

Preparing for Possibilities

TAKING ACTION WHEN FACED WITH CHALLENGE

The year 2020 was filled with events that brought forth challenges to the physical and mental health of ourselves, friends, and families. Situations conflicting with our moral and ethical character were tested. As you reflect on the past year, what did you learn about yourself? What choices did you make when faced with a challenge? Changes that will occur during this coming year are still unknown; what can you do now to prepare for the possibilities that come with each new day?

Those who work in the field of early childhood experienced tremendous stress, adversity, and challenges with the onset of COVID-19 and social justice issues. Those who have always understood the importance of building resiliency in children who experience trauma and stress, found themselves being overcome by personal and professional challenges. As adults, how do you find a way to keep from being overcome by the adversity and stress? What actions can you take to build resiliency? According to the article, *Building Your Resilience*, “Psychologists define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors.” As adults, our physical, emotional, and mental health can be affected not only by the challenges we face, but also by how we cope with the big and little sources of stress, difficulties, and trauma that we experience throughout our lives.

When I think of resilience as a process or a course of action I take when going through adversity, trauma, and stressful situations, it becomes something I can evaluate, reflect on, and develop. When the situation has resolved, I can review the way I coped with the situation: were the strategies I used helpful or harmful? Strategies might include a physical response: improve sleeping habits, eat healthier food, exercise. They may be emotional: write in a journal, talk with someone, learn to accept my feelings without judgement, take some “me time”. Or the strategies may involve a mental and/or spiritual response: practice mindfulness, meditate, take a class, volunteer for a cause or activity that helps others. After evaluating and reflecting on the strategies, I can readjust my coping mechanisms and also determine what course of action to take when faced with similar situations in the future.

There are multiple ways to build our resilience to be better able to cope with the stressors that arise in our lives. Currently, regardless of the type of adversity, my first step is to focus on the choice I can make in my attitude. I have control over my outlook of the situation and the actions I may or may not take. I do this by taking time to pause and breathe. As I breathe in, I acknowledge and accept my emotional response without judgement. It is what it is. As I breathe out, I focus on what is this experience teaching me, where is the hope to be found in this situation, and how can I view this as an opportunity or possibility for me to grow. This is still a work in progress for me and I will not say that I have mastered this strategy. In fact, I sometimes forget to take that time to pause and breathe before reacting or I quickly judge myself for having a negative response or emotion toward the situation. But it is progress, not perfection, I seek. Each time a challenge presents itself, it offers me the chance to change my focus to that of possibility.

“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith, and hope.” — Thomas Merton

May you continue to develop the strategies to build your resilience and embrace the possibilities and challenges of 2021 with courage, faith, and hope.

Resources

- [App for Free Meditations](#)

Articles

- [Self-Care and Professionalism](#) from Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System
- [Preventing Compassion Fatigue: Caring for Yourself](#) from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- [Resilience Skills, Factors and Strategies of the Resilient](#) Person from PositivePsychology.com

References

Building your resilience. (2012). Retrieved December 30, 2020, from [the American Psychological Association](#).

For more resources for administrators of early care and education programs, check out the [McCormick Center Library](#) and [professional development opportunities](#).

Barbara Volpe, M.Ed. is Leadership Academy Manager for the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University. In this role she coordinates and facilitates leadership and quality improvement training for early childhood administrators, teachers, and technical assistance providers. Barb has over 20 years of leadership and management experience. Barb enjoys developing trainings and has made many local, statewide, and national presentations. Barb obtained her master's degree from National Louis University in early childhood administration and her baccalaureate degree in child and family development from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.