

A black and white photograph of a young woman with long dark hair, laughing heartily. She is wearing a dark zip-up hoodie. The background is blurred, showing other people in a social setting. The photo is framed by a dark blue border.

Building your own resilience, health and wellbeing



Welcome to this practical guide to building your own resilience, health and wellbeing.

This booklet is for anyone working in adult social care. It explains what resilience is and how you can build your own resilience.

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1. What is resilience and why does it matter?

What do we mean by resilience?

Simply put, resilience is the ability to cope under pressure and recover from difficulties. A person who has good resilience copes well under pressure and can bounce back more quickly than someone whose resilience is less developed.

What does resilience look like?

Behaviours associated with resilience include:

- understanding and valuing the meaning of what you do
- greeting new situations, people and demands with a positive attitude
- doing what you can to get on with other people
- taking a problem solving approach to difficulty
- keeping a sense of perspective (and humour) when things go wrong
- being flexible and willing to adapt to change
- drawing on a range of strategies to cope with pressure
- recognising your thoughts and emotions, and managing them
- asking for help when you need it
- being willing to persevere when the going gets tough
- recognising and respecting your own limits, including what you can control and what you can't.

What makes a person resilient?

A resilient person

...has a sense of purpose and direction

...is self-aware

...takes a positive outlook on things

...can recognise when pressure is causing a problem

...has confidence in their own abilities

...has strategies to cope with in-the-moment pressure

...makes connections to other people

...has strategies to cope with long term pressure

... grows and develops



Where does resilience come from?

The way we behave is shaped by a range of factors including personality and past experience, as well as current circumstances and the people around us. All of these things influence a person's resilience.

Are some people naturally more resilient than others?

Everybody has resilience, but some people may have qualities that make them more resilient than others.

Why does resilience matter?

Being resilient will help you to manage stressful situations, protect you from mental ill-health and improve your health and wellbeing. At work, this ensures that you can continue to do your job well, and deliver high quality care and support. It can also support you in your personal life.

Resilient people benefit from:

- better job satisfaction
- personal development, including:
 - greater self-awareness and understanding of others, leading to better personal and working relationships
 - good self-management skills, such as the ability to set limits and better coping skills
- enhanced physical and psychological wellbeing
- better decision making skills - stress impairs our thinking process which can undermine our professional judgement, often just when it's needed the most.

Protection against stress

Stress is a significant cause of mental and physical ill-health. Work-related stress is a particular issue in social care. Yes, care work is rewarding - we make a positive difference to people's lives - but it's also inherently stressful.

It's not possible to take the stress out of care work, which makes it all the more important to do what you can to become more resilient.

The impact of stress on quality of care and support

The daily stressfulness of care work can contribute to:

- errors and misjudgements
- low morale
- sickness absence
- burnout
- staff turnover in the sector.








All of these undermine high quality care and support.

Task: How resilient are you?

Consider each of the questions below, then mark where you sit on the line between 'not much' and 'a lot'.

Afterwards, ask people who know you well if they agree.

If you think about yourself at work and outside work, is there any difference in where you are on the lines?

| To what extent are you: | Not muchA lot |
|---|---|
| in touch with your thoughts and feelings? |  |
| able to live with an unresolved problem? |  |
| positive and optimistic about life? |  |
| able to think accurately about things? |  |
| sensitive to how people around you are feeling? |  |
| confident of solving problems? |  |
| willing to embrace the new in order to grow? |  |

2. Recognising and coping with pressure and stress

What is pressure and when is it a problem?

Pressure means too much of something is pushing on something else. It can be in-the-moment or long term. Too much of either kind is harmful, both physically and psychologically.

In-the-moment pressure can arise from everyday situations such as being late to work, being short staffed or facing last minute demands.

Too much in-the-moment pressure makes people misread situations and react inappropriately, which can have consequences that last well beyond the moment. Repeated often enough, in-the-moment pressure also becomes a health risk.

Long term pressure builds up over time and could be affected by both home and work issues. It poses a much more serious health risk, as well as undermining people's judgement and behaviour.

Part of coping with pressure is recognising when it starts to become a problem. That means being:

- aware of how you're feeling
- alert to the signs and symptoms of too much pressure.

