Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life



Workplace edition

# Plan for resilience

For leaders, employees and self-employed

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This resource isn’t intended as a medical or mental health intervention. If you’re currently experiencing challenges, please reach out for support. You could reach out to your health care professional, your workplace wellness or employee assistance program.

**Crisis lines in Canada:** If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide or in a mental health crisis, call or text **9-8-8**. To find mental health or community services in your area, call or text 2-1-1. If you're in immediate danger or need urgent medical support, call **9-1-1**.



# Developing personal resilience

This resource can help you move from merely surviving to actually thriving by helping you build resilience and plan for stressful situations. Developing a plan to get through potentially stressful situations can have a positive impact on both your personal and work life.

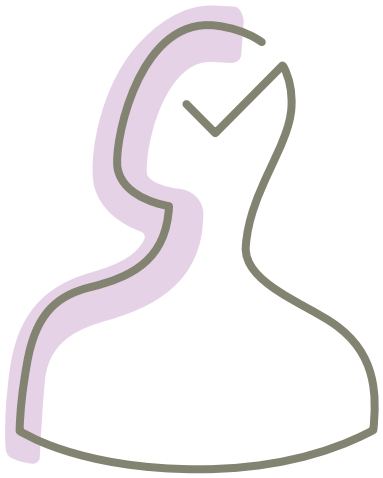
Understanding how other people deal with stress can also improve your ability to be objective about how their actions may impact you. If we recognize we all respond to stressors in our own way, we can also recognize what behaviours of another person might mean. Their behaviour may seem inappropriate or problematic, but it could reflect the person's struggle to deal with stress or adversity.

Having a high level of resilience doesn't mean you'll avoid stress. It means you'll be able to adapt to it and recover more effectively from it.

Many of us juggle personal, family, social, financial and work demands. While we try to manage, any of us could be blindsided by an unexpected situation. We could also become overwhelmed when too many stressors happen at once.

Stress is a fact of life. Stress isn't always bad or the result of a negative situation. In fact, stress can help motivate us to develop positive coping strategies or find effective solutions to problems. Stress can be a positive force in our lives but too much can have the opposite effect.

We don't always get to choose the situations we find ourselves in, but we usually get to choose how we respond in the long run. You can support your success and well-being. Recognize your automatic, immediate and unplanned responses to stress. Then, commit to building our own resilience.



## Resilience is…

**The capacity to adapt or recover in the face of adversity, including but not limited to:**

- Failure
- Trauma
- Tragedy
- Threats
- Harassment
- Loss
- Relationship or family problems
- Financial problems
- Health problems
- Workplace issues



## Resilience can take you…

| From surviving which may include: | To thriving which may include: |
|---|---|
| Being stressed | Recognizing your automatic responses to stress |
| Reacting in unhealthy ways to stressors | Choosing healthier responses |
| Denying or ignoring stressors | Recognizing and exploring your stressors |
| Isolation or one-sided relationships | Balancing your support network – those you help and those who help you |
| Doing what you've always done even if it's not working | Examining your options and making good decisions |
| Continually battling your personal weaknesses | Identifying and using your strengths |
| Resisting or feeling unable to make positive change | Committing to growing, learning and thriving |
| Waiting until a crisis to find help | Ensuring you're aware of potential resources |

### Overview

When you consider your **Automatic responses to stress**, you're more empowered to **Choose healthier strategies**. When you **Recognize and explore your stressors** you can more easily see how to best **Balance your support network** and **Examine your options** and **Make decisions**. By **Identifying and using your strengths** you're maximizing your ability to **Commit to thriving**. It's also important to **Be aware of potential resources**.

**Some of the strategies shared with you will include brainstorming options to address challenges by:**

- Taking action even when you feel overwhelmed by fear or worry
- Learning from your mistakes rather than being unfairly critical of yourself
- Building a network of support

Resilience may not ensure you avoid stressful situations, but it can help make it easier to get through them. You may be better able to anticipate and prepare for many types of situations. Your stressors and responses of en change from year to year, so we encourage you to revisit this regularly or when your circumstances change.



# Recognizing your automatic responses to stress

## Why this matters

For most of us, stress is a daily occurrence. Often, our responses to stress are automatic. This means we don't choose them or plan them. However, if we can identify some of our immediate responses to stress, we're more likely to recognize and address them before they create a major life or health concern. Most of us will have automatic physical responses and changes in our behaviours and emotions.

**Always eliminate the possibility that any of these responses may indicate an unrelated or underlying health issue that should be checked out with your doctor.** Once you know it's stress related only, you can use that information to help identify the source of stress earlier and make changes sooner.

**Understanding the automatic stress responses of others can be very important information for us, too.** When we recognize a stress response in others, we're less likely to take their behaviour personally. In recognizing that this is their defense mechanism to deal with their own stress, we're less likely to feel the need to defend ourselves. In fact, we may be able to help them deal with it. For example, you may have a friend who needs personal space, or they become agitated. Once you know that, you can see the agitation and step back to give them space or help them move to a better location.

