

A Resilience Toolkit



PrairieCare

A Division of Newport Healthcare

Your Step-by-Step
Guide to Enhancing
Stress Resilience
and Well-Being



for Parents, Teens, and Young Adults

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What Is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity and stress. Having resilience doesn't mean we avoid sadness, disappointment, or failure. But people who are resilient bounce back more easily from roadblocks.

Positive psychologists have identified a number of traits and behaviors that are associated with resilience, including:

- A sense of meaning and purpose
- Optimism
- Gratitude
- The desire to help others
- Humor
- Social connection and support
- A willingness to confront and grow from challenges and fears



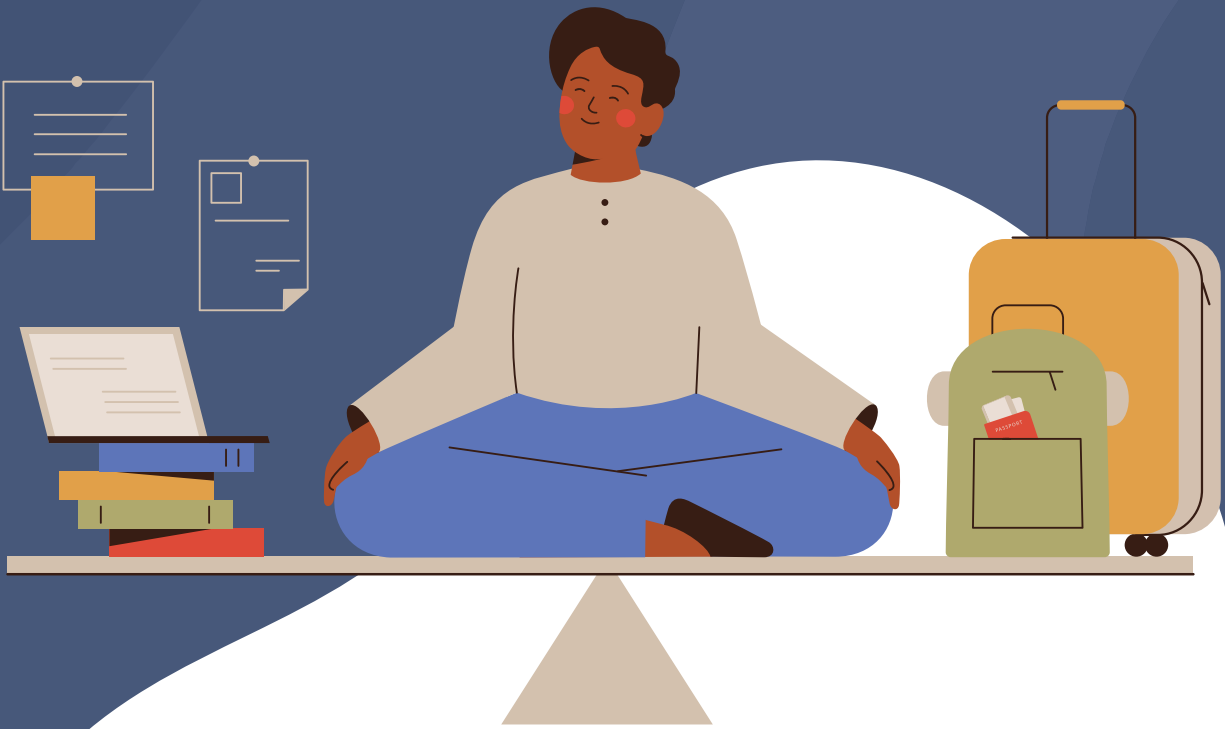
“Understanding what our own signs of stress are helps us to express those feelings effectively so others can help us and helps us recognize when we will benefit most from using healthy coping skills.”

—*Dr. Anastasia Ristau, Director of Psychotherapeutics, Licensed Psychologist*


We Can All Build Our Resilience

We each have different levels of the qualities associated with resilience, depending on our temperament and personality. However, we all have the ability to increase our levels of resilience through small changes in the way we live and the way we think. For example, we can increase our feelings of gratitude by focusing on the good things that happen to us, not just the difficult and painful experiences.

Another powerful way to build resilience is by identifying and activating our strengths. When we discover our own unique talents and character strengths, we can learn how to utilize these gifts to address daily challenges. Building healthy habits also promotes resilience—whether that's physical exercise, meditation, time in nature, or connecting with friends.