In-the-moment pressure

Recognising when in-the-moment pressure becomes a problem

People’s reactions vary, but here are some typical early signs.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Physical | Digestive problems, nausea, light headedness, dry mouth, heart pounding, rashes or flushing |
| Emotional | Immediate emotional judgement, short temper, feeling overwhelmed, paranoia |
| Behavioural | Procrastinating, neglecting responsibilities, nervous habits such as pacing, nail biting |
| Thinking | Inability to concentrate, seeing only the negative, constant worrying, self-blame, poor judgement |

Learning to recognise these early signs is one of the most important stages in developing resilience. It enables you to take action before the threat becomes overwhelming.

Task: What are your early signs?

Take a moment to think about what your early signs are. If it’s helpful, imagine you’re a person in a restaurant having their card rejected. What does that moment feel like?

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Strategies to cope with in-the-moment pressure

Strategies for coping with in-the-moment pressure focus on simple but highly effective techniques to relax, become more self-aware and regain control of your thoughts and feelings. Here are some examples that you might find useful.

Techniques to relax

- **Breathe**

Breathe in for a count of seven, and out for a count of 11.

- **Tighten, then relax**

Tighten all your muscles for a count of three, then let go.

- **Movement**

Such as a quick walk, going up and down stairs, or stretching. It doesn't have to be strenuous - any sort of movement will help you to release pressure.

- **Targeted muscle relaxation**

Muscle tension is a very normal reaction to pressure and can contribute to so-called 'stress headaches'.

Your stomach, shoulders, neck and jaw are all other places where you might store tension. Notice where your body feels tight and consciously relax the muscles. Self-massage (e.g. pressing your fingertips into the muscles in the back of your neck or your shoulders) is good way to find and release muscle tension.

Techniques to manage your thoughts and emotions

■ Step out of the stressful situation

Literally walk away and give your attention to something else, even if only for a moment. It gives you a chance to calm down and regain control of your thoughts and emotions.

■ Talk to a colleague

Talking about your thoughts and feelings can help to release pressure. Putting things into words to another person gives you distance and helps you calm down. It can also give you a different perspective on the issue.

■ Notice what you're feeling

This is a mindfulness technique to help you manage emotion. Ask yourself, 'what am I actually feeling?' Identify the feeling (or feelings), such as anger, fear, or embarrassment. Don't judge yourself and don't fight your feelings. Just observe and accept them. Whatever they are, those are your feelings. Taking that step back, becoming aware of your feelings and accepting them puts you back in charge and lets you move on.

■ Break the cycle

When you have negative thoughts, deliberately turn your attention to something positive, such as a good memory, something good you're going to do or anything that makes you feel positive about yourself. This is a great distraction technique that takes you to a place that reaffirms the good things in your life.

■ **Problem solve**

When you find yourself worrying about something that's coming up or that seems overwhelming, stop and ask yourself, 'what do I actually need to do about this?' Mentally rehearse how you'll deal with the situation. Think it through logically. If you'll need help, think about who you can ask. This is a problem solving technique designed to put you back in charge.

■ **Stop worrying and think positive**

If you find yourself worrying about a problem, try talking to yourself in a calm and logical way. If you're given a challenging task at work, think of a time you have done something similar and tell yourself you can do it again. Instead of seeing the task as a negative, try and view it as a positive, for example 'this will be a great opportunity to move forward in my role' or to 'gain more experience'.

Techniques to become more self-aware

■ Use reflective discussion to support self awareness

Reflective discussion is simply thinking about, or reflecting on, what you do. Next time you experience in-the-moment pressure, think about:

- what you did
- what happened
- what would you do different next time.

■ Know when to seek help

Being resilient is not about being self-sufficient. Resilience is about thriving under pressure. Sourcing help when you need it, is a very resilient behaviour.

■ Mindfulness

The essence of mindfulness can be summed up in three words, 'be here now'.

Mindfulness involves paying full attention to your feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations in the present moment.

This means standing aside from any other thoughts, worries, upsets and plans that normally absorb and preoccupy our mind.

Being mindful enables you to disengage from your worries and upsets, to give you some distance from everyday stress, and regain perspective and a deeper sense of self.

Mindfulness training is about acquiring techniques to focus your attention in that way. You can start by reminding yourself to take more notice of your thoughts and feelings. Tai-chi, yoga and meditation are more formal ways of practicing mindfulness.

