

# In Good Times and Bad, Emotional Resilience is Key

Updated December 2021.

Normal life can be hard. Disappointments and failures are unavoidable. But the challenges of 2020 and 2021 have created a new normal — complete with increased anxiety and depression. As if coping with COVID-19 wasn't enough, we also dealt with the news of natural disasters and community crises like Miami's Sunrise Tower collapse.

"I think it's super common to be a bit down and overwhelmed right now with everything going on around us," says Nicole Mavrides, M.D., a psychiatrist with the University of Miami Health System. "It's important to build up emotional resilience so that if/when something else challenging comes along, you know how to get through it or, at the very least, deal with it better."

Fortunately, resiliency is a trait we can develop in ourselves, our children, and our communities.

## What is resilience?

"Being resilient is having the capacity to recover from something difficult. It can be an internal or external struggle," says Dr. Mavrides.

**“It doesn’t mean that resilient people never face adversity, stress, or problems. It means they are able to move past it without letting it define them.”**

**- Dr. Nicole Mavrides**

---

## **Hardy people tend to be better at:**

- keeping setbacks in perspective
- not blaming themselves and others
- dealing with uncertainty
- responding to unexpected challenges
- avoiding feelings of helplessness and pessimism
- reaching their goals

## **How can you build up emotional resilience in the face of challenges?**

### **Prioritize your strong relationships.**

Keep in touch with your family, friends, and colleagues. Reach out to those with whom you’ve lost touch. Be more social and try to stay connected through the ups and downs of the pandemic. Join a hobby/interest-based group in person or online. Connect with a support group, your church, synagogue, mosque, and your child’s school, virtually or in-person, as circumstances dictate. Add your name to the school phone tree or email list and make sure you have emergency contacts. Get to know

your neighbors. A simple text saying, “Has anyone else lost power?” during a storm makes you feel less alone. If you don’t want to engage face-to-face, use social networking apps like Nextdoor to stay informed.

## **Practice daily mindfulness.**



Take breathers when you are stressed. Meditate. Pause to acknowledge your surroundings and your emotional reactions to them. Be more present and proactive in your responses to stressors/challenges. Dr. Mavrides reminds patients, “This is something that can be very helpful.”

When personal, local or global events blindsides your routine, “Restore normalcy as quickly as possible - eat three meals a day, maintain work and bedtime schedules. Use coping mechanisms that worked before, whether journaling, coloring, exercise, or meditation,” Dr. Mavrides says.

## **Avoid negativity.**

Limit your exposure to the news, social media, and individuals who trigger strong negative feelings. “This is one of the most important things I tell my patients,” Dr. Mavrides says. “I ask them to turn off alerts to the news and check it only twice a day.” While setting boundaries for yourself, teach your kids to set boundaries, too.

“Don’t watch the news in front of young children and don’t tell them more than they need to know. Tell teens, ‘Talk to me if you have questions instead of Googling the topic.’ And set limits on their media consumption. Parents may want one hour; teens may want five. Meet them in the middle. They’re more likely to follow a choice than a mandate,” Dr. Mavrides says. When you do experience negative thoughts and feelings, allow yourself time to work through these reactions and come out stronger on the other side.

## **Take care of yourself.**

Limit alcohol and recreational drug use. Don’t allow yourself to stress-eat your way through hard times. “If you neglect your coping mechanisms, it can lead to anxiety, depression, and being overwhelmed,” she says. Be patient and forgiving with yourself, as you would with a loved one.

“Prioritize getting enough sleep,” Dr. Mavrides says. “If sleep is difficult, try a meditation app or speak with your primary care physician about it.”

## **Accept change.**

Life changes are unavoidable. Some are not positive, but learning to frame your new reality more optimistically can help you become a healthier and more content person. Imagine feeling excited by change and the new experiences it can bring, rather than being scared of it.

## **Be consistent with physical exercise.**

Try walking, bike riding, playing sports, running, yoga, or HIIT workout videos. Regular exercise can lower your blood pressure, improve your sleep quality, and help you maintain a healthy weight. It’s also a productive way to spend time with others while encouraging each other to stick with it. When life events sideline your

routine, find a compromise. “You have to make time for exercise, even if you run for 10 minutes instead of your usual hour,” Dr. Mavrides says.

