Resilience and Wellbeing: Building Skills to Thrive

13 August 2020
Zoom Q&A Function

Please use the Q&A function on zoom if you have any questions for our presenters.
Our Panelists:

Dr Jane Harte
Associate Dean Students
College of Medicine & Dentistry
James Cook University

Dr Anna Kokavec
Academic Lead Student Support
College of Medicine & Dentistry
James Cook University
PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

• Challenges we are facing
• Trauma pandemic?
  • Post pandemic stress
  • Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  • PTSD Risk factors
• What is resilience?
  • Where does resilience come from?
  • Responding positively to change
  • Can resilience be learned?
• Resilience toolkit
  • Focusing on balance
  • Achieving balance
  • Building a resilient community
CHALLENGES WE ARE FACING

• CHANGE: Stress of living in an unpredictable world.

• TECHNOLOGY: Stress of learning to do things a different way using different tools.

• ISOLATION: Stress of being alone and not able to meet face-to-face with family, friends, work colleagues.

• FEAR: Invisible enemy that has the potential to cause death.
REFLECT

Let’s pause and reflect on our experiences during the last few months.

• Were there any positives?
• Any challenges?
  • How did you deal with the challenges?
  • As time went by do you think the strategies you adopted helped?
• Feel free to share your thoughts in the Q&A area.
TRAUMA PANDEMIC?

- The importance of “flattening the curve” to support our medical system has understandably been the focus in the media.
- However, mental health experts are warning the stress we experienced during lockdown could turn into a pandemic of another kind.
  - A trauma pandemic that could potentially stay with us for a long time.
  - Symptoms can emerge days, weeks, months or even years after the threat of COVID-19 has passed.
- Victorians have had a double dose of lockdown, making them particularly vulnerable.
POST PANDEMIC STRESS

• Social, mental, and cultural impact of going through a global pandemic can reportedly result in some developing acute stress disorder (ASD) and in extreme cases post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
• PTSD is reportedly prevalent in long-term survivors of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), an epidemic that started in China in 2002 (Mak et al., 2010).
  • Frontline hospital workers assisting with the COVID-19 pandemic are at risk of developing PTSD due to the daily risks to their life.
POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

Table 1. Diagnostic Symptoms of PTSD\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Intrusion              | 1 or more| • Distressing memories  
                         |                                                     | • Distressing dreams  
                         |                                                     | • Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks)  
                         |                                                     | • Psychological distress upon exposure to internal or external cues  
                         |                                                     | • Marked physiological reactions to internal or external cues |
| Avoidance              | 1 or both| • Avoidance of distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about the trauma  
                         |                                                     | • Avoidance of external reminders that arouse distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about the trauma |
| Cognitions/mood        | 2 or more| • Inability to remember an important aspect of the trauma  
                         |                                                     | • Negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others, or the world  
                         |                                                     | • Distorted thoughts about the trauma that lead to blaming oneself or others  
                         |                                                     | • Persistent negative or emotional state  
                         |                                                     | • Diminished interest or participation in activities  
                         |                                                     | • Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others  
                         |                                                     | • Persistent inability to experience positive emotions |
| Arousal/reactivity     | 2 or more| • Irritable behavior and angry outbursts  
                         |                                                     | • Reckless or self-destructive behavior  
                         |                                                     | • Hypervigilance  
                         |                                                     | • Exaggerated startle reflex  
                         |                                                     | • Problems with concentration  
                         |                                                     | • Sleep disturbance |
PTSD can occur following deliberate acts of violence against the person, severe accidents, natural disasters, or military action (e.g. prisoner of war).

- A pandemic that creates fear such as COVID-19 falls into the natural disaster category.
  - COVID-19 is a ‘sneaky’ virus. Many do not know they have it (i.e. asymptomatic) but are still highly infectious.
  - Fear and suspicion every time you go out of the house. Perceive your life as being at risk if someone coughs, blows their nose, or sneezes.
  - Subconsciously on the look out for some invisible enemy.

POST PANDEMIC STRESS
Is everyone at equal risk of developing PTSD?