■ **Practice the techniques as a team**

The techniques described here are quick and straightforward, that you can do anywhere. Often the trick is simply having the presence of mind to use them when you're caught up in the pressure of the moment. Team learning helps to make them a shared resource - colleagues can prompt each other and offer a different perspective.

Long term pressure

Recognising when long term pressure becomes a problem

Exposure to too much pressure over an extended period can result in chronic stress, which can have a range of negative effects.

You might feel:

- tense, agitated, irritable, tearful, moody, helpless, anxious and/or depressed
- weary - physically and mentally
- apathetic and/or withdrawn
- distracted and/or unable to concentrate.

You may experience problems with:

- relaxation and/or sleep
- judgement and/or memory
- muscle tension, headaches, dizziness, nausea and/or stomach problems
- frequent colds and/or minor infections.

You might also:

- worry constantly, see only the negative and/or feel lonely and isolated
- eat too much or too little
- use caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and/or drugs to help you cope
- put things off.

Feelings are infectious and behaviour is contagious. Too much pressure on one person can affect those working around them or the team as a whole.

This can lead to:

- conflicts and unhappiness
- sickness absence
- poor performance
- complaints and grievances
- people quitting.



Task: How are you coping at the moment?

Develop your self-awareness with this widely used self-assessment test*.

| At work in the last month, how often you have felt... | Never | Almost never | Sometimes | Fairly often | Very often |
|--|-------|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| Upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Unable to control important things in your job? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Nervous and 'stressed'? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Unsure about your ability to handle problems in your job? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Things are not going your way? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| You can't cope with all the things that you have to do? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Unable to control irritations in your job? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| That you're not on top of things? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Angry because of things that are outside your control? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Difficulties are piling up so high that you can't overcome them? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Add up your scores in each column | | | | | |
| Now add all your scores together for an overall score | | | | | |

Add up your score

- 0-10** You feel able to cope with pressure at work – you may be practising resilient behaviours already.
- 11-14** You're coping with pressure at work most, but not all, of the time – start developing your resilience now.
- 15-18** You're only coping with pressure at work some of the time – this may be affecting your judgement, behaviour and relationships at work; over time, feeling like this may start to affect your health.
- 19+** You feel overwhelmed by pressure at work – feeling like this will affect your judgement, behaviour and relationships at work, and is likely to damage your health. If you're worried about your health, see a Doctor. Please note this questionnaire is not a professional diagnosis.

*Adapted from the Perceived Stress Scale developed by Dr Sheldon Cohen, Carnegie Mellon University.

Strategies to cope with long term pressure

Strategies to cope with long term pressure aim to help you develop sustainable ways to manage work demands. Here are some examples you might find useful.

Look after your physical health

For example:

- eating a healthy diet
- not smoking
- taking regular exercise
- getting enough sleep.

They help to protect your body from the effects of stress, and maintain emotional balance and optimism.

Look after your mental health

For example:

- connecting with other people
- physical activity
- doing something new
- taking an interest in your surroundings
- doing things for other people.

These things build your confidence and help you to flourish in the world in a positive way.

Task: Do you know how to look after yourself?

Can you answer the following questions about yourself?

- What foods should you eat to ensure you get an adequate supply of energy throughout the day?
- How many hours of sleep do you personally need to feel rested? How often in a week do you sleep that number of hours?
- How much exercise should you be taking in a week? How often do you take it?
- Identify three realistic changes you could make to improve your lifestyle.

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Get the right work-life balance

Life outside work has its own pressures, which can lead to conflicts between your roles at and outside of work.

Establishing a boundary between work and home is key to establishing a sustainable work-life balance, and helps you manage role conflicts. What constitutes a good work-life balance is individual to you and changes over time, but it should ensure you have space to unwind properly, both physically and mentally.

Try to dedicate some time every day to an activity that gives a you time to yourself.

Task: Write down some activities that you enjoy and/or have been meaning to do. Make an effort to do them in the next month.

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.....

.....

Here are some tips to help you manage your work-life balance.

■ Know and stick to your limits

Care work is just as emotionally rewarding as it is demanding. The rewards come from helping people which makes you feel important, valued and good. That makes it hard to say 'no' and all too easy to say 'yes' when you're asked to do something. To manage long term pressure you have to recognise and respect the limits of your time and energy.

■ **Set boundaries**

Boundaries between work and home help you to protect your work-life balance.