## Instructions

Read each of the responses and potential impacts on the following pages. Check off your usual responses when you're experiencing stress and think about the responses you may have seen with others. It may be in the first moment of stress or after prolonged or chronic exposure.

The following categories include physical, emotional and behavioural responses. If you have a response that's not listed, please add it under the heading "Other".

### Behavioural responses

| Automatic behavioural responses may include: | Potential impacts from this response may include: |
|---|---|
| ☐ Using substances such as alcohol or drugs | Addiction, relationship problems |
| ☐ Using substances such as sugar or caffeine | An increase in stress, poor health |
| ☐ Making more mistakes | Risk to reputation, job loss, injury |
| ☐ Losing or forgetting things like keys, appointments or other things | Frustration, time lost, risk to reputation |
| ☐ Clumsiness like dropping things, tripping or bumping into things | Injury, damaging things |
| ☐ Being disorganized with tasks | Missing deadlines, poor quality work, wasted time |
| ☐ Focusing on tasks without being strategic | Wasting time, missing opportunities |
| ☐ Swearing or inappropriate gestures | Of ending others, risk to reputation |
| ☐ Hyper-scheduling or frantically making lists | Increasing stress |
| ☐ Avoiding social events or not being friendly with others | Damage to relationships, isolation, risk to reputation |
| ☐ Impatience with others | Damage to relationships, demotivating others |
| ☐ Falling asleep fully dressed | Lack of quality sleep, missing out on social interaction |
| ☐ Waking up worried | Increasing stress |

## Behavioural responses (continued)

| Automatic behavioural responses may include: | Potential impacts from this response may include: |
|---|---|
| ☐ Pushing through, despite impact on your well-being | Making mistakes, reducing productivity, increasing health risks |
| ☐ Unhealthy change in physical activity | Lower energy, weight gain or loss, health risks |
| ☐ Cleaning obsessively or leaving things a mess | Poor use of time, unable to find things when needed, build-up of germs or bacteria |
| ☐ Isolating yourself from others | Damage to relationships, lack of support system |
| ☐ Lashing out in anger | Risk to relationships, loss of respect, possibility of physical or emotional hurt |
| ☐ Losing motivation to do a good job | Job loss, loss of promotion, missed deadlines |
| ☐ Working harder, longer or faster | Risk of burnout, poor work-life balance, potential health problems |
| ☐ Making poor decisions | Damage to work or relationships |
| ☐ Becoming distracted – inef ective multitasking | Making mistakes, producing poor-quality work |
| ☐ Becoming narrowly focused or obsessed with task completion | Missing your breaks, not interacting with others |
| ☐ Becoming bossy or aggressive | Alienating yourself and others, creating too much pressure for perfection |
| ☐ No longer listening due to indif erence or lack of energy | Making mistakes, missing deadlines |
| ☐ Appetite changes | Health risks, weight gain or loss, lack of energy |
| ☐ Becoming impulsive | Making bad choices, creating bad habits, not making thoughtful choices |
| ☐ Avoidance through distraction | Choosing unhealthy activities to avoid dealing with the stressor |
| ☐ Other: | |
| ☐ Other: | |

## Physical responses

| Automatic physical responses may include: | Potential impacts from this response may include: |
|---|---|
| ☐ Hives | Distraction by the discomfort, feeling self-conscious about how it looks |
| ☐ Changes in sleep patterns – too much or too little | Inability to focus, more prone to accidents, impaired decision making |
| ☐ Blurred or impaired vision | Fear of more serious illness, inability to focus |
| ☐ Headaches or migraines | Can be disabling, increase irritability |
| ☐ Exhaustion | Becoming emotional, everything's more dificult |
| ☐ Cold sores | Becoming self-conscious or less social |
| ☐ Irritability, especially with those close to you | Damage to relationships, avoiding social situations |
| ☐ Flushed and red in the face | Risk from high blood pressure, embarrassment |
| ☐ Sweating and/or nausea | Feeling ill or self-conscious, avoiding situations |
| ☐ Tension in neck or shoulders | Irritability, pain, discomfort |
| ☐ Stomach or bowel problems | Feeling self-conscious, avoiding activities |
| ☐ Arthritis or auto-immune disease | Pain, inability to engage in activities |
| ☐ Shallow, dificult or rapid breathing (may happen all at once) | Anxiety, panic attacks |
| ☐ Clenching jaw or grinding teeth | Pain in jaw, damage to teeth |
| ☐ Lack of energy – even talking is an ef ort | Withdrawal, isolation, hopelessness |
| ☐ Other | |
| ☐ Other | |