Tool #1:
Mindfulness



Mindfulness is the state of being present, in the moment, with nonjudgmental awareness of what's going on within and around you. According to research, this skill allows us to better regulate our emotions and be fully present in our experiences.

With practice, our minds become better at simply noticing, rather than judging and reacting. This creates mental resilience that can help us stay calm and centered in the face of stress and challenge.

For Parents: Mindful Meditation

1. Sit quietly with eyes closed and breathe normally.
2. Bring your attention to your breath. Repeat the phrases “breathing in, breathing out” to help keep the mind focused on inhaling and exhaling.
3. When a thought comes into your mind, simply label it as “a thought” and allow it to float out of your mind like a cloud moving across the sky.
4. Then gently bring your attention back to your breath. Practice for as long or as short a time as you wish. Even a few minutes of meditation can make a huge difference in your day and in your mindset.

For Young Adults: Square Breathing

1. Sit comfortably in a chair, with your feet on the floor and hands in your lap.
2. Inhale slowly through the nose for a count of four, allowing the air to fill your belly.
3. Hold the breath in for a count of four.
4. Exhale slowly through the mouth for a count of four.
5. As you breathe, visualize a healing blue or white light washing over your body. Finally, hold the breath for a count of four.
6. Repeat the sequence for four minutes.
7. Ideally, repeat the exercise for four minutes, four times a day.
8. Practicing Square Breathing several times daily will help you become calmer and more relaxed.

> For Teens: Child's Pose

1. From hands and knees, lower your hips toward your heels.
2. Spread your knees wide apart while keeping your big toes touching. Soften the belly onto the tops of the thighs.
3. Rest your forehead on the floor and rest your torso on your thighs. Knees can be together or apart.
4. Extend your arms forward, with palms facing down, or bring them back to rest alongside your thighs, with palms facing up.
5. Breathe in for a slow count of five, then breathe out for a slow count of five.
6. Stay in the pose for as long as you wish.

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“Scientific studies support the efficacy of mind/body skills such as yoga, meditation, mental imagery (self-hypnosis) and biofeedback to balance the nervous system, elicit the relaxation response and reduce stress.”

—Dr. Timothy P. Culbert, *Developmental Pediatrician*





Tool #2:
Self-Compassion



Self-compassion means extending the same kindness and forgiveness to yourself as you would to a friend or loved one. Turns out, self-compassion is more important for happiness than self-esteem: Research shows that people who are compassionate to themselves are much less likely to be depressed, anxious, and stressed, and much more likely to be happy, resilient, and optimistic about their future.

Kristin Neff is one of the best-known researchers on the topic of self-compassion and how it enhances well-being. The exercises below come from her website, self-compassion.org.

For Parents: Supportive Touch

1. When you notice you're under stress, take two or three deep, satisfying breaths.
2. Gently place your hand over your heart, feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand. If you wish, place both hands on your chest, noticing the difference between one and two hands.
3. Feel the touch of your hand on your chest. If you wish, you could make small circles with your hand on your chest.
4. Feel the natural rising and falling of your chest as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
5. Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

For Young Adults: Identifying What We Really Want

1. Think about the ways that you use self-criticism as a motivator. Is there any personal trait that you criticize yourself for because you think being hard on yourself will help you change? If so, first try to get in touch with the emotional pain that your self-criticism causes, giving yourself compassion for the experience of feeling so judged.
2. Next, see if you can think of a kinder, more caring way to motivate yourself to make a change if needed. What language would a wise and nurturing friend, parent, teacher, or mentor use to gently point out how your behavior is unproductive, while simultaneously encouraging you to do something different. What is the most supportive message you can think of that's in line with your underlying wish to be healthy and happy?
3. Every time you catch yourself being judgmental about your unwanted trait in the future, first notice the pain of your self-judgment and give yourself compassion. Then try to reframe your inner dialogue so that it is more encouraging and supportive. Remember that if you really want to motivate yourself, love is more powerful than fear.

> For Teens: How Would You Treat a Friend?

1. Think about times when a close friend feels bad about themselves or is really struggling in some way. How would you respond to your friend in this situation (especially when you're at your best)? Write down what you typically do, what you say, and the tone in which you typically talk to your friends.
2. Now think about times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Write down what you typically do, what you say, and the tone in which you talk to yourself.
3. Did you notice a difference between how you talk to others and how you talk to yourself? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others so differently?
4. Now write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you're suffering.

