

# Finding Your Resilience During COVID-19

***Presenter – Aimee Prange, MSW, LCSW***

Thank you for joining today to finding your resilience during COVID-19. My name is Aimee Prange and I'm a licensed clinical social worker.

## Health Crisis

We are in a time of uncertainty, dealing with multiple stresses and adversity. During this uncharted and unique global health crisis, it can be unsettling when even the experts don't have timelines for when things will stabilize and hopefully begin to return some sort of normal. The available predictions tend to vary state by state, and county by county. Many resources have been impacted everything from routine healthcare and services to retail stores, food and toilet paper to employment and financial stability.

As I have listened and spoken to friends and colleagues and others, one thing has become really clear "The ocean looks fierce yet we're all in the same boat. How we experience the waves is unique to each of us."

You know, I think it would be unfair to assume any one individual's experience during COVID-19 is the same as the next person's experience. We are all living this day to day, and how we manage, or cope likely looks different.

Today we're going to discuss how to be adaptable in building your strength and resilience. And hopefully you'll find ways to weather the storm.

## You've Got A Lot to Handle

We've got a lot to handle and how we stay resilient and positive when our fear and worry take over during these times. You know I think with all of the different things going on, some things are at a standstill, yet other things are proceeding full force ahead. Our bills are still due, we still need groceries, if we're employed, we still have work responsibilities, if you've got children with school work to be taken care of, younger children need childcare while parents are trying to work so we're juggling a lot of different things. And then on top of that we've got the physical separation from friends, family and loved ones.

## What is Resilience?

In general, life doesn't come with a handbook, if you have one, I'd love to see it. Yet, we find ways to navigate everyday challenges from simple to complex. These many challenges impact us each differently, yet we learn to adapt over time, even in the most stressful situations. Think back to a previous time that was exceptionally challenging and think to yourself are there experiences that you can draw from to help you even now. That has a lot to do with resilience.

Resilience is defined as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. Those stressors could be anything from family issues, relationship problems, financial issues, health problems, work, COVID-19 among other things. Our ability to overcome these difficult experiences is resilience.

## Weathering the Storm

Stormy times are tough and sometimes downright painful. COVID 19 is no exception. Our present situation though doesn't have to define you or your future. The quarantine will not last forever, social distancing will not last forever, the economy will bounce back, and health will once again be restored. There's so many factors that we do not have control over right now and we have a choice- spending time worrying about the things we can't control, or focusing our attention on those things that we can control like our family, our jobs, what we do for entertainment, maintaining connections with friends and loved ones... We can look at this as a time of growth and seek the silver linings or we can dwell on the things that were missing or don't have access to and miss out on those little nuggets of hope. The path you choose will determine how you handle challenges going forward. Or you can choose resilience and improve your life along the way. I think back to lots of different experiences I've had through my life. Many times, that were not easy and probably really difficult. I look back at those experiences and learn from them and think about "how did I get through?" I'm not serving anyone myself included or my family if I sit here and think about all that is wrong, that won't help me right now,

## Managing Expectations

It comes down to trying to manage our expectations. You know, a lot of people think that resilience is a personality trait, either you're born with it or you're not. And I'm happy to tell you that simply isn't true. Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and honed over time. Some people may be more resilient than others, but you can build resilience much like you might build core muscle strength through exercise. It takes time, focus, and determination.

## Four Components to Resilience

Over the next couple of slides, I'm going to share with you four core components to building that resilience. We'll talk about building connection, fostering wellness, finding our meaning or purpose and seeking positivity.

### #1 Connections

So, starting with number one, Connections. Find people you connect with, even better if you can find people who remind you that you are not alone amidst this difficulty. It's really important to avoid isolation despite the fact that we are social distancing, as that can lead to depression, anxiety, and other health issues.

Accept support and help from those who care about you. It's never a burden or a bother. Allow yourself to genuinely connect and be vulnerable with those who care about you. You're not protecting anyone if you can't be authentic with those around you. And if you are familiar with the work of Brene' Brown, she talks a lot about vulnerability and the true strength associated with being vulnerable. You know, many people hear the word vulnerability and think "weakness", but it takes strength to be able to share that we are struggling and admit that we need help.

Join a group, be it civil purpose or local organizations because can be a source of Social support. And that can help you reclaim hope and help you find your purpose.

### #2 Wellness

Number two on the list is about wellness. You know we always talk a lot about self-care, but it really is a legitimate practice for taking care of our wellbeing both physically and mentally. This includes everything from eating well to good sleep habits, staying hydrated keeping your body move moving. It doesn't have to be hard core exercise to reduce potential for anxiety and depression.

Mindfulness can help you build connections restore hope and help you focus on the positive aspects in your life. Focus on the things that you're grateful for even, focusing on personal challenges might lead you to something to be grateful for.