## Emotional responses

| Automatic emotional responses may include: | Potential impacts from this response may include: |
|---|---|
| ☐ Being fearful or paranoid | Missing social or work opportunities, health risks |
| ☐ Overthinking | Increased stress, second guessing your decisions |
| ☐ Lacking self-awareness | Regret, poor choices, taking on too much responsibility |
| ☐ Crying for seemingly no reason | Embarrassment, becoming self-conscious, avoiding social situations |
| ☐ Losing objective perspective | Catastrophizing, feeling hopeless or overwhelmed |
| ☐ Being unable to make decisions | Wasting time, missing opportunities |
| ☐ Becoming unresponsive to others | Appearing rude or uncaring, isolation |
| ☐ Feeling like nothing really matters | Sense of hopelessness, depression, mental illnesses |
| ☐ Expressing anger or frustration | Of ending others, risk to reputation, violence |
| ☐ Having emotional outbursts | Embarrassment, stress |
| ☐ Being defensive or feeling the need to justify every action or decision | Fatigue, angering others, irrationality |
| ☐ Being distracted or lacking focus | Making mistakes, risk to job security or reputation, personal injury |
| ☐ Being unfairly critical of yourself | Headaches and other physical symptoms, not participating in social or work events, fear |
| ☐ Saying no to many things | Losing others' support, missing out on opportunities |
| ☐ Other | |

### You may have noticed

By identifying your potential physical, behavioural and emotional responses to stress before they happen, you can increase your ability to recognize when you're having a stress response.

This can enable you to reach out for help earlier, which may lessen the negative impact of stress on your work and health.

You may also have noticed some of these automatic responses are things other people do that you may have attributed to their personality or character – it may be a stress response for them.

For more information and resources related to the stress response: **https://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/reduce-stress**

# Choosing healthier strategies

## Why this matters

There are many strategies that can help reduce the negative impact of stressors. The following list includes potential strategies to help prevent or manage stress. Many are evidence-based approaches, such as mindfulness, practicing gratitude and deep breathing. Others are practice-based approaches shared by those who used them successfully to manage their own life stressors.

**Not all these strategies will work for everyone. In fact, some may cause you stress because they're not calming or enjoyable to you. Others may have neither a positive nor a negative impact.**



## Instructions

Check of the strategies below you know work for you. Put a checkmark by the strategies you think might be helpful and that you're willing to try. Pick key options for you – many strategies may look interesting – focus on those you feel you'll have time to work on.

**Choose some of these healthier responses to incorporate into your daily or weekly routines:**

- ☐ Meditation
- ☐ Mindfulness or mindfulness apps
- ☐ Spirituality
- ☐ Deep breathing relaxation techniques
- ☐ Seek natural light every day
- ☐ Stay hydrated with water
- ☐ Ask for help and support
- ☐ Take work breaks away from your workstation
- ☐ Reflect on your personal values and strengths
- ☐ Explore options – what can you do dif erently, cost/benefit analysis
- ☐ Search for a quick win – small victory, something positive
- ☐ Seek help to brainstorm solutions
- ☐ Gratitude – focus on what you appreciate in life
- ☐ Stay active doing things you enjoy
- ☐ Be aware of your thoughts and how they af ect you
- ☐ Avoid gossip and refocus conversations on solutions
- ☐ Ask someone to listen and provide an alternative perspective for you
- ☐ Read for pleasure
- ☐ Acupuncture or other complementary treatments
- ☐ Spend time outdoors, especially in nature
- ☐ Go for a drive
- ☐ Music – like singing and dancing
- ☐ Laugh
- ☐ Volunteer or help others
- ☐ Exercise – like walking, hiking, biking
- ☐ Sports or recreational activities
- ☐ Creative arts
- ☐ Spend time with children – read to them, listen to their laughter, play with them
- ☐ Create a poster with images of a positive vision
- ☐ Listen to enjoyable podcasts or videos
- ☐ Nutrition – increase healthy food choices
- ☐ Improve sleep habits
- ☐ Talk therapy
- ☐ Massage, aromatherapy, reiki or reflexology
- ☐ Spend time in silence
- ☐ Spend time with people who are a positive influence in your life
- ☐ Card game with friends
- ☐ Plan a trip
- ☐ Interact with animals
- ☐ Delegate tasks that aren't your responsibility
- ☐ Seek medical advice and/or treatment as appropriate
- ☐ Naturopathic or complementary treatment
- ☐ Engage in hobbies you enjoy
- ☐ Try to dress so you feel good about yourself
- ☐ Take a break when needed or at least every 2 hours
- ☐ Journal – write down your experiences and feelings
- ☐ Access help for time management strategies
- ☐ Communicate with a trusted advisor, friend or mentor
- ☐ Join communities or groups where you feel supported
- ☐ Other:

## You may have noticed

By adding healthier responses to your regular activities, you help build resilience. You may also be able to reduce stress in many different situations.

