### Fostering Resilience During Times of Chronic Stress

## Strengthening Coping and Protecting the Most Vulnerable

### **Trauma Recovery Innovations**

Kristen Lindgren, Ph.D. & Michele Bedard-Gilligan, Ph.D.

A presentation for the National Postdoc Association







### Acknowledgments:

- ✓ Emily Dworkin, TRI colleague
- ✓ UW Dept of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences
- ✓ Colleagues at:
  - ✓ Center for the Study of Health and Risk Behaviors
  - ✓ UW Center for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress

### Goals for today:

- ✓ Define resilience
- ✓ Explain what you can do to promote resilience
- Outline options for those who need more support

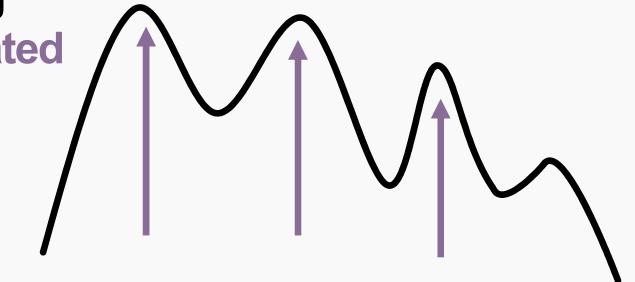




### DEFINING RESILIENCE

### We are living in a time of elevated **acute AND chronic** stressors.

Everyone is being exposed to repeated periods of acute distress.

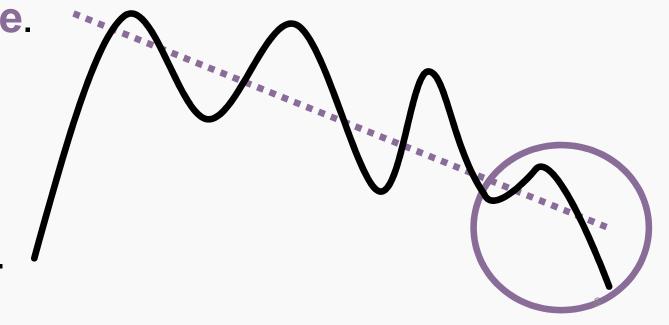


## Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity.

Resilience is the most

common outcome.

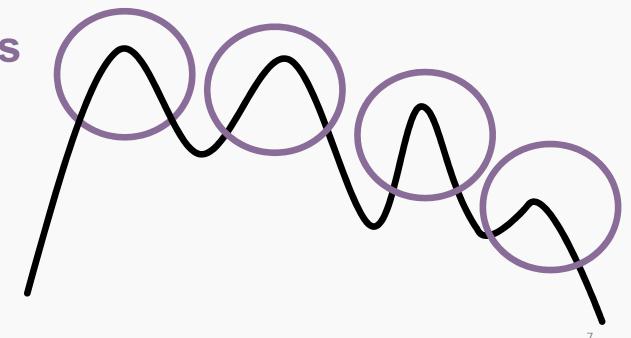
We expect most people to be resilient during & following disasters.



### But resilience is variable and nonlinear.

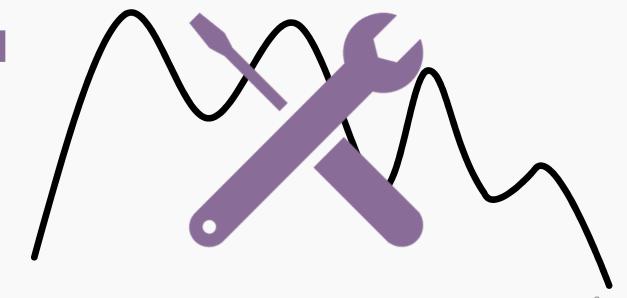
It doesn't mean there's no distress along the way.

We don't have to like it.



