

# How Building Resilience Helps Prevent Substance Use

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Building resilience can help improve your life and happiness as well as reduce and prevent substance use in youth and adults (Cohn et al., 2007; Griffin & Botvin, 2010; Rudzinski et al., 2017; Tebes et al., 2007). With all the research support for resilience, it is important to know what it is, how to strengthen it, and start practicing today! In this article we define resilience, review examples of resilience, discuss 5 ways you can build resilience, and provide information on how building resilience can prevent substance use.

### What is Resilience?

**Resilience** is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (a) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, (b) the availability and quality of social resources, and (c) specific [coping strategies](#). Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can

be cultivated and practiced. Also called psychological resilience.” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.). Simply put, resilience is the ability to recover from or to adjust to adversity, trauma, stress, or change. Some think of it as the ability to bounce back or show resolve or toughness during difficult circumstances. Everyone will experience one of these or a similar difficulty in their life. The ability to respond to these difficulties without greater harm is important because it allows us to overcome negative experiences, and it is an ability that can be learned.

### Examples of Resilience:

According to the US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC, n.d.) Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) can “make daily activities more challenging and impair parents' decision-making and ability to bond with their children. Parental risk for alcohol and SUD can be reduced with supportive programs that use informed decision-making and healthy behaviors. This can include creating safe and supportive communities and connecting families to resources that promote healthy behaviors. Head Start programs can also support families by promoting resilience, social and emotional wellness, positive parenting, mindfulness, and self-care.”

Tim Keady, Health & Wellness Faculty member, said “examples of resilience are shown daily in the clients we interact with from the Harm Reduction Groups we lead in 2 Cache Valley treatment centers. The attendees in group have experienced incarceration, homelessness, violence, and hopelessness (to name a few) due their SUD. But in the treatment setting their ability to positively look forward to life without the need to use their chosen substances is inspiring. When they describe how it feels to be with their families free of those substances that trapped them for so long, the joy is evident on their faces and in their body language. They have been resilient in the face of a SUD crisis that has taken the lives of hundreds across Utah, and thousands in the US. They have been the lucky ones.”

### “Resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary” (APA, 2020)

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), “resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary.” In other words, research suggests resilience is something that can be learned, developed, and enhanced with positive behaviors, thoughts, and actions (Saletnik, 2018). A common misconception is that resilient individuals will

never experience distress or adversity. On the contrary, experts suggest that an important factor in building personal resilience involves experiencing adverse events, trauma, or significant stressors (APA). Building personal resilience is “like building a muscle;” it takes time and effort. There are many strategies that can increase an individual’s capability to “bounce back” after difficult experiences (APA).

## How to Practice & Build the “Resilience Muscle”:

1. **Take care of your body** - building personal resilience doesn’t have to be complicated. Getting the recommended amount of sleep, drinking water, and taking care of your body are good first steps. When you feel good in your body it’s easier to be in the right mindset to deal with difficult things when they happen.
2. **Surround yourself in a community** – getting involved in your community, whether it be school, church, family, or work, allows you to create a sense of identity and belonging. A community will also allow confidence to grow and maintain a support system.
3. **Writing in a journal** - the American Psychological Association explains people who actively write and think through their thoughts and feelings are more equipped to deal with hardships with a growth mindset rather than a destructive mindset.
4. **Create and work towards goals** - allow yourself to work towards realistic goals that will better your life. If the bigger goals seem out of reach, set smaller stepping stone goals to help create achievement along the way.
5. **Handle stress in a healthy way** - stress is normal and is something everyone experiences, but stress becomes unhealthy when our coping mechanisms aren’t building us to become a better person. Rather than trying to mask or ignore stress, try working through stress by taking active breaks, practicing mindfulness, and asking for help.

## How does Resilience help with Substance use prevention:

A focus on individual abilities or strengths can help build resilience and reduce SUDs. With youth, resilience building works by increasing protective factors like self-care and coping skills, while reducing risk factors like early substance use or conflict (Griffin & Botvin, 2010; Tebes et al., 2007). While there is limited research on all the

ways that building resilience can help in recovery and with adults, the literature is promising (Rudzinski et al., 2017).

To learn more about SUD and prevention, join the August 31st International Overdose Awareness Day event. This global event aims to raise awareness that overdose death is preventable and to reduce stigma associated with drug-related deaths. It is important to know what to look for, how to respond, and how to prevent overdoses. To learn more, reduce stigma, make a difference, and get involved in the 2020 International Overdose Awareness Day, visit: [www.overdoseday.com/](http://www.overdoseday.com/)

## Conclusion:

Clearly the research supports strengthening resilience for many facets of life. This overview of what resilience is, how to strengthen it, and how to start practicing today will get you going in the right direction. For additional information and to learn more see some select resources below.

## Resilience, Substance Use, & Emotional Wellness Resources

### Resilience Resources:

- Resilient Utah: <https://www.resilient-utah.org/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/April-2020/Coronavirus-Building-Mental-Health-Resilience>
- The American Psychological Association (APA) Building Your Resilience: <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>
- International Overdose Awareness Day: [www.overdoseday.com/](http://www.overdoseday.com/)

### Substance Use Resources:

- The American Psychological Association (APA): <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/opioid-abuse.aspx>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): <http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Living-with-a-Mental-Health-Condition/Taking-Care-of-Your-Body/Drugs,-Alcohol-Smoking>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): <https://www.drugabuse.gov/>
- Stop The Opidemic: <https://www.opidemic.org/>

## Emotional Wellness:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255): <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- The American Psychological Association (APA) Health & Emotional Wellness: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/wellness/index.aspx>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Find Treatment: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- Get Healthy Utah: <http://gethealthyutah.org/mental-wellness/>

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