In theory, boundaries at work are clearly defined by:

- job descriptions
- policies
- procedures.

In practice, the unpredictability of work makes them fuzzy, for example:

- a colleague has to go home early and asks you to cover
- a client needs help so you stay on after regular hours
- emails arrive after work hours.

Keep reminding yourself and others exactly where your boundaries are. Next time you're asked to do something beyond your boundaries, you could say: "I'd really like to help, but I can't swap shifts this weekend" or "It would be great to go out for a drink with you all, but I can't tonight."

■ **Assertive communication**

Being assertive means that you express yourself and stand up for your point of view, whilst also respecting the rights and beliefs of others. Here are some tips for assertive communication.

- Use 'I' statements, for example "I disagree" rather than "you're wrong."
- Practice saying no! Be direct and if an explanation is needed, keep it brief.
- Rehearse what you want to say.
- Use assertive body language. Keep your body upright, lean slightly forward, keep eye contact, keep a neutral facial expression and don't use gestures such as crossing your arms.

■ **Time management**

Effective time management helps you maintain boundaries and can extend the limits of your time and energy, which makes it easier to deal with the unpredictability and uncertainty of work. Here are some tips for effective time management.

- Plan! Write a list of everything you have to do.
- From this list, prioritise the tasks by importance and urgency.
- If you work in an office, block time out in your calendar to complete tasks.
- Have a simple routine for your day, but allow for unexpected issues.

Task: What are your limits?

Use this exercise to become more aware of your limits. If possible, do the exercise with a colleague. Observe yourself over the course of a week. Notice when you feel pushed beyond your limits. At the end of each day, reflect on what happened.

Think through:

- the situation – what happened, what led up to it, who else was involved and how did you feel at the time
- how it affected you – what buttons it pushed, the thoughts that went through your head, the feelings you experienced and how you reacted physically
- the demand – what was actually being asked of you
- how you responded – what options you felt you had at that moment, how you chose to respond and what prompted you to respond that way
- what the result was – for you and for others
- what other ways you could have responded
- what you can learn from the experience about your limits and how to respect them.

Jot down your answers in bullet form. At the end of the week, get together with a colleague or friend and explain to each other what you've learned about recognising and respecting your limits.

Support from others

Research has found that support networks offer important protection against stress. Building networks of support is a resilient behaviour.

Some types of support are quite structured, such as supervision and appraisal meetings at work. Others are much less formal, such as social networks of colleagues and friends.

They help you to manage pressure in two ways. On a practical level, they're a problem solving resource. On a more personal level, they provide reassurance and make work feel safer.

Bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment can be significant sources of workplace stress and will undermine efforts to build resilience.

Forms of bullying include:

- excluding people
- belittling them
- gossiping about them
- humiliating them
- giving them unachievable or meaningless tasks
- undervaluing them.

If you experience or witness bullying or harassment, report it. There are well established ways of dealing with it.