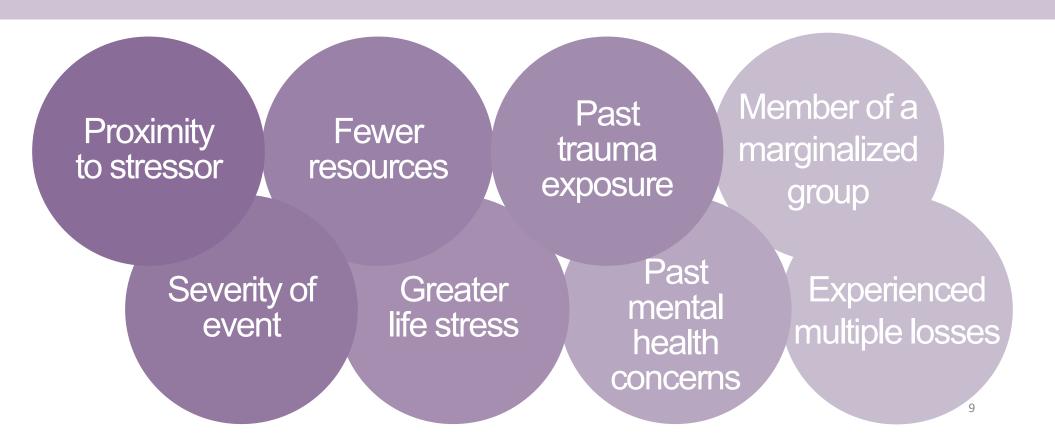
## Resilience requires effort, persistence, and patience.

It can be acquired and learned.



#### W

## Those who are **most vulnerable** may need more support.





### Some of us are affected more than others.



Bolstering the community helps us all!



### What it means to be resilient.

"It's to be adapting and accommodating, rather than resistant to, the suffering. I think that's what it is to live through hardship for sustained periods of time."

- Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Columbia University





### PROMOTING RESILIENCE



### Strategies to promote resilience focus on **3 A's**.



- ✓ Assessing
- ✓ Accepting
- ✓ Adapting

### Regularly **assessing** one's well-being & needs is crucial.

Do regular emotional and behavioral temperature checks.

Eating healthy?

Sleeping well?

Staying active?

Seeing friends/family?



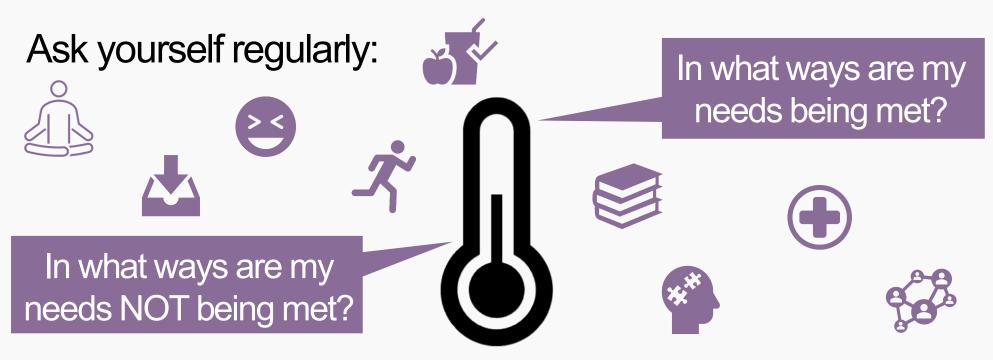
Positive feelings?

Negative feelings?

Negative thoughts?