• Interestingly, not everyone who experiences a traumatic event develops ASD or PTSD.
  • Some seem to be more resilient than others.
  • A person's risk of developing PTSD can be influenced by a range of factors.
# PTSD RISK FACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Examples of Risk Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pretrauma  | • History of depression or anxiety  
• Previous trauma exposure  
• Childhood adversity  
• Lower intelligence or education |
| Peritrauma | • Severe trauma  
• Interpersonal trauma  
• High perceived threat to life of self and/or others  
• Dissociation (distorted awareness; unreal) |
| Posttrauma | • Negative cognitions about self and world  
• Poor coping strategies  
• Ongoing life stress  
• Lack of social support |
WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

• Comes from the Latin word ‘resile’, which means “to spring”.
• Defined simply, resilience is a person’s ability to adapt to changing circumstances and ‘bounce’ back even stronger from stress, adversity or challenges.
• Resilience is our ability to cope – it’s about learning, growing and developing into the most emotionally robust person we can be.
WHERE DOES RESILIENCE COME FROM?

• Some people, when they encounter stress, manage to survive, grow stronger, and even thrive.
• Others fall apart, become scared, and overwhelmed.
  • Why do you think some people deal with stress better than others?
WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT

Things you find easy to deal with may present a challenge to someone else.

- How we cope with adversity is a learned behaviour.
- Everyone copes differently because not everyone has had the same experiences.
- Important to show compassion for those who are not like you.
  - Offer support rather than judgement.
  - Everyone is doing the best they can.
RESPONDING POSITIVELY TO CHANGE

Change is everywhere and it is impossible to avoid change.

• How you respond to change will determine how you feel.
• Important to make change your friend.
  • **Characteristics of a resilient individual:** flexible, adaptive, learns from experience, optimistic, proactive, and knows when to seek support.
  • **Characteristics of a resilient team:** based on mutual trust, social norms, participation and social networks. Has the resources to adapt positively to change.
    • Both individual and organizational resilience is an important determinant of how you will respond to the challenge of returning to work.
CAN RESILIENCE BE LEARNED?

YES, resilience *can* be learned!

- Building resilience involves developing ‘positive’ **behaviours** that we can draw on during stressful times.
  - We could also say we are building *positive coping strategies*!
- When things in your life become stressful, having a well stocked resilience toolkit, full of positive coping strategies, is key to moving forward, staying peaceful and calm.
THE RESILIENCE TOOLKIT

- Stress Management
- Positive Perceptions
- Balanced Emotions
- Taking Back Control
- Staying Connected
- Self-Care
MANAGING STRESS

Resilient people know how to identify and manage stress effectively.

- When confronted by a stressor, resilient people adopt a coping strategy that allows them to successfully get through the challenge and remain peaceful in the long-term.
COPING STRATEGIES

- Coping is a learned behaviour and the coping strategy you adopt when confronted by a stressor is largely based on what worked for you in the past.
- Coping strategies can be grouped into two broad categories:
  - **Negative strategies**: Getting through the acute challenge only.
  - **Positive strategies**: Getting through the acute challenge and staying peaceful down the track.
COPING STRATEGIES

NEGATIVE
- Alcohol
- Drugs
- Gambling/Gaming
- Bingeing/Purging
- Shopping
- Dwelling/Brooding
- Avoiding
- Blaming/Venting/Gossiping
- Fighting/intimidation

POSITIVE
- Seek support
- Mindfulness/Meditation
- Relaxation/PMR
- Visualization, Thought Stopping, Cognitive Reframing
- Tapping (EFT)
- Physical Activity
- Music/Dancing/Art
- Humour/laughter
There are many different ways of coping with the same stressor.

The coping strategy you adopt is based on what worked for you in the past.

- No such thing as a good strategy or a bad strategy.
- Sometimes the road is so rocky, it is just about getting through the challenge.
- What works for you may not work for another. We have all had our own set of unique experiences?
- Replace judgment with empathy and compassion.

DOING THE BEST I CAN
POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS

Shift your thinking from black and white to color.

• Example: Two shoe salesmen went to Fiji in the 1800s to assess opportunities and each sent their employer a telegram:
  • Telegram 1: “Situation hopeless. They don’t wear shoes!”.
  • Telegram 2: “Glorious opportunity! They need shoes!”.
We live in a world of opposites (e.g. up/down, left/right, hot/cold, yes/no, right/wrong, good/bad etc.)