**Feeling stressed for
a long time can take
its toll.**

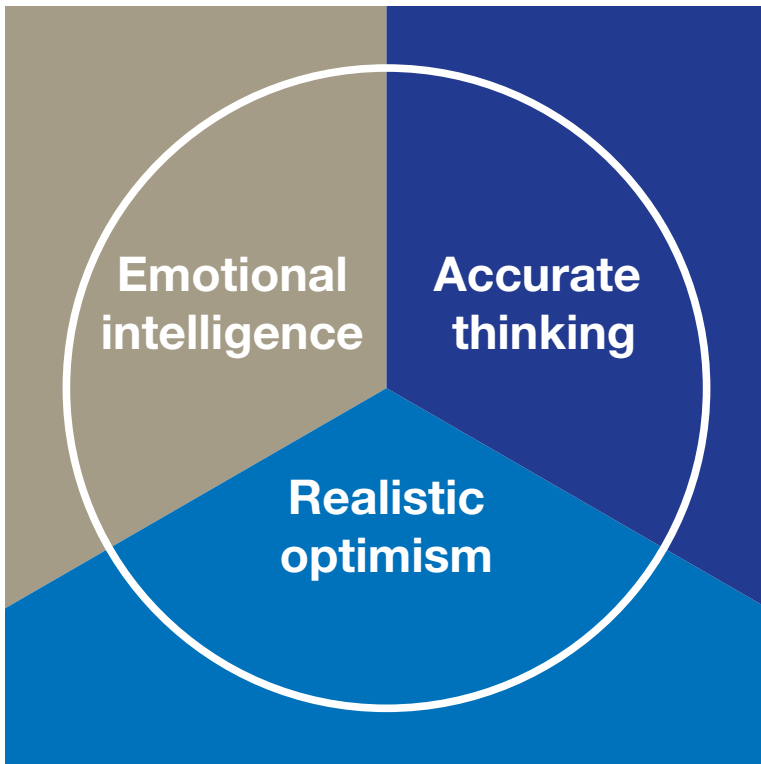
**Do something about
it now!**



3. Building your own resilience, health and wellbeing

Everybody can develop their personal resilience.

There are lots of things that you can do to develop your resilience. We've grouped them under these three headings.



Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage your own emotions, understand what they're telling you and respond thoughtfully to other people's emotions.

It requires:

- **self-awareness** – the ability to identify your feelings
- **self-management skills** – the ability to control your feelings
- **empathy** – sensitivity to other people's emotions
- **interpersonal skills** – the ability to connect with other people and sustain constructive relationships.

There's lots of advice and information about emotional intelligence and how to develop it, on the internet. In the end, it boils down to noticing and reflecting on your own and other people's reactions and responses to things. Here are some tips to help.

Tips for developing your emotional intelligence

- Notice the clues (physical, emotional, thinking or behavioural) that suggest you're finding it difficult to cope, and use a technique (such as 7/11 breathing) to help you manage it.
- Practice identifying your feelings and emotions. Ask yourself what it is you're actually feeling. If possible take a few moments to watch the emotion without trying to change it.
- Notice how the people around you affect your feelings.

- Pause for thought before forming a judgement or reaching a decision, particularly when you feel pressured.
- When faced with a problem, look at it from as many different perspectives as possible. What factors are involved? Is it a problem that can be solved, or not? Are you spending too long worrying about it. If it is possible to solve, then how? Who can help you?
- Make a point of asking yourself what the people around you are feeling and why. What might the situation look like from their perspective?
- When listening to someone, give them your full attention. Try not to interrupt. When they've finished, summarise what you've understood back to them to check your understanding - and to show them you want to understand them.
- When helping people to solve problems, ask them questions to help them arrive at their own solution, rather than coming up with your own solution for them. You could ask simple, sympathetic questions like 'have you had to deal with anything like this before?', 'what did you do?' or 'who might be able to help you'?
- When something doesn't work out as planned remember FAIL – it stands for 'First Attempt In Learning'. If we got everything right first time around, there wouldn't be much learning involved. Reflect on what you can learn from the experience.

Accurate thinking

Accurate thinking means being objective and basing your understanding on facts rather than emotions.

How you think about something helps to determine how you feel about it and what you choose to do about it. That makes it essential to think as accurately as you can, particularly when dealing with any sort of problem.

To think accurately you should:

1. separate facts from information
2. separate facts into two groups: relevant and irrelevant, or important and unimportant.

Try and focus your thoughts on the facts that are important.

Inaccurate thinking

Have you ever watched a friend jumping to a false conclusion, worrying about something that's unlikely to happen or reading far too much into someone's chance remark? They get so caught up in the thing, they lose all perspective. This is 'inaccurate thinking', and there are different ways we think like this, including:

- Filtering out the positive to focus on the negative. For example, ignoring three compliments to focus on one minor criticism.
- Personalising - making every problem about you. For example, if something goes wrong at work and you immediately assume people will blame you.
- Awfulising and catastrophising. For example, automatically assuming that every small problem will turn into a major disaster.

- **Polarising.** For example, seeing everything as either good or bad or right or wrong, with no middle ground.

Task: Develop your ability to think accurately by observing your own thinking patterns and questioning your conclusions.

Imagine you're walking down the road and you spot a colleague from work walking on the other side of the road. You smile and call out to your colleague, but they ignore you and turn the corner.

What thoughts go through your head? Are they more like pattern A or B?

| Pattern A thoughts: automatic negative thoughts | Pattern B thoughts: other interpretations of what happened |
|--|---|
| She doesn't like me | They just didn't see me |
| I've done something wrong | They had something on their mind |
| | They need glasses |

Pattern A thoughts belong to a category called automatic negative thoughts.

