



RESILIENCY TOOLS

Courtesy of: Elizabeth A. Estabrooks, MSW
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As covered in the book, resilience is a skill or dynamic process. We are not born with it, but we can and do develop it – some differently than others. Briefly, it is what helps us positively adapt in the face of trauma or adversity.

This document provides resilience tools taken from Mental Health America (MHA)¹ that can be helpful for those who have experienced trauma, recently or in the past. Credit goes to MHA for the following resilience tools, found on their website, but more can be found elsewhere.

1. Connect with others – many of us have experienced the truth in this statement: it is possible to be surrounded by people and still feel alone. Tips for connecting:

- Connect with others at places you already go to
- Use shared experience as a topic of conversation
- Give compliments
- Make time to be social
- Not all connections have to be made in person
- Accept invitations
- Pay attention to what other people are interested in
- Organizing activities

2. Stay positive – Negativity in our lives can affect our moods, actions, and health. Practice gratitude.

Gratitude meditation has become very popular for a reason. It's a great way to start the day and clear your head of negativity. Avoid negative thinking, which can decrease performance and effectiveness in

¹ Mental Health America. Ten Tools for Resiliency. <https://mhanational.org/ten-tools>

your life and work. Worse, negative self-talk can become thoughts we believe. What are some MHA tips for staying positive?

- Write about a positive future or, if you aren't a writer, use your imagination to imagine positive outcomes
 - Search for the silver lining. Sound silly? Maybe, but according to MHA, it can show great strength.
3. Get physically active. When depression and anxiety set in, getting off the couch and doing something can be incredibly difficult, but engaging in activity is not just good for your heart, your blood pressure, your weight, your immune system, your energy, and more, it can help improve your mood, you. It reduces stress, anger, and tension and decreases anxiety and depression. Depending on the type of exercise you are doing, set a goal for 3 – 5 days a week at a minimum of 20 minutes per day.
 4. Help others. Helping others through acts of volunteerism or otherwise (this includes donating money) has been shown to improve happiness, reduce stress, and improve how you feel about yourself. It can serve as a reminder that you are lucky in your life, that you are needed in this world, and add a sense of purpose. Get out there and do good for yourself and others.
 5. Get enough sleep. Too many Americans, and especially those of us with PTS, have poor sleep habits due to overworking, stress, and more. MHA offers these tips for improving sleep:
 - To sleep longer—and better—consider these suggestions:
 - Set a regular bedtime
 - Limit caffeine
 - De-stress yourself
 - Get out in the sun
 - Exercise
 - Don't eat right before bed
 - Nap smart

- Say no to nicotine
- Go easy on the drinks
- Limit distractions
- Make your bed a sleep haven

6. Create joy and satisfaction. As the old saying goes, “laughter is the best medicine.” A decrease in pain is just one of the benefits of laughter. Heart, lungs, anxiety, and muscles can all be improved through laughter. While it is certainly not a substitute for taking care of your health in all the important ways, it does lend itself to better health. Recommendations from MHA include:

- Reading funny books or listening to jokes, comedy, podcasts, and more. Laughing at yourself or the situation can help you get through tough times.
- Go have some fun. Have you forgotten or dropped the things that used to give you pleasure? Try picking them up again.
- Find your flow. We all have those moments, whether it is a hobby, writing, or engaging in challenging activities. What gets you into the zone and how long has it been since you were there?

7. Eat well. What are your eating habits like? Have you given up cooking, or have you just never experimented with it? Now is a great time to get back into it. Life is busy and sometimes people get stuck in the routine of relying on fast food, but fat, carbs, and sugar is a storm of nastiness that negatively impacts not only your body but your mental health. There is a popular myth that eating fast food is cheaper, which is why so many people use it as an excuse. Try this challenge to get you started: plan a menu for a week and then shop and cook for that week. If it works for you, do it again the next week. If you end up skipping a night, that is okay, no one will take away your birthday. You can always start up the next day. To get you started, here’s a fantastic Better Homes and Gardens website that offers 32 meals for under \$3 a serving.² See you in the kitchen!