- **Pessimist**: looks for the negative in every situation.
- **Optimist**: looks for the silver lining in every situation

Every construct has an exact opposite.

- Not just black and white exists, every shade of grey in between.
- Time to **flip the script** and start focusing more on the good things happening in your life.
- Is your glass half empty or half full?
Keeping a daily gratitude journal can help keep the focus on the positive.

- What are 3 good things that happened to you today?
  - Write them down (in your journal).
  - Read back what you wrote and say aloud with conviction “I am grateful to have [positive] in my life”.
- Over time, this can help re-train your brain to develop more positive thinking habits.
  - Do this daily [yourself]
  - Do this daily with others [family, partner]
  - Encourage others to also do it [friends]
What you think influences how you feel so it is important to learn how to take control of your thoughts.

- If you are feeling sad and want to be happy pay attention to the quality of your thoughts.
- Feeling better is as simple as changing a thought from negative to positive.
ACTIVITY: SEEING IS BELIEVING

• Close your eyes and with your mind’s eye see if you can ‘see’ yourself in the middle of a stressful event.

• Now change the image and ‘see’ yourself at a very happy event laughing and having lots of fun.
  • Pay attention to what your body is doing during the activity.
  • How does seeing the two images make you feel?
  • Any difference?
COMBATING NEGATIVE THINKING

When mood is low it is not unusual to repeatedly experience negative thoughts, which are often involuntary.

• **Cognitive reframing**: Look for the positives in every situation.
  
  • **Negative thought**: The money will not be going into my account for at least 10 days.
  
  • **Reframed thought**: The money will be in my account before my next bill is due.
THOUGHT STOPPING

Stop negative thinking in its tracks.

• When you experience repeated negative or distorted thoughts a simple way of interrupting the flow of thoughts is:
  • Imagine that you are holding a big red stop sign.
  • Loudly say “stop”
  • Reframe the negative thought into something more positive.
  • Repeat several times if necessary.
EMOTION FREEDOM TECHNIQUE (EFT)

- EFT is a relatively easy to learn and gentle ‘tapping’ technique.
  - Combines elements of exposure and cognitive therapies with acupressure for the treatment of psychological distress.

- Can be used anywhere and anytime anxiety hits.
  - A systematic review, recently published in the Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, confirmed that EFT can promote a significant reduction in anxiety (Clond, 2016).
  - YouTube link for how to do the tapping sequence: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAclBdj20ZU
CIRCLE OF CONTROL

- **Circle of Control**: all the problems that concern me that I can do something about.
  - Resilient people focus on what is in their circle of control
- **Circle of Influence**: problems I have some influence over.
- **Circle of Concern**: Difficulties and problems I can experience in all aspects of my life. For example health, work, personal relationships.
- **No Concern**: problems (usually belonging to others) that is not my concern.

Source: Momentum, Michael McQueen
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND MOVING FORWARD

1. Focus on what you CAN do.
   • There are two ways of approaching your problem
     • **Problem-focused**: Is there anything you can do to change the problem?
     • **Emotion-focused**: Is there anything you can do to change your response to the problem?

2. Take responsibility for the situation. What are your options?
   • Weigh up each choice. Choose the best option that suits you.
   • Sometimes none of the options are ones we want to take.
   • Choosing something is better than nothing.

3. Break large problems down into smaller parts.
   • Make a list of what you can do in order of priority.
   • Start at the top of the list and tick things off as you go.
   • Completing something is better than completing nothing.
   • If you are having difficulty starting at the top, choose something easy even if it is not the first thing on the list.
STAYING CONNECTED

• Try to talk to another person at least once every day.
• Be selective about who you connect with. Positive? Negative?
• Don’t just make it about work.
• Use communication technology that lets you see a person’s face (e.g. Zoom, Skype, FaceTime).
• Arrange online social events to stay connected with friends
  • Example: www.Boardgamearena.com
  • Couple with zoom for a real time experience.
SELF-CARE

When it comes to self-care resilient people know the importance of

- being proactive about self-care;
- making self-care a priority;
- planning ahead to ensure there is enough time for self-care.
GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