Choose healthier strategies in times of personal stress. Take your break offers healthy activities you can do alone or with others in 15 minutes or less in most settings: **https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/healthy-break-activities**

# Recognizing and exploring your stressors

## Why this matters

Resilience is the ability to bounce back af er being blindsided or overwhelmed by adversity. One way to improve our ability to bounce back is to be aware of the potential adverse events that could happen at any time. Then we can consider how to cope with them.

**This isn't intended to increase anxiety about what could go wrong. It's to realize many people have experienced these life events and successfully moved forward with their lives.**

For example, most of us know individuals who've experienced serious illness, disability or loss and then bounced back to enjoy and appreciate life more than ever. We probably also know people who experienced a setback or disappointment many years ago and continue to experience anger or upset every day.

By anticipating that life will present challenges and developing your ability to bounce back from them, you can take your life from just surviving to thriving.



## Instructions

The items listed on the following pages can be significant life stressors. They could happen to you or someone you care about.

There may be times in life when we have many different stressors, and times when we have only a few. Life is very fluid and can change at any time. We want to build resiliency to cope with any of life's stressors, but this is a lifelong learning activity. We'll start with whatever's most relevant to you *now*.

Check any items you're coping with right now or know you'll have in the very near future. You'll be asked at the end of this activity to prioritize one of your stressors to explore further for potential solutions.

Remember, when you check an item, consider if it's something you're coping with now or you foresee as a concern in the immediate future.

## Health

- ☐ Injury or disability
- ☐ Lack of emotional or physical well-being
- ☐ Pregnancy
- ☐ Your personal identity, including sexual identity
- ☐ Stress related to the health of friends or family members
- ☐ Vicarious trauma – impact on you when someone else is traumatized
- ☐ An unexpected diagnosis, either physical or psychological
- ☐ Inadequate access to care, support or resources for self or others
- ☐ Management of chronic or episodic health conditions
- ☐ Overstimulation – no mental downtime due to work or life demands

## Financial

- ☐ Having enough money to pay for day-to-day expenses
- ☐ Incurring unexpected expenses
- ☐ Debt repayment
- ☐ Incurring an investment loss
- ☐ Ensuring enough money for retirement
- ☐ Long-term care expenses for your parents, partner or other loved ones
- ☐ Losses due to traumatic experiences like fire, accident, floods or storms
- ☐ Health expenses – insurance, prescriptions, treatment
- ☐ Other:

## Social

- ☐ Coordination of schedules with spouse or significant other
- ☐ Support of parents or other adult family members
- ☐ Cultural expectations of family clash with other expectations
- ☐ Loss of a loved one
- ☐ Supporting others dealing with grief
- ☐ Loss of a pet
- ☐ Excessive exposure to negative, frustrated or angry people
- ☐ Isolation or estrangement from family or friends
- ☐ Unresolved conflict or dificulty maint aining relationships
- ☐ Sexual harassment, violence
- ☐ Aggression, violence, intimidation
- ☐ Gossip, ridicule, humiliation, bullying
- ☐ Social injustice
- ☐ Stigma or discrimination
- ☐ Lack of acceptance for who you are
- ☐ Lack of acceptance of who I am (by me)
- ☐ Identity-based marginalization
- ☐ Being ignored or shunned
- ☐ Unwelcome change in involvement in church, community or group
- ☐ Parental responsibilities, including adult children
- ☐ Management of children's school and extra-curricular activities
- ☐ Supporting children with special needs or health concerns
- ☐ Family breakdown – separation, divorce or custody issues
- ☐ Breakdown of relationship with friends or co-workers
- ☐ Empty nest syndrome – adjusting to life without children at home
- ☐ Fear of disappointing your family or friends

## Work

- ☐ Job insecurity – fear of dismissal or contract not being renewed
- ☐ Lack of role clarity or shifing e xpectations
- ☐ Major organizational shif s like merger, acquisition, reorganization
- ☐ Conflict
- ☐ Organizational or team culture – lack of respect or civility
- ☐ Lack of time to plan, think or reflect leading to errors or poor decisions
- ☐ Ethical dilemmas
- ☐ Workplace bullying or harassment
- ☐ Mobbing – where a group treats someone insensitively
- ☐ Lack of job flexibility
- ☐ Lack of wage equity
- ☐ Lack of recognition or appreciation
- ☐ Fear of being perceived as inadequate or incompetent
- ☐ Stagnation – no opportunities for job growth or development
- ☐ Work pressures or demands
- ☐ Responsibility without reasonable authority
- ☐ Inadequate training
- ☐ Inadequate or inef ective resources
- ☐ Quality or safety concerns af ecting your products or workplace
- ☐ Occupational health and safety concerns
- ☐ Workplace psychological health and safety issues
- ☐ Major traumatic events, including workplace injuries or death
- ☐ Lack of control over opportunities at work
- ☐ Return from vacation to a huge backlog
- ☐ Survivor guilt – when others lose their job or are injured
- ☐ Communication demands or expectations – immediate responses to email and cellphone
- ☐ Other:

## Emotional

- ☐ Dealing with change
- ☐ Lack of change or boredom
- ☐ Fear of failure
- ☐ Fear of missing out
- ☐ Impact from criticism, judgment or accusations
- ☐ Fear of being perceived as inadequate or incompetent
- ☐ Humiliation
- ☐ Chronic frustration or irritability
- ☐ Ongoing feelings of guilt or shame
- ☐ Continual disappointment, unmet expectations or feeling let down
- ☐ Fear of the social, political or economic climate of the world
- ☐ Fear of violence or terrorism
- ☐ Inability to relax or take time out
- ☐ Sense of hopelessness
- ☐ Other:

# Please don’t compare your stressors to anyone else’s

One stressor can sometimes overwhelm us, while at other times we can manage multiple stressors quite well.

Whether you check off few or many, your stressors don’t compare to anyone else’s – everyone’s past and present experiences are different.

Any or all of these could be a stressor at some point in your life.

The intent of identifying potential stressors is to build resilience so we’re better equipped to deal with them.

## Stress is inevitable and it’s not a competition.

**Identify one of your current stressors from the lists above to focus on for the following exercises titled Examining your options.**

# Examining your options

## Why this matters

We have choices when it comes to dealing with stress and adversity. These choices can usually be classified as one of **the 4 A's:**

- **Accept**
- **Avoid**
- **Alter**
- **Adapt**

The following is adapted from: **wellness.uchicago.edu/healthy-living/health-information/stress/**.

### Recognize that valid choices are those that can eliminate or significantly reduce your stress:

#### Accept

**Accept** the things (and people) you really can't change. As hard as it may be, accepting what's not possible to change (rather than desperately or hopelessly wishing it were different) allows you to manage your stress more effectively:

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable
- Look at challenges as opportunities for personal growth and learning
- Share your feelings to help reduce their power over your emotions
- Learn to forgive and move on

For more on forgiving someone who has hurt you, check out the late Dr. Wayne Dyer's blog **drwaynedyer.com/blog/category/forgiveness/**

#### Avoid

**Avoid** unnecessary stress. Not all stress can be avoided. It may even be unhealthy to avoid stressful situations that need to be resolved. When appropriate, try to avoid unnecessary stress:

- Learn how to say no and stick to your boundaries
- Avoid people who may foster or create a stressful environment for you whenever possible
- Take control of your environment, such as establishing a low-stress work space
- Prioritize your to-do list and drop tasks or activities that aren't truly necessary

#### Alter

**Alter** by shifting your external environment in some way so the stress is reduced or eliminated:

- Modify your environment
- Change your routines, including what you consume, how you move, what you watch and where you go
- Set boundaries in your relationships

#### Adapt

**Adapt** your internal thought process:

- Change the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress
- Reframe problems as a desired solution, such as "I don't sleep enough" reframed as "I need to improve the quality of my sleep"
- Consider potential consequences of taking various actions – Look at the big picture
- Set clear and reasonable expectations and standards for yourself



**We may make stress worse by refusing to reach out for help or denying there's a problem.**

## Less helpful strategies

Some people turn to alcohol, food or other substances when they're stressed. This can help distract us from whatever's causing the stress, but it rarely makes things better and can of en make things worse.

## A more helpful strategy

Others will step back and take time to consider potential approaches to addressing the cause of their stress. This can provide an opportunity to reduce the stress and gain perspective about what can be done.

## Instructions

Think about a specific stressor in your life right now and use the chart below to consider how each of the 4 A's – accept, avoid, alter and adapt – might make your stress better or worse.

**Briefly describe the stressor for which you'll explore your options**

**How I might make my stress worse:**

### Accept

Put the situation in perspective – it is what it is – so it becomes less personal or stressful.

### Avoid

Refocus away from the stressful situation or person toward something more positive for you.

### Alter

Shift your external environment in some way so the stress is reduced or eliminated.

### Adapt

Change the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress.

**How I might reduce my stress:**

## You may have noticed

Perhaps you use a coping strategy that's more damaging than healthy or helpful. Considering all the 4 A's might help you manage your perspective of the situation and improve your stress level. The 4 A's are used in many organizations because they work.

# Balancing your support network

## Why this matters

How do you feel after you help someone? If you're happy to help others and feel good doing it, do you also feel good about asking for help? If not, why not?

Some of us were raised to believe that helping others was a sign of strength but asking for help shows weakness. Do you think people who ask for help are weak? Probably not.

If you feel hesitant to reach out, think about how you feel when you can help someone. Many people welcome the opportunity to help and are relieved to find out we all need help from time to time.

All of us will have times when we can offer help and times when we should reach out for help. There are times we need to be supported and times we need to be supportive. Asking for help in our personal or work lives is one of the ways we can improve our resilience.