² <https://www.bhg.com/recipes/healthy/dinner/cheap-heart-healthy-dinner-ideas/>

8. Take care of your spirit. Nope, not talking about religion or any higher being, although it can be those things. MHA says this, “being spiritual means observing rituals, studying texts, and attending religious services, well, religiously. For others, it's not at all about traditional structures or notions of God.” It is connecting to whatever you consider meaningful or holy. It can mean going to church, or a hike in the forest, or a trip to the beach. Regardless of how you get your spirituality fix, it can improve your mood and decrease anxiety and depression.
9. Deal better with hard times. Fact: you have coping skills, or you would not have gotten this far. If you have favorite coping skills, keep doing that. If you are struggling with identifying or relying on them, here are some that you might be able to use:
 - Write about it. Journaling is a wonderful exercise. Alternatively, a great way to get something off your chest is to write that letter to someone but then do not send it. Just writing it out is a great way to get it out of your system.
 - Tackle your problems. Make a list of the problems, and then think of solutions and write those down. Do not get bogged down in looking for perfect solutions, because that may end up in a spiral. Instead, choose a solution that works – the best option.
 - Determine your options for getting to the other side. Weighing the pros and cons helps.
 - How do you eat an elephant? One piece at a time. Do not try to solve all the problems all at once. Make a reasonable plan, and then work the plan.
 - Shift your thinking. If you get stuck in the negatives or “I can’t’s” or “it’s impossible” spiral, jump out. How realistic are your worries? Or are you making it more than it is? Focus on the good in your life. And, as much as it may not be something you want to do, think of it as an opportunity to learn. What is the positive that has come out of this?
 - Get support. Call on friends, family members, your therapist, whomever. Call a crisis or help line and talk it out. Never be afraid to ask for help. There’s always someone out there who has your back.

10. Get professional help if you need it. Sadly, there is a terrible stigma in our world that burdens those seeking mental health care but think of it this way: if you have a heart problem, you go to the doctor, and maybe you take meds. You don't not go because you are embarrassed. There's a list of resources at the front of the book, and a more comprehensive list on my website. You deserve to be healthy. Make the call.

There's an app for that!

The National Center for PTSD and VA have spent years collaborating on the development of apps for PTSD, military sexual trauma, recovery, health, and more. These apps are free and available for anyone, even those who are not veterans. I have used a number of them and know others who have. This is a short list of apps that are relevant to people who have experienced trauma. More are available on the website, as well as some for loved ones and providers. Take a look and see if there is something there for you:

****None of these apps are a replacement for therapy with a trained mental health professional**

- **PTSD Coach** - App users can track and manage their symptoms, learn more about PTSD and available treatments, and find additional support and help.
<https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach>
- **Beyond MST** - Beyond MST is a free, secure, trauma-sensitive mobile app that was created specifically to support the health and well-being of survivors of sexual assault or harassment during military service. Find coping tools and free resources to work through challenges associated with Military Sexual Trauma (MST).
<https://mobile.va.gov/app/beyond-mst>
- **Mindfulness Coach** - Learn how to practice mindfulness to reduce stress and improve emotional balance.
<https://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach>

- **MHA for Veterans** - Allows you to take a variety of mental health assessments from the comfort and convenience of home. You can complete assessments assigned by your provider and receive scores and feedback in real time on a smartphone, tablet, or computer.

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/mha-veterans>

- **Stay Quit Coach** – designed to help anyone who would like to quit or reduce use of cigarettes, electronic nicotine delivery systems, cigars and chewing tobacco.

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach>

- **VetChange** – for veterans and service members who are concerned about their drinking and how it relates to posttraumatic stress, and for all people who are interested in developing healthier drinking behaviors.

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/vetchange>

- **Caring for Women Veterans** – Whether you are a VA or non-VA care team member, the Caring4WomenVeterans App has useful information to help you serve the unique physical and mental health needs of women Veterans.

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/caring-4-women-veterans>

- **Safety Plan** - Create a custom step-by-step action plan to keep yourself safe when experiencing thoughts about suicide or self-harm.

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/safety-plan>

- **Pain Coach** – Pain Coach is an interactive app that was created for anyone who experiences chronic pain or has any pain that disrupts their life. The app uses cutting edge, evidence-informed strategies to help people manage chronic pain.

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/pain-coach>

- **Insomnia Coach** - The Insomnia Coach app was created for everyone, including Veterans and Service members, to help manage insomnia. The app is based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I).

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/insomnia-coach>