

Enhance Resilience During the Holidays



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BY CANDICE PEGGS

As the winter months unfold and the holiday season approaches, we may find ourselves struggling to manage day-to-day tasks instead of thriving. Demoralization, discouragement, deep sadness, uncertainty, fear, and even exhaustion are not uncommon reactions.

As the holiday season draws near, it is more important than ever to develop inner resilience. When I think of resilience, it is the tree with deep roots and tall, far-reaching branches that bends and sways without breaking. Resilience is built, learned and fostered on an individual level and within communities and cultures.

If we nurture the tree within us, it will protect us when the storms roll in. There are concrete skills that keep us grounded and push us to grow. Resilience is inherently in all of us. The time to start tending to ourselves is now. I have identified three ways to bolster resilience: tapping into inner resources, conquering fear, and building social support.

Rediscover Inner Resources

Each of us contains a wealth of knowledge and power. Use what you know to sustain you and protect you. Inner resources insulate us from stress. Taking a few minutes to tap into your inner strengths before holiday tasks and guests take over will lessen exhaustion, reduce stress, and increase awareness of joyful moments.

Practicing mindfulness is one proven tool that slows us down and connects us with the present moment. Mindfulness also increases emotional fitness. Mindfulness practices can lead to states of flow. These are moments when we are completely engrossed. Self-consciousness disappears. We are in the present. Paying attention to thoughts and emotions happening in the here and now builds resilience patterns.

In this moment, you have your breath. Take a deep inhale and exhale. Notice your surroundings with all the

senses. Delight in the now. Whether this is sustained for a minute or sixty, each opportunity to pause reconnects us with what is important.

To further identify and access tools you already have, try some investigative questioning. What is one thing I can do for myself today? What have I done before that makes me feel good? What helps me feel at ease? For some, it is returning to that weekly, community yoga class. For others updating a playlist is a reminder to tune in to favorite songs. A friend recently initiated daily, short walks. Try bringing one joyful activity back into your life. Feel the tree roots grow stronger and deepen. This holiday season, give yourself permission to take care of yourself.

Understand Fear with Compassion

Fear is part of our human experience. Fear may paralyze, engender escape fantasies or put aggressive energy into overdrive. Let us put fear in its place. Here are some ways to understand and conquer fear.

I once worked with someone who was in extreme physical pain and ready to give up. She had recently gone through a surgery in the middle of the holidays. She said this was the most difficult thing she had ever encountered. She felt alone. She did not think anyone around her understood or genuinely cared. Besides feeling disappointed and sad, together we realized she was scared. She was afraid she was incapable of managing what was happening.

Before panic sets in, face fear through writing. Putting feelings onto paper takes us out of our heads. This increases awareness. Feelings are messengers that offer special gifts to us if we are brave enough to explore. Naming fear takes away its power. A journal is a safe space to vent and question.

Curiosity without judgment equals perspective. Pretend you are looking at your writing through the compassionate gaze of a friend. Non-judgmental awareness increases soothing and problem solving. If thoughts or feelings seem overwhelming, then start small and go slow. Some people enjoy sharing what they write with trusted family, friends, or even a therapist.

Rather than an adversary, fear can be an ally. After I spent time with this individual naming the physical and emotional pain, she realized she could indeed handle the situation if she broke things down into steps. First, allow her body to heal. Then talk with the doctor about her medical and medication needs. Voila, a new plan. Armed with awareness and insight, she was ready to move forward.

Knowing what you are afraid of can seem anxiety provoking. With practice, you gain the gift of knowing your unique response to stress. When

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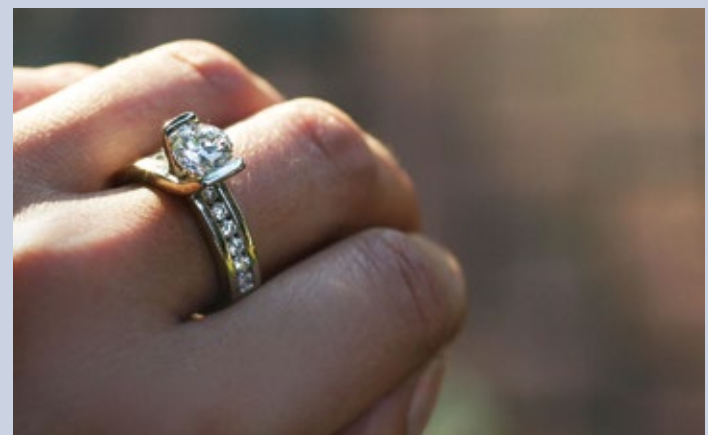
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you understand this, you can then develop a plan to work with it instead of against. This is resilience.

Seek Support

With grounding tools in place, you are ready to extend your tree branches. Social support increases a felt sense of understanding and enhances confidence. It feeds us in deep ways. One way to do this is to ask for help. This is especially hard in our tough-it-out culture. It may seem especially impossible during the holidays when appearing selfless and giving are imperative. However, there is often surprise when learning others are thrilled to lend a hand. Borrow, barter, share. Reaching out, we form connections and create community. That is what the Holidays are about. We are not alone. I once worked with a man in his late thirties who desperately wanted to read. We worked together to find male role models with whom he could relate without shame and community classes in which to enroll. His courage inspired.

To connect more in busy times especially the holidays, practice reflective listening. So much time is spent thinking of what to say next, talking, fixing and problem solving. We need

more people to hear our story. Listening grounds both the listener and the person talking. Next time you are with a friend, ask them to simply listen. Savor the feeling.

Consider asking for comfort as well. Know what you need and ask for it. It may be in the form of touch, kind words, quality time, or shared activities. Before you know it, you are held in the supportive embrace of community.

This is the beginning of building practices to sustain us in hectic and joyful times. Plant your seeds, tend to them, and watch them grow. What is your next easiest step towards growth? Begin now.

Candice Peggs, LCSW-C, RYT is a registered yoga teacher, meditation practitioner and licensed clinical therapist. She provides compassionate, solution-oriented therapy to help us be in touch with our own inner power. She practices in Bethesda, MD, and can be reached at www.candicepeggs.com or at 301-893-4282.

To continue building resilience, Candice is running a Renew and Restore 8-week women's group starting January 9, 2017. Contact Candice at www.candicepeggs.com to receive more information.

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