You may discover there are more people than you were aware of who would be willing to help you. Still, not everyone can help with every issue. If the first person you reach out to is unable or unwilling to help, try someone else.

If you feel hesitant to reach out, think about how you feel when you are able to help someone. Many people welcome the opportunity to help and are relieved to find out that we all need help from time to time.



Resilience involves acknowledging our need to connect with each other.

## Instructions

Think about who you could reach out to for help, like:

• Family • Friends • Associates • Colleagues • Neighbours • Services

In column one of of this chart, list the names of people whom you can or do support for each specific task listed in the centre column. In column 3, list the names of people who could provide that support to you. Try to include a variety of names so you can create a diverse network of support for yourself.

| Those I can or do support | Types of support | Those who could or do support me |
|---|---|---|
| | Do errands | |
| | Help with housework | |
| | Help with work tasks | |
| | Of er emotional support | |
| | Be trusted with a secret | |
| | Provide a tough love approach by calling me on my stuff | |
| | Provide a reality check and question my perspective | |
| | Encourage and support unconditionally | |
| | Celebrate | |
| | Generate laughter | |
| | Encourage positive action | |
| | Explore potential solutions | |
| | Hold accountable to follow through | |
| | Have fun | |
| | Go to a social or work event | |




## You may have noticed

You never have to be alone when you need support: there's always someone who really wants to help, including a professional or volunteer. There are multiple organizational and community resources you can find in person, online and over the phone. Take time to discover these supports now so they'll be easier to find when you need them – when you need them, reach out.

The Government of Canada highlights varied supports here: **https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/health-wellness-public-servants/mental-health-workplace/resources-employees-mental-health-workplace.html**

You may have more support than you first thought. You might also notice your support network isn't as large as it could be.

This isn't a popularity contest. We're fortunate if we have a few good people in our lives who'll be there to help us.

To help develop your network, look for opportunities to use your strengths to assist others.

This can include joining a group, collaborating online or in person, volunteering or finding one person who needs your help. When you choose to build a support network, you may find that when you support more people, there are more people there for you when you need help.

# Identifying and using your strengths

## Why this matters

When we talk about a person's character, we're talking about the sum total of who that person is. This means:

- How their thoughts, feelings and behaviours shape who they are
- How they see the world
- How they interact with the people around them

Every person has character strengths. These are positive qualities that are part of who we are – we don't have to try and think about them because they come naturally to us. It's much easier for us to use our strengths during times of adversity than to try to manage our weaknesses. For example, if patience isn't your strength, it won't be easy to be patient when faced with a delay in a work project. If creativity's a strength, try to distract yourself from the stress and frustration of waiting while you begin a new, creative project.

If you've not already done so, consider completing the free VIA Character Strengths Survey at **www.viacharacter.org** and contribute to research. It will take you about 15 minutes. There's no need to purchase the full report to learn about top strengths for this activity.

This survey's part of a research project, so you'll need to provide personal information – including your name and email address for research purposes. Or you can write down what you feel are your top strengths using the list found in Appendix A.

Once you know your top 3 strengths, write them in the space below. Then add ways to use them to help you deal with challenging times. The first 3 are examples to help you get started.

| Top 3 strengths | How I can use this strength to help me deal with challenges |
|---|---|
| Forgiveness | Because my guiding principle is mercy, and not revenge, I can move on even when someone has hurt me. |
| Love of learning | When things go wrong, I know I can examine the situation and learn a new way of going forward. |
| Bravery | Even when being opposed by many, I'm able to do what I think is right. |
| | |
| | |
| | |

### You may have noticed

We all have many character strengths, but we don't all have the same strengths to the same degree. For example, while everyone has curiosity, it will be stronger in some people than in others. Also, any strength can be overused to the point where it becomes a problem. Let's use the example of curiosity – not enough can make life boring while too much can make you seem nosy or intrusive. Recognizing strengths in ourselves and using them wisely can help us improve our own self-confidence. We'll also build connections with other people.

When learning how to use your strengths to help you thrive in all areas of your life, more information and tools can be found here: **https://viacharacter.org/resources**

# Work resilience for leaders

## Why this matters

Not being able to work can exacerbate stress. If you couldn't do your regular work for any reason, having a plan that minimizes potential negative impact from your absence can make a big difference.

### Instructions

**Answer each of the questions below.**

1. If you can't do your regular work, does your workplace provide accommodations so you can work from home, part-time or job share? If these options aren't available or possible, who might be able to cover for you?

2. What would be the effect on your workplace, co-workers and employees if you were unable to do your regular work? What can you do about that?

3. If your organization does not provide a benefit plan, how would you continue to pay your bills if you could not work?

4. What insurance or government benefits are available to you?

5. What tasks could you just wait or be dropped altogether if you were unable to work?

6. Your work will likely evolve over time. This means that your needs could change. For this reason, set a reminder to review this plan again in one year.

