

## Coping with College Series

### On Being Resilient

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As a counselor I often talk with students who are troubled by tragedies, losses, victimizations, and just about anything else you can think of. You might wonder if this type of exposure makes me feel depressed. Students considering entering the field of psychology often say to me, "don't you take your work home with you?". I usually answer in a reassuring way, but the truth is that sometimes I do take my work home with me, but not in an unhealthy way.

Working with people and problems offers me a window into the resiliency of the human spirit. People transcend situations, losses and problems in ways that I find utterly awe inspiring. Sometimes I assist them in this process because I know quite a bit about psychology, and a little bit about life. But I know that resiliency and strength emerge from my clients, not me, and I feel honored to share in their struggle. So when work "comes home with me" it's usually in a thoughtful way as I reflect on the courage I've witnessed during the week.

Everyone faces problems in life. How can one cope with a painful shyness, or anxiety or learn to accept that the person they love most in the world is alcoholic? How do people adequately mourn the loss of the innocent and carefree childhood they never got to experience? There are no easy answers to these questions, but research on resiliency has shown that there are factors that foster the ability to recover from tragic circumstances. Following are a few thoughts about resiliency summarized from an article in Psychology Today, June 1998.

- Resiliency can emerge at any time in one's life. Some people find it in childhood, others later in adult life, but the potential is always there.
- Resilient people seem able to remember that bad times are temporary. It's important to believe in a future that can be different than the current reality.
- Setting goals for the future is an important part of resiliency. Goal setting fosters a belief in the future and helps you identify both external and internal resources.
- Resilient people often learn to see themselves as strategists overcoming difficult life circumstances. They develop a perspective that affirms their own creativity in dealing with life's blows.
- People with high resiliency believe in themselves. They begin to see the ways that their struggles have made them stronger, more sensitive, or more caring with others, and they find strength in this knowledge.
- Finally, people with high resiliency accept or recruit help from others. They turn to people in their lives that can help them, whether it's teachers, mentors, family, friends, or a counselor.

We all have to cope with struggles in life. If you are currently coping with some type of adversity in your life, I hope you'll review these things and consider how to use them to foster your own sense of resiliency.