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“I am excited to continue to see a positive shift in individuals feeling more comfortable in opening up about their struggles with mental health and finding a support network.”

—Brianna Carlson,
Hybrid Therapist/Social Worker



**Tool #3:
Gratitude**





By consciously activating a sense of gratitude, we can enhance our happiness levels and strengthen our overall resilience. Simply by noticing the good things around us and acknowledging the people who support us, we promote our own mental health and develop more satisfaction in our lives. Studies show that gratitude exercises positively impact people of all ages in both the short and long term.

For Parents: Create a Family Gratitude Jar

1. Decorate a jar with ribbons, glitter, stickers, paint, or anything else you find beautiful. Find a place to leave it in a common area of the house.
2. Cut up little slips of paper and put them in a small box next to the jar, with a few colorful markers for writing.
3. Invite every member of the family to reflect on what they're grateful for each day, write it down on a slip of paper, and drop it in the jar. You can each write about anything you're grateful for, big or small. It might be a positive interaction at school or work, doing well on a test, or getting together with a good friend. Encourage family members to write down three things each day for the gratitude jar.
4. When the jar is full—or on a day you've previously decided on—sit together as a family, read each paper one by one, and savor the good memories of your experiences.

For Young Adults: Write and Deliver a Gratitude Letter

1. Think about a person you feel grateful for—a friend, family member, coworker, teacher, or mentor—someone you haven't thanked yet who has had a meaningful positive impact on your life.
2. Write that person an email or handwritten letter. Describe why you're grateful to have them in your life and how they have affected you, being as specific as possible.
3. You can send the email or mail the letter—or you can set up a “gratitude visit” with the person, either in person or virtually. Set up a time to meet, but don't tell them about the letter yet. When you're together, read them what you wrote.

> For Teens: The Gratitude Rock

1. Find a rock or other small object that you like—one that feels good to hold or has an interesting texture.
2. Every day, carry this rock around with you in your pocket, or wear it on a chain around your neck or your wrist.
3. Whenever you see or touch the rock, pause to remember something you are grateful for—anything at all that makes you feel happy and thankful.
4. When you take the stone out of your pocket at the end of the day, look back for a moment on the things you felt grateful for throughout your day. The next morning, when you put it back in your pocket (or around your neck or wrist), think back on what you were grateful for the day before.

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“Each day has something to be thankful for, even if it feels insignificant at the time.”

—Perinatal IOP Team





**Tool #4:
Giving to Others**



Research shows that volunteering offers mental and physical health benefits that strengthen your resilience. When we help others, our brains produce more feel-good chemicals, like oxytocin and progesterone. In turn, these neurochemicals lower stress and promote overall health and well-being. On a more conscious level, helping others allows us to feel more connected and purposeful, which increases our happiness levels.

➤ For Parents: Give Your Focus and Presence

Yes, parents are always doing things for their children and other family members. There's always somewhere the kids need to be or a household task to check off the to-do list. But how often do you set aside time and space to be fully present and emotionally available for your loved ones? What small practical or mindset changes can you make to bring more of that connection into your daily life together? Here are a few tips for making your time together more meaningful.

- Put away your phone and give them your full attention.
- Schedule one-on-one time with each child if that's a rare occurrence.
- Listen carefully, without interrupting or thinking about what you'll say when they're done talking.
- If you're struggling with your child's behavior, see if you can recognize the needs that are behind the behaviors or words, and address those directly.
- Ask them to share something with you that they love or are currently obsessed with—their favorite music, a TV show, a video that cracks them up, or a political issue they're fired up about.



“My personal definition of self-care is anything that allows me to take pause, slow down, reflect, and engage in an activity that feels calming or provides a sense of enjoyment and relaxation. It means to ‘re-charge’ my battery.”

—*Laura DaBruzzi, Therapist*



➤ For Young Adults: Volunteer for a Cause You Care About

Find a way to regularly give your time and energy to a cause that matters to you. You might spend time volunteering once a week or once a month. Ideally, access the support of fellow activists to create community and lighten the load. Because activism can be draining, it's important to practice self-care, including:

- Recharging in ways that work for you—whether that's being in nature, reading, creative expression, or time with friends that isn't focused on activism
- Creating healthy boundaries: When you're getting tired or your mood is low, choose to stop and rest rather than pushing through.
- Developing a balanced relationship with media and social media: Social media can support activism, but constant exposure can be exhausting and demoralizing, so be sure to unplug sometimes.
- Caring for your body—getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising regularly
- Keeping track of your wins: Document the milestones that represent forward movement as a reminder that change is possible.


