain greater focus and composure as you cope with the situation — proactively and positively.

Embrace the stress. You stress about things that matter to you. See your stress as your body gearing up to get you what you want. Then focus on what matters and go after it.

I’m all right, right now. Tune into right here and now. You’re safe. You can breathe. You’re alive. Feel that. Relax into that.

4-7-8 breathing. Breathe in slowly to a count of 4. Hold for 7. Slowly exhale for a count of 8. Repeat 3-5x. Do this several times each day.

R.E.S.T. Relax; pause, breathe. **Evaluate** the situation, inside & out. **Set** an intention. **Take** small actions to bring your intention to life.

Body scan. Work through one or more parts of your body with FOCUS, FEEL, RELEASE, and RELAX. Breathe slowly and deeply.

S.T.O.P. Stop what you’re doing. **Take** a slow, deep breath. **Observe** what is happening inside and outside yourself. **Pose** a helpful question. **Proceed** in doing what you were doing.

Move it or lose it. Get up and move with a quick walk around the block or up a flight of stairs. Combine with other practices.

Name it to tame it. Describe in detail how you are feeling. Share it with a friend. Name the story you’re telling yourself like the “I’m not worthy” story. See it as just another story.

Gratitude. Reflect on who (or what) you deeply appreciate. For an extra boost, reflect on what your life might be like without them. Express it.

3 Reframe my perspective

How can I think about and perceive this more resiliently?

Seven C’s powerful questions. Which of the Seven C’s questions (other side of this sheet) might be helpful to you **here**? Pick your favorite 2-3 go-to questions.

Three P’s. With pessimism, we see problems as *permanent* (it’ll always be this way), *pervasive* (everything is bad), and *personal* (it’s all about me and my failings). Try instead to see what you are facing as not permanent, pervasive or personal. It will change. It is specific to this situation. And it’s not just about you; there are almost always multiple factors at play.

Radical acceptance. This isn’t the same as giving up or giving in. Here, you just acknowledge and “sit” in the whole situation as it is just observing all your thoughts and feelings about it, without judgment. This powerful method allows you to make more clear-headed choices about how to deal with things as they are, not as you wish them to be.

Decatastrophize. Allow yourself to fully play out a chain of “what if” thinking. You’ll get to a point where you realize that in the end, you’ll be able to handle most of what life throws at you.

Death bed. At the end of life, what would you think about this challenge? Think about who’s going to care about this in a hundred years.

4 Renew my commitment

What is my deeper commitment here?

Clarify your commitments. Reflect on these questions:

What is your bigger-than-self goal in this situation?

What larger purpose might you serve in dealing well with this?

What do you really care about? What are your core values? What might you remember about those values as you address this issue?

What do I want to create here? Reflect on the ideal outcome for a given situation, beyond just getting stuff done (e.g., how you’d like yourself or others to feel, what conditions for success you want to establish). Start your day asking what you want to *create* today (vs. *what you need to do today*).

Best possible outcome. Imagine the best possible outcome for a challenge you’re facing. Then lean into this possibility, committing to do and be your best in bringing this vision to reality. Examples: *Stressed about a job interview? Visualize feeling confident, comfortable and poised as you ace it.*

Nervous about a difficult conversation? Visualize an honest, caring talk that brings you closer.

5 Respond with baby steps

What initial “baby steps” might I take toward my commitments?

Baby-step planning. Think about your difficult situation. What super-achievable “baby steps” can you take to get going?

Examples: 10-minute web search; set up a meeting; phone a friend; write a list; take a walk and ponder the situation.

Forcing functions. Set yourself up for successful follow-through on action plans by detailing how, where, when and with whom you will complete the action.

Schedule the action in your calendar. Set up meetings with others for feedback or idea generation. Boost your chances for success by promising yourself a small reward at the end.

Procrastinate with purpose. Sometimes we really aren’t ready to jump headlong into action (it’s late, we’re tired, or we’re waiting for a crucial person or thing). Set a timer for 5-10 mins to prep for a fresh start (e.g., clean off your desk, write a short list of do-first actions, get all needed docs in one folder, pack your bag).