## You may have noticed

Stressful thoughts about work can consume much of your time and energy. Recognize that if your work situation changes, you can still thrive. Knowing what to do when change may be unwelcome or unanticipated may help to decrease this particular stressor.

# Work resilience for employees

## Why this matters

Not being able to work can exacerbate stress. If you couldn't do your regular work for any reason, having a plan that minimizes potential negative impact from your absence can make a big difference.

### Instructions

**Answer each of the questions below.**

1. If you couldn't do your regular work, does your workplace provide accommodations so you can work from home, part-time or job share? If these options aren't available or possible, who might be able to cover for you?

2. What would be the effect on your workplace and co-workers if you couldn't do your regular work? What can you do about that?

3. If your organization doesn't offer a benefit plan, how would you continue to pay your bills if you couldn't work?

4. What insurance or government benefits are available to you?

5. What tasks could wait or be dropped altogether if you couldn't work?

6. Can you set a reminder to review this again in one year? How will you do that?

## You may have noticed

Stressful thoughts about work can consume much of your time and energy. Recognize that if your work situation changes, you can still thrive. Knowing what to do when change may be unwelcome or unanticipated can help with decreasing this particular stressor.

# Work resilience for self-employed

## Why this matters

For those who are self-employed, not being able to work for any reason can exacerbate stress, especially if yours is the only source of income for your household. Letting down your employees or clients can also add to your stress. If you weren't able to do your regular work, having a plan for business continuity can make a big difference.

### Instructions

**Answer each of the questions below.**

1. What would the effect be on your clients and your reputation if you weren't able to do your regular work? What can you do about that?

2. If you're self-employed or your organization doesn't provide a benefit plan, how would you continue to pay your bills if you couldn't work?

3. What insurance or government benefits are available to you?

4. How might you generate passive income (income that continues when you're not working)? Consider product sales, rental fees and other income.

5. What property or possessions could you sell and/or what savings do you have available?

6. What could wait or be dropped altogether if you're unable to work?

7. What friends, colleagues or family members could help or temporarily cover your role if you were unable to work?

Complete the following table to identify those who could help you meet commitments or obligations to clients and/or continue to provide for your employees. Consider individuals, services or other organizations that could help. These could be competitors who of er similar services/ products or temp agencies who provide short-term workers.

| Who can help you meet your commitments? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Organization** | **Email** | **Phone** |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Your business will likely evolve over time. This means your needs could change and those who could help you could change. For this reason, set a reminder to review this plan again in one year.

## You may have noticed

Stressful thoughts about work can consume much of your time and energy. Recognize that if your work situation changes, you can still thrive. Knowing what to do when change may be unwelcome or unanticipated may help to decrease this particular stressor.

# Committing to myself

## Why this matters

At this point, we've explored how you might automatically respond in the face of adversity. We've also considered alternative responses or daily habits that could be more beneficial. Now you can commit to one thing you're willing to do differently for at least 3 weeks to improve your resilience.

### Instructions

**Choose one of the items listed below or create your own.**

### Over the next 3 weeks, I'll commit to working on:

- [ ] **Reframing challenges as an opportunity for growth**

  Life will always present us with stressors, like disappointment, frustration, conflict or loss. We don't always get to choose what happens to us, but we always get to choose our response. With this commitment, you'll pause to consider what you may have gained from any of these events. It could be you have learned what not to do next time. It could be you're spurred to take action that propels you toward something better. It could be you've learned to be more sensitive or compassionate. In each case, record what you've gained and review them all at the end.

- [ ] **Taking action to complete tasks I know are good for me**

  Motivational speaker Mel Robbins talks about immediately taking action when we have a thought about something we know is good for us, but we don't have much motivation to do. For example, if you know you should call a family member, but don't feel like talking on the phone, just count down (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) and make the call. Just do it. You'll probably feel much better afterward. This can work whether the activity is eating something healthy, going for a walk or asking for help. Count down and then just do it. Sitting and waiting for motivation rarely spurs us to take effective action.

- [ ] **Brainstorming options to address stressors I encounter using the 4 A's**

  Using the 4 A's, consider your options when responding to your stressors and evaluate how they might make your stress better or worse.

- [ ] **Expressing appreciation to those who help me**

  This can help you recognize that many people want to and do of er help in both large and small ways every day. Whether it's someone who holds the door open or someone who makes us a meal – thank them specifically for what they did with as much detail as possible. For example, say, "Thanks for holding the door for me," or "I really appreciate you making me this sandwich". By doing this, you'll probably find people will be quicker to of er help or support, as you'll be encouraging and rewarding this type of behaviour.

**Consciously learning from my mistakes**

When we hide our mistakes, we risk repeating them or having them become even more of a problem. We can choose to take responsibility for our mistakes and openly talk about them with the intent to find solutions. This can significantly change our perspective about mistakes. We can move from seeing our mistakes as weakness or failure to understanding that mistakes are part of life. This can help facilitate our personal growth and development.

