

Resilience in difficult times

The current pandemic has resulted in changes to our daily lives. People don't generally like continual changes or uncertainty. We establish patterns and habits in order to create some certainty about what is to happen in our lives. This is exacerbated when we feel a sense of threat to ourselves or the people we care about.

Essentially this is all focused on the question 'Will I be okay?'. Not knowing the answer is what upsets our equilibrium. The rapidly changing events around us at the present can create anxiety. However, there are a few simple things we can do to build our resilience and the resilience of the people we serve.

Anxiety in difficult times is a perfectly normal response but resilience offers practical steps to reduce this unease, and in its place, promote a sense of wellbeing. Living with ambiguity and stress can have an emotional labour on us so anything we can do to reduce this is worthwhile.

The good news is we all have resources we can use in difficult times. In order to focus these resources, I refer to the building blocks of resilience. I call these:

- **Meaning making**
- **A sense of mastery and control**
- **Connectedness to self and others**



In order to focus, ask yourself the following questions¹:

- "Setting aside the things I don't know about this situation, what are the things I do know for sure? What can I do, based on that?" **(MEANING MAKING)**
- "What kind of attitude do I want to have about this situation? Given that, what choices do I want to make?" **(MASTERY AND CONTROL)**
- "Who are the helpers? And who can I help?" **(CONNECTEDNESS)**
- "What feels familiar to me in this, given my knowledge and past experiences? And what does that tell me I could do now?" **(MY RESOURCES)**
- "What can I learn from this? What will I do differently as a result?" **(MY ACTIONS)²**

Asking and answering these questions is resilience in action.

¹ Adapted from Caroline Webb (2019) [carolinewebb.co]
² Adapted from Christie, J (2020) Promoting Resilience in Dementia Care.

“ Resilience is where we experience adversity and find new ways of coping to reduce the negative impact on ourselves and our lives. ”

Some helpful pointers

Meaning making



- This current situation will pass.
- Use a single reliable source of information to keep up to date with the latest news E.g. WHO
- Your organisation is prepared for this situation and responsive. We care about each other.
- Talk to your line manager any time you are unsure of what to do.
- Make opportunities to talk to friends and colleagues about the things you are worried about.
- Write down worries and put them to one side. You don't need to carry them with you.
- The skills you use in your work to make sense of behaviour in others can help you make sense of this situation. And you can also help others to make sense too.
- Look for the helpers. Whenever you feel overwhelmed or struggle to make sense of bad news items look for people who are making things better. It always helps.

“Remember the skills you use in your work, are the skills you need now – living with uncertainty, problem solving, finding resources. We do this every day in our work with others.”

Sense of mastery and control



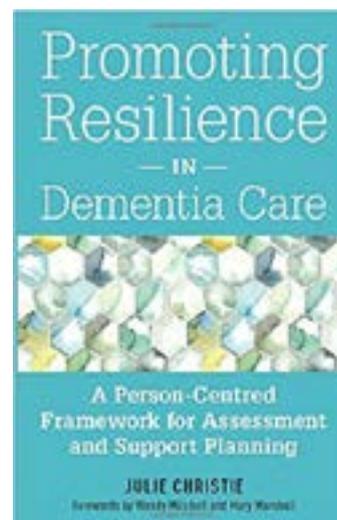
- Know the symptoms – temperature/fever and persistent dry cough.
- Follow the guidance – safe physical distancing, regular handwashing, clean surfaces; use PPE
- Attend and read/view team updates and briefings.
- Ask questions.
- Employ your workplace triage questions to determine the appropriate response to work requests.
- Use your line manager to clarify uncertainties.
- Employ prepared practice for ourselves and others-
 - Have advance plans in place.
 - List contacts and NOK; what will happen if a care partner is not available?
 - Order medications
 - Have food and supplies for a week to ten days.
 - Encourage care partners and people with dementia to keep a 'Getting to Know Me' record.
 - Use your work resources to support people through problems that arise as a result of this new situation.

Some helpful pointers (continued)

Connectedness



- Employ physical distancing not social distancing. Stay connected to people that matter to you. Use social media, the phone- whatever works.
- Who is there for you at work, at home, in your community? We can create a visual asset or ecomap of the local community which highlights the formal and informal resources in our networks and neighbourhoods.
- Ask 'how can I be there for others? We can help to mobilise resources, develop relationships and provide advice and support. Our local identity and our professional networks make us very effective in this role.
- Identify local and community leaders that emerge in response to this new situation. Its not always the obvious or established leaders.
- Make use of pastoral support for yourself and others.
- Humour helps us work through problems without becoming bogged down by them.
- Try and establish a routine that works for you where possible.
- Be active, engaged and productive – it's good for you!
- Kindness, generosity and understanding go a long way in difficult times.



The information in this helpsheet is based on content from the book **Promoting Resilience in Dementia Care** by Julie Christie. For more information see <https://www.hammond.com.au/shop/carer-resources/promoting-resilience-in-dementia-care?searchresultpage=1>

Resources



- Ask 'How can I feel more like myself during this time'?
- What are the things that make you feel good everyday – how can you still find time for this? This might be hearing a favourite song or seeing a picture of which makes you smile. Its okay to make time for silly or fun things.
- What skills, experiences, personal qualities, resources do you have that you can use now?
- What skills, experiences, personal qualities, resources can you lend to others?
- Use your team to help solve problems. We are all in it together.

Actions



- Ask 'What will I do?' and then make a plan that works for you.