Pattern B thoughts are consistent with balanced conclusions and are a good example of accurate thinking.

Think about other scenarios and write down the automatic negative thoughts, and come up with more positive interpretations.

| Scenario: | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Automatic negative thoughts | Other interpretations of what happened |
| | |

Realistic optimism

Realistic optimism means seeing things as they are, accurately, then making the best of them to maintain a positive outlook whilst being aware of the difficulties that exist.

People who are optimistic tend to be happier and more able to cope when times get tough.

However, it's also possible to be unrealistically positive if you pretend things are fine when they aren't.

Consider this idea: The things we can change, we should. The things we can't change, we must accept.

Realistic optimism is not about unrealistic wishful thinking and it's certainly not about ignoring problems.

Realistic optimism is about:

- engaging with life positively and constructively
- taking personal responsibility for your choices
- taking a problem solving approach to difficulty
- looking for solutions.

Tips to be a realistic optimist

■ Reframing

Reframing is a way of viewing events and experiences in a more positive way. It doesn't change the situation, but it can help you look at it from a different perspective, which can change your understanding.

You can feel different ways at the same time about a situation, of course. The important thing is to understand things from as many perspectives as possible. That helps you draw balanced conclusions.

Task: Reframing negative thoughts

Over the next week, write down any negative thoughts you have at work. At the end of the week, revisit them and think how you might reframe them in a positive light.

| Thought: | Reframe: | Balanced conclusion: |
|--|--|---|
| Example: I've worked here so long now, how boring is that!? | I'm one of the most experienced people here, how great is that!? | On balance, I get a real satisfaction from being here |
| | | |
| | | |

■ **Making the best of a difficult situation**

A difficult situation presents you with two basic options and then a choice.

■ **Develop optimism**

Emotional intelligence and accurate thinking both help to develop realistic optimism.

At its heart, however, optimism comes from a feeling that:

- what you're doing is worth it
- you have the skills that you need
- you can deal with the problems and difficulties you're going to encounter.

The best way to develop those feelings is to:

- understand your role and its value – that means talking about what you do with colleagues and clients
- build networks of mutual support
- take every opportunity to learn and develop.

Reminder of key learning points

You behave resiliently when you:

- manage your own thoughts and feelings
- assess a problem before you try to resolve it
- are realistically optimistic
- think accurately about things
- are sensitive to other people's emotions
- are confident in your own ability to solve problems
- are willing to embrace the new in order to grow.

Personal resilience in a nutshell

- Personal resilience is about self-awareness, coping strategies, networks of support and being positive - these are all things that can be developed.
- Personal resilience is underpinned by the ability to manage in-the-moment and long term pressure.
- Managing pressure begins with recognising when pressure is becoming excessive.
- Too much in-the-moment pressure leads people to misread situations and react inappropriately; repeated often enough, in-the-moment pressure can become a health risk.
- Simple techniques exist to relax, become self-aware and regain control of thoughts and feelings.
- Exposure to excessive long-term pressure results in chronic stress and can produce many negative physical, psychological and behavioural effects.

- Key strategies for managing long-term pressure include addressing the sources of pressure, recognising unhelpful thinking, achieving a good work-life balance, respect for personal coping limits, boundary-setting, assertive communication, time-management and building networks of support.
- Focus personal development on emotional intelligence, accurate thinking and realistic optimism to become more resilient.
- Optimism is linked to feeling that what you're doing is worth it, you have the skills you need to do it and are able to deal with difficulty.

Where can I find out more about resilience?

Investigating resilience online

Resilience is an area where practice and research are developing quickly. Internet searches offer an easy way of keeping up to date with trends and approaches. Put any of the questions below into your search engine for some interesting results.

- What is resilience?
- Resilience and stress at work
- What are resilient behaviours/attitudes/skills?
- How can I become more resilient?
- How can I help others become resilient?
- Resilience training UK



Resources from Skills for Care



Greater resilience, better care

This guide is for managers in adult social care services to help them develop the resilience of their staff.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resilience



Learn more about stress at work

This booklet explains what good and bad stress is and how you can use stress to your advantage.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resilience



Core skills

We've developed resources to help you develop your English, number, digital and employability skills, including resilience.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskills



Common core principles to support mental health

This guide provides a basis for a general understanding of promoting good mental health and recognising signs of poor mental health.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/mentalhealth



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