Done list. Still overwhelmed with the enormity of what lies ahead? Add things to a “done” list as you accomplish them. Watching your “done” list grow fuels a sense of progress, efficacy, agency, and control.

7C's resilience questions – for cultivating resilient perceptions and beliefs

Calm	Compassion	Challenge	Capability	Control	Connection	Commitment
What feelings are you having about this?	What would your own best friend do or say to help you here?	What positive challenge does this present?	What might you learn here?	What do you have control over in this situation? What direct actions can you take?	Who might be able to help you here? How might they help you?	What is your bigger-than-self goal in this situation?
What thoughts are you having about this?	What is unhelpful about the way you are talking to yourself in this situation?	What opportunities might there be in this situation?	What might you need to learn to better deal with this? How might you learn that?	What or whom might you be able to influence to help with this situation?	Who else might be having this problem now? How might you help them?	What might you commit to that would reflect you at your best?
What's going on in your body as you think about this?	What might you say to yourself that would be more helpful and understanding?	How might you be your best self in this situation?	How might this make you bigger-better-stronger?	What do you NOT have control over in this situation? What do you need to let go?	What relationship issues or conflicts might it help to resolve or work through in this situation?	What might be the best possible outcome for this situation?
What can you do to regain and remain responsive, calm, and helpful here?	How might it help here to show some compassion and understanding for others?	What is the hidden gift, the silver lining in this problem or situation?	How might you apply your core strengths and talents here?	How might you practice acceptance in this situation?	How might forgiveness help you in this situation?	What might you commit to here that is good for you AND for others?
What would your resilience role model do in this situation?						Which of your core values might you want to apply here?

ABC-ABC all-in-one resilience practice

When you are feeling stressed (overwhelmed, anxious, etc.) you can get lost in those emotions and function in a way that works against your better interests. This is where the **ABC-ABC** practice comes in handy. It's an all-in-one resilience practice that you can employ in 2-3 minutes (or longer if needed, and with easy-to-remember steps). So, the next time you find yourself in a challenging situation with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, remember your ABCs:

Awareness. Tune in with awareness to what is going on in the situation, in your body, with your thoughts and feelings. Don't try to do anything about it yet. Just notice what is going on.

Breathing. Tune into your breathing. Take a slow deep belly breath then slowly let it out. Repeat.

Compassion. Be kind to yourself like you would with your own best friend. Pay attention to how you are speaking to yourself. Notice how your self-talk makes you feel. Extend this compassion to others. Look at the world through their eyes for a moment. How might you show kindness to them?

Acceptance. This is not the same as giving up or giving in. Here, you just accept the whole situation as it is, including any difficult emotions you're experiencing. Relax into it and drop your urge to fight or run away. Just draw a big mental lasso around it and sit with reality as it really is.

Beliefs. Use the Five C's resilience questions to challenge your perceptions and beliefs about the situation and your role in making it better. Do a web search for "cognitive distortions."

Commitment. What is your more noble, bigger-than-self commitment in this situation? What might you commit to here that would better reflect you at your best?

Resilience habit stacks

Habit stacks help us to establish resilience habits and routines.

First, pick a common task or routine (like making coffee, walking the dog, preparing for a meeting, etc.).

Then identify 1-2 simple resilience practices to do along with that task or routine, creating a "habit stack."

The habit stack formula is "When I am [doing routine task], I will [new resilience habit(s)]."

Play with various combinations. Find what works. Periodically change them up to keep them fresh. Create visual reminders at work and home. Create a few different stacks if you'd like. Keep them simple and achievable.

Habit stack examples:

When I am making coffee, I will send a text of appreciation to someone.

When I am washing my hands, I will reflect on what is good about a challenging situation.

When I am in the shower, I will reflect on three things I am grateful for.

Create your own . . .

Want to know more about resilience and how we might help develop it in your team or organization? Reach out to Bill Hefferman at bill.w.hefferman@ey.com and/or Brooke Illahuston at brooke.illahuston@ey.com