Avoid negativity and judgment. This is especially true about ourselves. Allow yourself to be forgiving during this difficult time. Avoid that self-criticism that you're not doing enough, or you should be doing X or if you find this particularly stressful; you're human. You will also want to avoid turning to substances like drugs or alcohol as a way to cope with or numb the pain that you might be feeling. Instead find ways to give your body resources to manage the pain, feel the pain, and to be present with your feelings rather than eliminate them altogether.

### **#3 Purpose**

Volunteering can be a game changer and help give you that sense of purpose and self-worth that you've been seeking. In addition to the added bonus, it can truly help empower you to develop in your resilience. Accept your emotions when things get hard but also think about how you can problem solve so when things are hard, ask yourself "what can I do about xyz?" If the problem seems too big or unsolvable try to break it down into more manageable pieces. The big picture item may be overwhelming, but can you break it down into smaller manageable parts. Remember even when you feel you have no motivation or purpose, if you dig deep enough you can do it and you will more easily overcome the challenge next time that they present themselves.

Have realistic goals and work on them on a regular basis. Yes, even the smallest thing counts. So, if your goal is "I'm just going to make sure that I get dressed every day and perhaps maybe jump in the shower every other day", kudos, that's great. And keep doing that, but make sure that that it becomes habit. Those little actions will help you move toward bigger things and you've you a sense of direction.

We often find growth as a result of the biggest challenges. Look for these areas of self-discovery and how can it help you greater appreciate where you've been, as well as how far you've come.

It's OK to look back and be like man I didn't think I could make it, especially as you are looking at the situation with COVID and Social distancing and managing all the different hats you may be juggling while we're all at home.

I think for myself, you know, as I look at that the chaos that kind of ensued in my own home, and what I have overcome. I can look back and see it is peaceful and it is not as chaotic. There still areas that we could improve on, but I take it as a win.

### **#4 Positivity**

Are you someone who has a tendency to catastrophize difficulty situations or feel the world or others are not on your side? Think about what you can do to learn to be more realistic about different situations. Remind yourself that you are not helpless. Next time you are feeling overwhelmed, be it with work, at home, COVID-19, something you saw on the news... pay attention to how you are feeling. If it's helpful keep a journal of your reactions and thoughts, you are having. Take some time to not only acknowledge that you may not be able to control or change the stressful situation, but you can control how you respond or react to it. Change the "I can't take it thoughts" and visualize what you want, want you can control, rather than focusing on what you worry about. When we accept change and acknowledge that not only is change part of life, but some things are beyond your span of control; focus on the part of change that you can control.

The first days of social distancing as I mentioned, having my family home 24/7 were chaotic and stressful. I couldn't change the fact that we were asked to shelter in place, but I could control how my children spent their time, how we structured our day, and finding ways not to get in each other's way.

And fighting that can often happen when people are together and in close quarters for long periods of time.

Seek optimism. An optimistic point of view can be empowering and allow you to look forward to the positive things that will happen in your life. As you change your thoughts during difficult situations, pay attention to the subtle ways in which you begin to feel better and how you may start dealing with stress and difficulty better.

Learn from the past. Think back to previous hard times and identify what was helpful and not so helpful. Can you use any of those tools now? What helped you get through, maybe that was your connections with friends reaching out for help. And think about what wasn't so helpful were you drinking more than you typically do, which you know that tends to make us feel worse in the long run. Are there tools that you can take with you and use now can you apply that in our current situation remind yourself that when you found strength in the past we can now learn from that and apply it to our future experiences.

## Seeking Help

If you're struggling and finding it hard, it is 110% OK to ask for help. We all need help sometimes. Don't kid yourself in assuming that you can do it all, all the time. When your own resources and reserves are not enough to give you that boost for resilience, reach out and contact your EAP, find a mental health professional, such as a social worker or psychologist who can help you trouble shoot and find an appropriate strategy to move forward in your journey toward resilience. This is especially true if you are feeling like you're unable to function at the level that you would like and previously functioned. Or, if you're finding it hard just to do the basic activities of daily living like taking a shower, brushing your teeth, getting dressed every day. You are not alone in your boat. The storm may feel vast but there is always a helping hand close by, be it a professional or personal.

## You've Got This!

We all have the strength within us to find and become resilient. These are trying times. Stay active, remain open, engage with others, it will get easier. And as you do, new circumstances will be more manageable when they pop up. Thank you so much for your time to listen to this. I hope it was helpful for you. Be well. Be kind to yourself and stay healthy. Take care

## Resources For Living

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC. This material is for informational purposes only. Information is not a substitute for professional health care and is not meant to replace the advice of health care professionals. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.

©2020 Resources For Living | 44.36.900.1-052020-RFL (5/20)