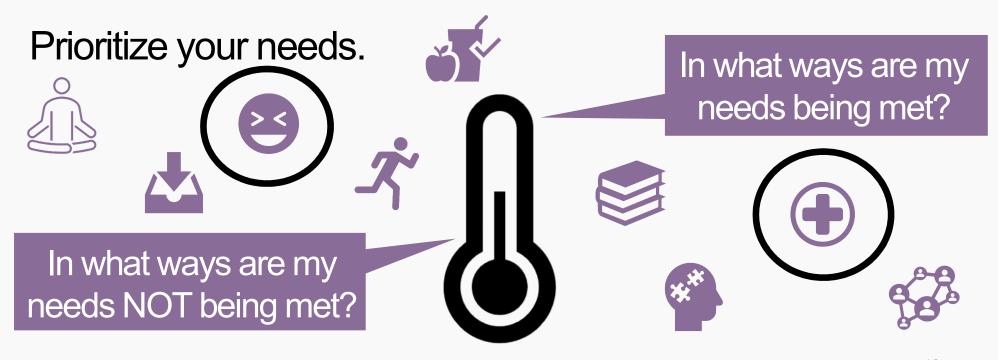
Substance use?

### Regularly **assessing** one's well-being & needs is crucial.



#### W

### Regularly **assessing** one's well-being & needs is crucial.



#### W

## Acceptance means changing what we can and letting go of the rest.

Is this a problem you can do something about?

YES

NO

Let the problem go and focus on something else.

What are your options for solving the problem?

Is there anything you can do right now?

YES

Do what you can, then let the problem go and focus on something else. NO

Make a plan, then let the problem go and focus on something else.



## Acceptance means acknowledging the new normal and your reactions to it.



Notice where your reality has shifted and work to accept:

Unavoidable changes

Negative emotions

Loss of control

**Uncertainty & ambiguity** 



## Acceptance means acknowledging the new normal and your reactions to it.



Also notice:

How you coped

Your strengths

Your resources

#### W

## Acceptance means acknowledging the downsides & upsides of the new normal.

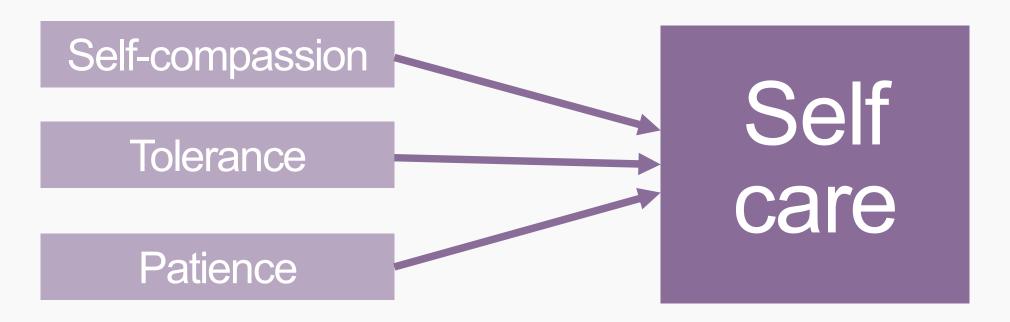


Also notice:

Losses and gains

Both... and....

### Acceptance means acknowledging that this is hard!



## Adapting to the new reality requires intention, planning, and flexibility.

Set a routine
Stay active
Don't avoid

- •Sleep, eat, work, school, social, self-care
- Exercise, get out, get engaged
- •Don't isolate or withdraw, limit substance use

### Adapting involves promoting positive activities.

#### Review a list of activities.



#### Create

Draw a picture
Paint a portrait
Take a photograph
Doodle / sketch
Organise photographs
Make a photograph album
Start a scrapbook
Finish a project
Do some sewing / knitting



#### Kindness

Help a friend / neighbor / stranger
Make a gift for someone
Try a random act of kindness
Do someone a favour
Teach somebody a skill
Do something nice for someone
Plan a surprise for someone
Make a list of your good points
Make a list of things or people you
are grateful for



#### Plan

Set a goal Create a budget Make a 5 year plan Make a 'to do' list Make a 'bucket list' Make a shopping list



