



Thriving Through Turbulent Times

Each of us is unique and what works for one person may not work for another. The following are a few tips and tools for you to choose from to build your resilience and thrive in any difficult time. Most of these tools will impact your mindset, emotions, thinking and your physical being. Pick a tool and practise it, try it on, see how it fits for you. It may take a few times before it begins to feel comfortable and accessible for you to build your resilience. Further, it may take practise in choosing the right tool for the current circumstance you are experiencing.

Tips to build resilience:

Physical:

- **Listen to your body.** What is your body telling you? Early warning signs of stress may include accelerated breathing, not breathing, heart rate increase, sweating, stomach ache, throat tightening, or other physical sensations.
- **Get 7 to 9 hours of sleep.** If you are having difficulty falling asleep, or staying asleep, this may be a sign of stress. Keep a consistent bed time and wake time, even on weekends. Develop an evening routine that begins 30 to 60 minutes before going to bed. Avoid over stimulation, such as electronic devices and television. Try sipping a soothing tea or warm milk to help wind down.
- **Get regular exercise.** You don't have to be an athlete...however regular exercise supports your ability to fight infections, decrease stress hormone (cortisol) and increases your mood (endorphins). Find a friend or partner to help you stick with it and build it into your regular daily routine to make it a habit.
- **Eating to create good feelings.** Yes, there are foods that can help elevate your mood, and foods that contribute to negative moods. If you choose healthy foods 80% of the time you will be well on your way to eating healthy. Try to avoid packaged or processed foods. Choose mood elevation foods like: chocolate, brazil nuts, chilli peppers, complex carbohydrates, garlic, oysters, green leafy vegetables.
- **Get plenty of sunlight.** The sun helps us produce and absorb vitamin D, which may help reduce Season Affective Disorder and boost our ability to be resilient during times of pressure and stress.
- **Practicing yoga** can support your physical, emotional and spiritual well-being all at once. There are many different styles and teachers, find one that works for you.

Spiritual / Connections:

- **Meditation can help you focus your attention.** You can choose to meditate for as little as five minutes of focusing on your breathing (in for three counts and out for six). Deep meditation may involve focusing your mind on all your senses for twenty minutes per day. Find the one that suits you.
- **Mindfulness** is a way to help focus on the present rather than worry about the past or future. Practice this while doing certain activities such as eating, reading, walking. Focus on what you are doing, notice all your senses in the activity (sight, smell, taste, hearing). Try to engage in only one activity at a time (versus eating while watching TV or reading) so that you can focus. If your mind wanders, bring it back to your senses involved.

- **Pet an animal or own a pet.** Studies have shown that pet owners and those who pet animals on a regular basis have lower blood pressure, reduced cortisol (hormone produced during sustained stress), and increased “happy chemicals” (endorphins) due to the unconditional love an animal has with you.
- **Develop spirituality, pray, or build connections.** Experiment with different beliefs and find one that fits for your belief system and values. If you practice spirituality (which is different than religion), this will help keep you whole and connected to yourself and inner peace as well as other deep relationships in your life.
- **Cultivate positive relationships.** Ensure you make time for those you love and those who are a positive influence and energy for you. Practice unconditional love and acceptance of yourself, your friends, your partner and relatives. Accept yourself and let go of trying to “fix” others.
- **Know your life purpose and passions.** When we know our purpose, and are living aligned with our values we are more resilient when pressure starts to build up. Keep your decisions aligned with your values to stay true to yourself.

Emotional:

- **Avoid or let go of negative emotions.** Emotions and feelings are just that. Notice them and let them pass. It’s when we dwell on the negative emotion that it becomes harmful to us. Let go of anger, blame, cynicism, hate, revenge, hostility, jealousy, suspicion, resentment and shame.
- **Release** your stress and negative emotions by laughing at yourself. Find a way to smile, breathe and let the negative emotion pass.
- **Forgive.** Make the decision to forgive someone and let go of harbouring resentment. Holding on to resentment hurts only you in the end.
- **Start a Gratitude journal.** Build gratitude every day by jotting down as many things you can think of to be grateful for. When you are feeling upset, triggered, or stressed, go back and look at all the good things in your life.
- **Laugh and play** and develop your inner child. Do something wild and crazy, fun and unexpected to release endorphins and boost your resilience.
- **Find something to look forward to,** this will develop your optimism for the future. Studies show that anticipation makes us happy and perform better. When we expect the future to be bright, stress levels are reduced.
- **Ask for help/support.** Seek professional help such as a counsellor, EAP, psychologist or professional coach depending on what might be most effective for your situation.

