

# Behavioral News You Can Use

from  [www.TalkingDoc.net](http://www.TalkingDoc.net)

by Catherine Anne Walsh, Ph.D., P.A.

Fall 2008

## Resilience – *Coping with the Stressful & the Everyday*

Summer is winding down – and for some that means a return to school. For many people, this is a challenging time of the year when social anxiety in academic or work settings can produce difficulties which seem insurmountable. Here are some of the optimistic findings from psychological research in recent years to help.

One reason that people – children and adults – can become despondent is because of what we say to ourselves about ourselves and our situations. Depressed and anxious thinking can convince us that the problems we encounter are enduring and are caused by personal faults. **Optimistic thinking** helps us see ourselves as capable of handling most of what life dishes out because we see problems as temporary and their root cause as external to us. Most of us significantly underestimate our ability to change how we feel, and we underestimate how quickly we can do that, says Princeton University psychologist Daniel Kahneman, Ph.D. Harvard University psychologist Daniel Gilbert, Ph.D. and University of Virginia psychologist Timothy Wilson, Ph.D. have discovered that we are not as good at predicting how we will respond to emotional events as we think. People in their experiments **overestimated** how long it would take them to recover from an unhappy event.

Another very interesting finding: Despite what Mae West contended, too much of a good thing can be a problem – especially if that good thing is too many choices. Too many choices – even paying to have choices so we can avoid feeling trapped – may feel good in the short run, but it often leads us to procrastinate, to make choices and decisions on impulse at times when it would have been better to wait. A lot of emotional energy and time gets spent, and often

wasted, on this behavior. Having a hard time thinking of an example? How about looking through catalogs, and picking things you never end up ordering – or worse, ordering, and then regretting later because of the cost, disinterest once it arrives, etc? How about the time spent browsing the Internet looking at “stuff”? You get the picture.

The most exciting outcome from all this research is this: We don’t know how well we can cope generally because we seldom take into account our **resilience**. **RESILIENCE** is a process of using resources that help buffer us from the slings and arrows of life, and bounce back. Some of these are:

*Having goals –  
and moving  
toward them –  
reminds you of  
what you can  
control in your life.*

- Friendships and family
- Good planning and follow-through skills
- A positive view of yourself
- Intelligence
- A sense of humor
- Good problem-solving skills
- Good communication skills
- Ability to manage strong feelings/impulses
- Good nutritional habits
- Good sleep habits
- Good health
- Good habits related to exercise
- Socializing with friends and family

These all provide us with positive feedback and events in our life that help balance out the “bad news” everyone experiences. Daniel Gilbert, Ph.D. states: “People are famous – in folklore, in literature and especially in our own field (psychology) for making the best of bad situations.”

One of Gilbert and Wilson’s studies specifically demonstrated that people’s “immune system” began

— CONTINUES ON BACK

---

Catherine Anne Walsh Ph.D., P.A.

LICENSED CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST &  
WHAT NEXT? RETIREMENT COACH

1060 B Cliffwood Drive  
Mount Pleasant, SC 29464

*Behavioral News You Can Use* is written and distributed by licensed clinical psychologist Catherine Anne Walsh, Ph.D., P.A. Dr. Walsh is an author, practicing psychologist and retirement coach who uses proven, research-based methods to help adults, adolescents and children live better lives. She's run her practice in Mt. Pleasant for nearly 20 years.

---

## Resilience

— CONTINUED FROM FRONT

working when distress became too high. Knowing this, we might be willing to deal with more stressful situations if we **knew** that these would be temporary, that we had “the right stuff” to deal with them, and that any negative effects from these trying situations would not last as long as we often fear. We also might stick with something that seems tough right now, and not quit if we knew that ultimately we would likely be happier with our choice. Even better news:

There are ways to build resilience. Here are a few –

1. Having *good relationships* with close family members and friends helps, and being able to accept help and support from them when you need it.
2. When crises occur, as they do in all our lives, you can learn to interpret and respond to the events more effectively *by looking beyond the current crisis to the future*, and remembering times when you have dealt with seemingly insurmountable problems and prevailed.
3. *Have goals and keep moving toward them.* You know, research done with a group of Harvard graduates revealed that those who had goals achieved more of what they wanted in their lives, and the same can be true for you. Having goals and moving toward them reminds you of what you can control in your life.

When we apply these ideas to adolescents and children, keep these things in mind:

Most children can cope with one or two risk factors in their lives (such as loss of a parent, divorced parents,

illness) and overcome them to succeed in life; some children can even win out struggling against more than that – all this points to the natural resilience that protects children, too. Having adults who are stable, consistent and supportive in their lives helps tremendously. The role of positive school experiences cannot be overlooked, either. School can provide the predictability, calm and routine that children need in their lives. Overcoming adversity really does help increase resilience and the sense that you can handle a lot more than you might have imagined.

### WHEN SHOULD YOU CONSIDER SEEKING HELP?

If you feel you're not able to work or take care of your usual daily responsibilities because of traumatic or stressful events, give me – or another licensed mental health professional – a call. Sometimes having a trained individual listen to you and help you sort through what issues you are facing can be very helpful, and help you “get back in the saddle” to continue living your life to the fullest as effectively as you can.

For parents, be aware of changes in your child's behavior, and encourage your child to talk to you when overwhelming feelings threaten. Keeping your child involved in decision-making when it seems appropriate will also help your child feel a necessary part of the family. And if stress for your child or you becomes a concern, contact your child's school counselor, family physician, or a psychologist to help.

---

» If you do not wish to receive further newsletters, please call and leave a message at (843) 884-3121

  
www.TalkingDoc.net

EMAIL cawalshphd@TalkingDoc.net

PH (843) 884-3121 FAX (843) 849-7728

So, some interesting ideas to consider, and hopefully,  
**news you can use.** ■ ■ ■