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Is College Stressing You Out? Six Tips to Increase Your Resilience

College is an exciting and terrifying time of meeting new people, making your own decisions, sharing a room with a new friend, and learning how to manage your time. These changes can all create a chronic, background level of stress. And imagine how much your stress level would increase if an acute event happened like the end of a relationship, failing a test, or worse, the loss of someone close to you. How can learn to bounce back in the face of these stressors?

Resilience simply means, “The ability to bounce back.” Thankfully, resilience is not a fixed entity, but can grow and evolve. Research consistently shows that resilience is a trait that can be increased when life is organized appropriately. Here are six tips to help build your resilience:

- 1. Recognize and respond to stress:** As with many things in life, awareness is half the battle. Take time each day to understand the sources of stress you face and how the stress is affecting you. Respond by taking 20- to 30-minute “purposeful breaks” daily to do something that you really enjoy (e.g., take a nap, read a book, play a game) to maintain your resilience— and don’t feel guilty about it!
- 2. Change your thought patterns:** Sometimes, we create our own stress. Negative thoughts and emotions, often a result of past experiences, cloud our perspective and can create irrational beliefs that weaken our resilience. If you find yourself jumping to conclusions, making mountains out of molehills, or explaining things in absolutes (e.g., always, never, everyone), try to step back, look at the situation objectively, gather truthful information, and begin challenging these negative thoughts (and believing truth).
- 3. Create strong social connections:** Whether you are an extrovert or an introvert, strong relationships will help you stay resilient. It takes a while to develop strong social connections at college, but keep at it. And remember that the number of relationships is not as important as the depth of the relationships. Seek mutually supportive relationships where both of you listen and ask good questions of each other.
- 4. Take care of yourself:** Balance is an important concept in college and in life. Take care of your body, mind, and spirit, and you will be more resilient and better able to handle negative stress when it comes up. Create a schedule that allows for work and school responsibilities, as well as exercise, friendships, rest, and play. Good time management will help you be more balanced and able to withstand stress.

5. **Don't forget your values:** You came to college with passions, values, and beliefs that have helped to shape your identity. Making choices, like deciding on a major, what activities to join, or whom to date, that don't align with your values creates dissonance and threatens your resilience. Write down your personal, academic, and social values and refer to them often. That way, they will easily come to mind when it's time to make decisions.

6. **Set goals:** Research shows that people with goals tend to be more successful than those without them. Take time at the beginning of each semester to make a list of academic and personal goals for yourself. Setting and achieving these goals will keep you motivated and boost your resilience.

Resilience is one of the tools that will help you thrive in college and in life. These tips to build resilience can help you persevere through the many transitions of young adulthood.

The information above was adapted from SCoRE, the Student Curriculum on Resilience Education, which was developed specifically for college students by 3-C Institute for Social Development in partnership with LEAD Pittsburgh. For more information on SCoRE, go to the website at www.scoreforcollege.org.