## **Make yourself feel useful/find some purpose.**

Identify a cause that inspires you, volunteer, help a friend or family member in need, or adopt a pet. Helping others will improve your self-esteem, take your mind off your stressors, and make you feel productive. Every age has its challenges and there’s no perfect way to prepare. Instead of worrying, empower yourself through action.

“It’s really beneficial to make connections and talk with your neighbors,” Dr. Mavrides says. She also believes in having age-appropriate discussions with children before a crisis hits. You can teach children without giving them too many details and causing undue worry. For instance, when hurricane season rolls around, get them involved in preparations and say, “We’re entering hurricane season. This is what that means. We have a plan in place.”

Sadly, children today undergo “Code Red” drills to learn what to do if a school shooting occurs. What do you say if your child is worried about these and other random events? “Tell them the likelihood of this happening is low and that you and other people in the community – teachers and first responders – are doing their best to keep them safe.” Be willing to answer questions and talk about the tough topics.

## **Discover/rediscover your interests.**

Start a new hobby or reengage with one that you used to enjoy. Read more for pleasure, listen to podcasts, make art, learn to cook, plant something in a garden, or join a group in person or online. Expand your daily or weekly to-do list to include activities that lift your mood and distract your mind and body.

## **Set new goals for yourself.**

You can build emotional resilience through small, attainable tasks, like cleaning the kitchen. Or, they can be longer-term goals like learning a new language or how to code. Or focus on more significant objectives you need to accomplish, like polishing your resume and landing a job.

## **Seek help when you need it.**

Ignoring or denying anxiety and depression will only make them worse over time. Hiding these feelings can deepen the experience of isolation and trigger feelings of shame. Reach out to a professional. Speak with loved ones you trust. Sometimes, just talking it out can relieve negative thoughts and feelings and help you realize you're not alone.

## **Learn from your mistakes.**

"Growing from a mistake is way better than wallowing in it and repeating it," Dr. Mavrides says. "There is real truth in working through something difficult and not letting it happen again." This approach can help you avoid crippling guilt and regret, which can inhibit your emotional resilience.

## **Maintain your perspective.**

What may seem overwhelming at the moment may not be a significant issue over the long-term. Try not to blow things out of proportion. This will help you manage your reactions to day-to-day challenges like running late for an appointment.

## **Parents can help their children by letting them fail once in a while.**

"I think young people don't need to do anything different than adults—other than

allow their experiences to shape them,” Dr. Mavrides says.

“Failure helps them build resilience and makes them not want to repeat it. Don’t always allow kids to get whatever they want or do whatever they want. We want to raise kids who know how to function in the world. Having rules and structure can only help,” she says. “And when a child or teen is struggling, encourage them to try all of these tips and guide them to get the professional help they need.

“We should teach kids that there will be stumbling blocks along the way. If we always expect things to work out perfectly, of course we’re going to be disappointed. When we eventually reach our goals, it means a lot more to us because it wasn’t super easy. It’s all about perspective.”

---

Dana Kantrowitz and Nancy Moreland are contributing writers for UMiami Health News.

---

## **IMPORTANT NOTIFICATION:**

**UHealth is not currently offering monoclonal antibody therapy for treatment of COVID-19 except in rare cases where strict criteria are met. Omicron is the dominant variant strain in South Florida and data has shown that bamlanivimab/etesevimab (by Eli Lilly) and casirivimab/imdevimab (by Regeneron) are not effective against this variant.**

---

## LEARN MORE



**Remember - your health comes first.  
Speak up.**

“We don’t know how to act in a pandemic. We’re learning as we go. It’s difficult to digest all the information and ever-changing (public health) guidelines. Our work, school, and personal lives overlap, yet we’re expected to multitask and keep it together. We need to face and reconcile these challenges to protect our mental and physical health,” says Dr. Vanessa L. Padilla.

Read more.

Content Type Article