**Accepting support when of ered and reaching out when needed**

Over the next few weeks, pay extra attention to offers of help you receive from others, like bringing you a coffee or making you a meal. Make a mental note of when people of er help, and wherever possible, accept the help and say thank you. Also, ask for help when you need it. Don't worry if someone can't provide what you ask for – congratulate yourself for having the courage to ask.

**Improving self-talk (the things I say to myself about myself)**

Each time you say something derogatory to yourself about yourself, catch yourself doing this and rephrase the comment as though you're talking to someone you care about. For example, rephrase "I'm an idiot" to "That was an honest mistake." Instead of "How can I be so stupid?" consider "Try again." Retraining your brain to think fewer unkind or critical thoughts will help you feel better and be more resilient.

Put a reminder in your calendar now to review your progress next year. Keep your plan and refer to it when stress becomes overwhelming or share it with a trusted friend who will help you when needed.

### You may have noticed

Committing to a challenge and sharing your plans with someone may help keep you accountable to your goals. Limit your stress by choosing only one or 2 changes to work on at a time.



**Thanks for completing this Plan for resilience**

This resource isn't intended as a medical or mental health intervention. If you're currently experiencing challenges, please reach out for support. You could reach out to your health care professional, your workplace wellness or employee assistance program.

**Crisis lines in Canada:** If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide or in a mental health crisis, call or text **9-8-8**. To find mental health or community services in your area, call or text 2-1-1. If you're in immediate danger or need urgent medical support, call **9-1-1**.

# Coping strategies planner

Below add in your most likely or existing stressors and the coping strategies or strengths you'll use to deal with them. The first one is an example to help get you started.

**Stressor:**

Loneliness

**Coping strategies:**

Join a group
Volunteer

**Stressor:**

**Coping strategies:**

**Stressor:**

**Coping strategies:**

**Stressor:**

**Coping strategies:**

**Stressor:**

**Coping strategies:**

**Stressor:**

**Coping strategies:**

# Be aware of potential resources

Fill this in on your own or obtain a list of resources available to you within your school or community **before you need them**.

## Potential organizational resources

### Human resources

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Benefits provider

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Peer support program

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Leader or manager

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Wellness/health centre

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Occupational health nurse

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Association or membership resources

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Other

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

## Potential community resources

### Family doctor

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Mood disorder services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Addiction services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Distress/help line

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Child and family services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Spiritual or bereavement counseling through church, temple, mosque or funeral home

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Circle of support – people who agree in advance to support each other

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Physically close supporters(those you see regularly)

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Peer support services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

### Other

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

# Appendix A – The VIA Classification of Strengths

Every individual possesses all 24 character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique character profile. You can discover your personal character strengths profile by taking the scientifically validated VIA Survey at **viacharacter.org/survey/account/register**.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Wisdom** | **Creativity** | Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are. |
| | **Curiosity** | You like exploration and discovery. |
| | **Judgment** | You think things through and examine them from all sides. |
| | **Love of learning** | You have a passion for mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge. |
| | **Perspective** | People who know you consider you wise. |
| **Courage** | **Bravery** | You don't shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain. |
| | **Honesty** | You live your life in a genuine and authentic way. |
| | **Perseverance** | You work hard to finish what you start. |
| | **Zest** | You approach everything you do with excitement and energy. |
| **Humanity** | **Kindness** | You're kind and generous to others. |
| | **Love** | You value close relations with others. |
| | **Social Intelligence** | You know how to fit in to different social situations. |
| **Justice** | **Fairness** | One of your abiding principles is to treat all people fairly. |
| | **Leadership** | You excel at encouraging a group to get things done. |
| | **Teamwork** | You excel as a member of a group. |
| **Temperance** | **Forgiveness** | You forgive those who have done you wrong. |
| | **Humility** | You don't seek the spotlight. Others recognize and value your modesty. |
| | **Prudence** | You're a careful person. |
| | **Self regulation** | You're a disciplined person. |
| **Transcendence** | **Apprecation of beauty** | You notice and appreciate beauty and excellence in all domains of life. |
| | **Gratitude** | You're aware of good things that happen and don't take them for granted. |
| | **Hope** | You expect the best in the future and you work to achieve it. |
| | **Humour** | Bringing smiles to other people is important to you. |
| | **Spirituality** | Your beliefs shape your actions and are a source of comfort to you. |

# Notes

# Notes

# Notes

This resource was created by Workplace Strategies for Mental Health with final analysis and critique provided by Dr. Ian M. F. Arnold and M. Suzanne Arnold, PhD. Thanks also to Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada's managers and Mental Health and Wellness in the Workplace Working Group members who significantly enhanced this resource.

This resource is based on the research that suggests that planning for adversity and knowing what to do when it happens can reduce the negative impact on physical and mental health. For more information and citations, go to **clwsmh.com**.

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