Getting the balance right means focusing attention on the

- Physical
- Emotional and
- Social aspect of health and wellbeing

- Important to also include the ‘Self’ when focusing on balance and self-care.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
<th>SOCIAL</th>
<th>PSYCHOLOGICAL</th>
<th>SELF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Am I taking care of my</td>
<td>Who am I spending my</td>
<td>What is my mind doing?</td>
<td>What do I see when I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>body?</td>
<td>time with?</td>
<td></td>
<td>look in the mirror?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fuel: What am I eating?</td>
<td>• Relationship: Do my</td>
<td>• Mood: How do I feel?</td>
<td>• Self worth: Do I love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hydration: What am I</td>
<td>friends lift me up or</td>
<td>What am I scared of?</td>
<td>and accept myself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drinking?</td>
<td>drag me down?</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-esteem: Do I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Activity: When was</td>
<td>• Connectivity: Have I</td>
<td>• Cognition: What am I</td>
<td>appreciate myself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the last time I did any</td>
<td>talked to anyone</td>
<td>thinking? Are my</td>
<td>• Self-confidence: Do I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical activity?</td>
<td>today?</td>
<td>thoughts positive or</td>
<td>trust myself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nature: Have I been</td>
<td>• Communication: What</td>
<td>negative?</td>
<td>• Responsibility: Am I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside today?</td>
<td>did we talk about?</td>
<td></td>
<td>scared of saying ‘no’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do I rely too much on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the opinion of others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What do I need to be happy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FOCUSING ON BALANCE
## Achieving Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biology</th>
<th>Connectivity</th>
<th>Psychology</th>
<th>Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fuel</strong>: Varied diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables</td>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong>: I surround myself with positive people, those who respect and care for me.</td>
<td><strong>Mood</strong>: I use my tools to keep my emotions balanced.</td>
<td><strong>Self-worth</strong>: I accept all of me. What I think and feel matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hydration</strong>: Filtered water</td>
<td><strong>Connectivity</strong>: I connect with someone every day.</td>
<td><strong>Cognition</strong>: I use my tools to keep thoughts positive.</td>
<td><strong>Self-esteem</strong>: I am proud of myself and my achievements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Activity</strong>: What can you do? If sitting try to get up and move around for 5 min every hour</td>
<td><strong>Communication</strong>: I have a face-to-face conversation, even if it means using technology</td>
<td><strong>Expectations</strong>: I accept my humanness. My expectations of what I can and cannot do is realistic.</td>
<td><strong>Self-confidence</strong>: I am strong; I have everything I need to be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature</strong>: at least 30 min per day; On nice days an idea may be to eat your lunch outside.</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Flexibility</strong>: I go with the flow.</td>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong>: I am responsible for my choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mindfulness</strong>: What am I doing right NOW.</td>
<td><strong>Balance</strong>: I choose balance in all areas of my life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRACTICAL TOOLS AND TIPS

• Simple and practical tools and tips to help build resilience and promote balance.
  • Can be used every day.
  • Developed by health professionals.
  • Suitable for the entire family.
• Follow on Instagram @_myprogram_
  • New tools and tips uploaded every week.
It takes courage to speak up and admit that things are getting too much.
  • The rest of my friends/team are depending on me, I don’t want to let them down.
  • Everyone else seems to be coping. I don’t want to seem weak, especially not when I am with my friends/colleagues.

Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, depressed, or exhausted and not dealing with the situation and just hoping it will go away, is a choice that is always available (Negative coping).

A better choice is to tell someone you are struggling and ask for help (Positive coping).
  • GP? Counsellor? Supervisor? Teacher?
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

• Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a free counselling service paid for by your employer.

• Anything between 3-12* counselling sessions can be accessed free of charge to assist with personal or work-related issues.

• Completely confidential service, separate to your employment.

• In Australia there are a number of companies who are registered as EAP providers.
  
  • JCU staff can contact LifeWorks: 1800 604 640
  
  • Others, your HR manager can provide contact details.
BUILDING A RESILIENT COMMUNITY

Moving forward, what can we do to make our community more resilient?

- Make safety a priority.
  - Wash our hands.
  - Adhere to social distancing.
- Make an effort to engage positively with others at all times.
  - Add compassion and empathy into the mix.
- Look out for each other.
  - If you see someone struggling don’t be afraid to ask “RUOK”.
REFERENCES


Q & A
Thank You for Joining our JCU Webinar Series!

For all upcoming and previous webinars, please visit our website: www.jcu.edu.au/webinars