#### Write

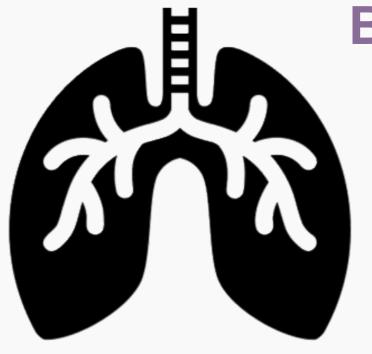
Write a letter with compliments
Write a letter to your politician
Write an angry letter
Write a grateful letter
Write a 'thank you' card
Write a journal / diary
Write your CV
Start writing a book



#### Self care

Take a bath
Take a shower
Wash your hair
Give yourself a facial
Trim your nails
Sunbathe (wear sunscreen!)
Take a nap

## Adapting involves managing distressing reactions as they occur.



### **Breathing**

Get comfortable

Breathe in through your nose for 5, expanding your belly

Hold for 5

Exhale slowly for 7 while you say a soothing word

## Adapting involves feeling and tolerating distress, not eliminating it.



### Writing Exercise

Set aside 30 minutes

Write about whatever is distressing you

Give yourself space to feel your emotions

Consider the things you did to help yourself or others

Repeat, building in new helpful thoughts



## Adapting involves noticing negative thoughts.

Situation — Distressing Emotions

#### **Notice:**

What thoughts go along with the situation & emotions?

Situation — Thoughts — Distressing Emotions

## Adapting involves distinguishing between normal and excessive worry.

### NORMAL WORRY

Helps you to get what you want

Helps you to solve problems in your life

### EXCESSIVE WORRY

Leaves you feeling demoralized, upset, or exhausted

Gets in the way of living the life you want to lead



## Adapting involves challenging negative thoughts, not treating them as facts.

Ask yourself: What would be more helpful thoughts? What would I say to a friend in this situation?

I might feel bad for a while, but I'll probably feel better with time.

Even if I don't feel better, I know I can get help if I need it.

W

## Adapting involves increasing social and community connections.

- ✓ Who are your most important connections?
- ✓ With whom can you share your feelings?
- ✓ With whom do you want to be in touch?
- ✓ Who might need your help or support right now?
- ✓ Consider what is missing or needs to be changed.



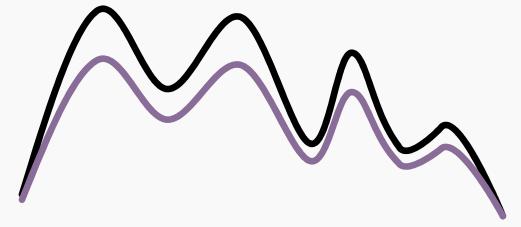
## We can play a role in helping those who depend on us adapt.

- ✓ Communicate calm, compassion, and respect
- ✓ Listen to concerns while maintaining appropriate boundaries
- ✓ Share information openly and honestly
- ✓ Help troubleshoot challenges

## Assessing, accepting, and adapting can promote long-term resilience.

Remember that **resilience** is the most common outcome.

Working to cope effectively with crises will promote future resilience.







# FOR THOSE WHO NEED MORE SUPPORT

## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for mental health W disorders following trauma is effective at reducing symptoms.

Depression

Anxiety Substance use

- ✓ Time limited
- ✓ Present focused
- ✓ Structured and skills oriented
- ✓ Practice outside session
- ✓ Delivered by a trained professional

## We can play a role in connecting those who depend on us to resources as appropriate.

- ✓ Normalize the need for support
- ✓ Know your limits
- ✓ Respect personal boundaries
- ✓ Know what's available and who to ask for help





### LAST THOUGHTS...



## To increase resilience in your community, look for the helpers and be a helper.

- ✓ What you do for yourself and those around you makes a difference.
- ✓ Finding ways to make meaning, engage others, and foster compassion is important.

### RESOURCES

COVID Support Program (page includes handouts and guides) https://psychiatry.uw.edu/clinical-care-consultation/ covid-19-resources-for-mental-well-being/





https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/COVID coach app.asp

CDC Resources on Managing Stress:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stressanxiety.html

Contact Kristen & Michele: TRIHEAL@uw.edu