➤ For Teens: Do Something Kind for Someone Every Day

Giving to others in a small way every day helps build a habit of generosity. And thinking about others' needs can help them shift the focus away from their own negative or anxious thoughts. These gestures of kindness can be simple while still being meaningful, such as:

- Taking a neighbor's dog for a walk when they're sick or busy
- Holding the door open for someone
- Calling an older relative just to say hi and find out how they're doing
- Complimenting a friend
- Letting someone cut in front of you in line
- Leaving an extra-big tip for a server or barista

Tool #5:
Activate Your
Character Strengths





Character strengths reflect who you are at your core. They are positive parts of your personality that affect how you think, feel and behave. Using your character strengths can help you more effectively face challenges and navigate stressors. Studies show that activating your strengths creates long-term benefits, including higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depression.

If you don't have a good sense of your personal character strengths, take the [free 10-minute assessment](#) provided by the VIA Institute on Character, available for teens and adults. The exercises below are adapted from [viacharacter.org](#), [positivepsychology.com](#), and [therapistaid.com](#).

➤ For Parents: Focus on Your Best Possible Self

Take a moment to reflect on your strengths and how they affect your life. What do you do that shows these strengths? What are the positive impacts of these strengths on your life? How do your strengths benefit others? You might think of a specific time, recently or a while back, when you felt you were at your best and most authentic—as a parent, child, friend, or partner.

Now imagine a future in which you are bringing your best possible self forward each day. Visualize that “best possible self.” Make note of the character strengths that you'll need to activate in order to make that self a reality. You might want to choose a phrase, image, or object that brings your best possible self to mind, and place it somewhere you'll notice it regularly.

➤ For Young Adults: Exercise and Express Your Strengths

1. Select one of your top character strengths, a core strength that is easy for you to use, and gives you energy.
2. Consider a new way to express the strength each day—at work or school, in relationships, while traveling, when leading others, or when working with a team, for example.
3. Express the strength in a new way each day for at least one week. For example, if the strength you chose is curiosity, explore a new place or route one day. Another day, try a new food or a new restaurant. Ask someone you know a question about their life you've never asked before. Think about what you want to explore in yourself.
4. At the end of the week, write about the strength you focused on during the week and how you used it. Write in detail about what you did, how you felt, and what you learned.
5. Choose a new top strength to focus on the following week, and do the exercise again.



> For Teens: Three Good People: A Strengths-Spotting Exercise

This exercise from the Therapist Aid website is great for the whole family to do together, or for a group of teens.

- Name an inspiring character from a book, movie, or TV show.
- List their strengths.
- Describe how they use their strengths to overcome challenges, or in everyday life.
- Name an inspiring person.
- List their strengths.
- Describe how they use their strengths to overcome challenges, or in everyday life.
- Think about yourself.
- List your strengths.
- Describe how you use your strengths in everyday life.

Now reflect on what you discovered—in writing, with the whole group, or in pairs.

- What strengths do you share with the fictional character and the person you know?
- What strengths do you possess that the others do not?
- What is a strength of yours that you often overlook?
- Is there an area of your life where you could better put your strengths to use?



More About PrairieCare

> Providing Hope and Healing

At PrairieCare we believe that mental illness is real, common, and treatable. Our programs and services span the full continuum of care, knowing that each patient has their own unique experiences, stages in life, and set of needs. Whether a patient needs perinatal psychiatric care or managing anxiety in school, our clinicians are accredited and trained to help. We support patients during their time with us and create sustainable outcomes for them to reach their goals.

> We Treat

- Depression and suicidal ideation
- Anxiety disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Trauma and PTSD
- Neurodevelopmental disorders
- Disruptive behavior disorders
- Personality disorders
- Chemical dependency
- Psychosis and psychotic disorders
- Co-occurring disorders

> We Offer

- Clinic & Outpatient Services
- Intensive Outpatient Program
 - Perinatal
 - First Episode Psychosis
 - Youth & Young Adult
- Partial Hospitalization Program
 - Healthy Eating and Living Program
- Inpatient Hospitalization Program
- Residential Treatment Program
- Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation

Call us or visit our website to access resources and support for people of all ages and their families.



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