Mental:

- **Increase flexible thinking** by letting go of “all or nothing, black or white” thinking. Find the middle ground and start looking for shades of grey.
- **Avoid climbing the ladder of inference.** Check your assumptions and look for more facts beyond your own belief system. What assumptions are you making? Is there something else? Is there another perspective? What’s the underlying belief that may not be useful for you?
- **Avoid perfectionistic tendencies.** Very few things in life are actually perfect. It is the uniqueness of life and our ability to be flexible in our thinking and behaviours that will keep us resilient. Since we can’t actually achieve perfection, it will only lead to more negative thoughts and emotions. Strive for high level of performance and success, NOT perfection.

- **Get “off the grid” for a period of time.** These days we are constantly bombarded by technology. Shut the phone off, remove the electronics and spend some quality down time.
- **Increase your self awareness.** Practice being aware of your thoughts, feelings, behaviour, physicality in the moment. The more self-aware you are, the easier you adjust and shift to stay in contribution in the moment.
- **Master your inner critic.** Notice your inner critic (the negative self talk and emotions), don’t argue with it. Build your inner ally’s voice. Find your new mantra or visualization to put the critic away.
- **Control your attention** and choose what you pay attention to. Focusing on things out of your control and “worrying” about them creates stress. Pay attention to the things you can control or influence and set your priorities.
- **Commit yourself to developing your resilience. It takes practice and involves choosing to take responsibility for your thoughts, behaviours and relationships.**

Tips to shift your thinking:

Adapted from Marilee Adams, “Change your Questions, Change your Life”, the concepts below may help to shift your mindset out of rumination and judgement into curiosity and learning. It reduces tension and stress to allow possibility, innovation and choice. The table below provides details and questions one can ask to help shift your mindset.

1. What mindset am I in? Am I in judgement or open to Learning? 2. Is this what I want to be feeling / behaving? 3. How else can I think about this? 4. Am I willing to shift my mindset? Then shift your questions out of Judger into Learner	
Judger	Learner
What’s wrong with me?	What do I want? What are my goals?
What’s wrong with them?	What works? What can I learn?
Whose fault is it?	What are the facts? What assumptions to I have?
Why doesn’t anything ever work for me?	What are my choices? What is my underlying belief?
Why is everyone so stupid and annoying?	What action steps make the best sense?
Why bother?	What is possible?
Results of being in judgement versus curious mindset	
Judger	Learner
Negative mood, pessimism, rumination, stress	Positive mood, optimism, hope, possibilities
Judgemental, reactive, critical, inflexible	Thoughtful, appreciative, curious, creative, flexible,
Win-lose, defensive, aggressive	Win-win, connected, collaborative

Tips to deal with stress during conflict:

Managing and resolving conflict requires the ability to quickly reduce stress and bring your emotions into balance. You can ensure that the process is as positive as possible by practicing the following guidelines:

- **Listen for what is felt as well as said.** When we listen, we connect deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening deeply involves being present, suspending judgement, watching body language and seeking to understand.
- **Make conflict/problem resolution the priority rather than winning or "being right".** Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than “winning” the argument, is the priority.

Be respectful of the others and their viewpoint. Try to understand their perspective, their needs and desires before responding. Try to find a win - win solution.

- **Focus on the present.** If you're holding on to grudges based on past resentments, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than holding onto the past and assigning blame, or making assumptions, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- **Pick your battles.** Conflicts can be draining. It's important to consider whether the issue is worthy of your time and energy. Look at the big picture – how will this impact your life in one month or one year from now?
- **Be willing to forgive.** Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to hold onto grudges or punish. Take a moment to ask yourself what you need to let go of a past wrong and move forward.
- **Know when to let something go.** If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree, or take a time out. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

Tips to deal with stress during communication:

- **Recognize when you're becoming stressed.** Your body will let you know if you're stressed as you communicate. Are your muscles or your stomach tight or sore? Are your hands clenched? Is your breath shallow? Are you "forgetting" to breathe?
- **Take a moment to calm down** before deciding to continue a conversation or postpone it.
- **Bring your senses to the rescue** by taking a few deep breaths, clenching and relaxing muscles, or recalling a soothing, sensory-rich image. The best way to rapidly and reliably relieve stress is through the senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Find something that will work for you.
- **Look for humor in the situation.** When used appropriately, humor is a great way to relieve pressure and stress.

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Organizations hire Michelle to facilitate the development of leaders and talent to increase their effectiveness and elevate their contributions. Her consulting practice includes developing HR strategy, building alignment with business strategy and goals, talent management, succession planning, change management and organization / business transformation.

Individuals hire Michelle to reach their personal and professional peak performance and achieve transformation to lead more fulfilling and rewarding careers and lives.

Resources and references

Fighting Fair To Resolve Conflict – Covers the causes of conflict, different conflict styles, and fair fighting guidelines to help you positively resolve disagreements. (University of Texas at Austin)

Conflict Resolution – Comprehensive resource on how to manage and resolve conflict. (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

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“Mindsight” The new science of personal transformation, Dr. Daniel J Siegel, 2010

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“Taming Your Gremlin”, Rick Carson, 2003