

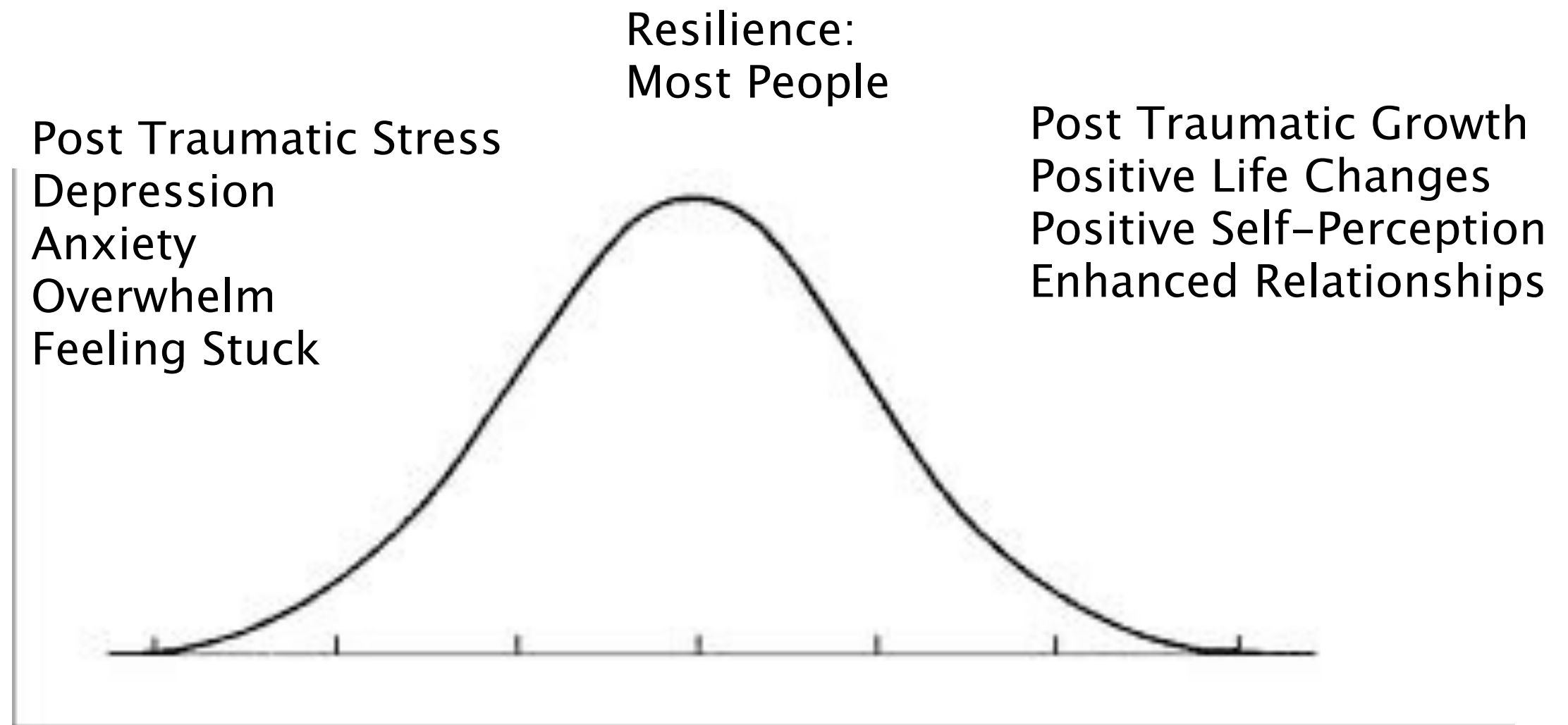
Resiliency:

Being flexible in a changing world.



Arielle Schwartz, PhD

Traumatic Exposure and the Bell Curve



3 Questions

- Why do some people respond better to traumatic experiences than others?
- What coping strategies and behaviors are associated with the greatest **adaptation** to stressful or traumatic life events?
- What are the most effective means of integrating these strategies into our lives?

What is Post Traumatic Stress?

Adverse and long lasting effects of unintegrated emotional and physiological response to stress.

What is Resilience?

Resilience is adapting well in the face of adversity--It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.

What is Post Traumatic Growth?

Improved self-perception, enhanced relationships, and a strengthened life philosophy that occur after exposure to a traumatic event.



Resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary.



Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.





Traumatic events create pockets of un-integrated emotions and sensations.

Think of these as psychological eddies where you can get stuck.

Can I stay open to life knowing that loss and pain happen?

Resilience is like taking a raft trip down a river. You find difficult stretches that you have to get through.

It is important to have strategies to find your way. You will face rapids, currents, and difficult stretches of the river.

You can climb out to rest along the way. But to get to the end of your journey, you need to get back in the raft and continue.



The Experience of Trauma is Transformative

- We can not undo what has been done.
- Being resilient does not mean that we don't experience difficulty or distress.
- The road to resilience involves considerable emotional distress.



Resilience is both a process and an outcome:

As a process:

- We become conscious of the meanings we make of difficult life events and cultivate choice about the narrative we tell ourselves. (e.g. “I wasn’t good enough” can become “I did the best I could”)
- Instead of shutting down, we feel and express our vulnerability, pain, fear, rage, sadness, or terror.



The outcome of resilience is that we can say,
“This happened to me, and it is over now.”

The outcome of Post Traumatic Growth is
that we can say, “and I am stronger
because of it”



Factors associated with resiliency –in children:

- The presence of a caring adult who takes an interest in the life of the child.
- A supportive, caring community
- A sense of self-efficacy (I can have an impact on my world, I can make things happen)



Study of impoverished children, Noman Garmezy (1983)

“We need to have faith in the capacity for children to come to grips with the reality that no one’s world is perfect”



(Garmezy, 1993)

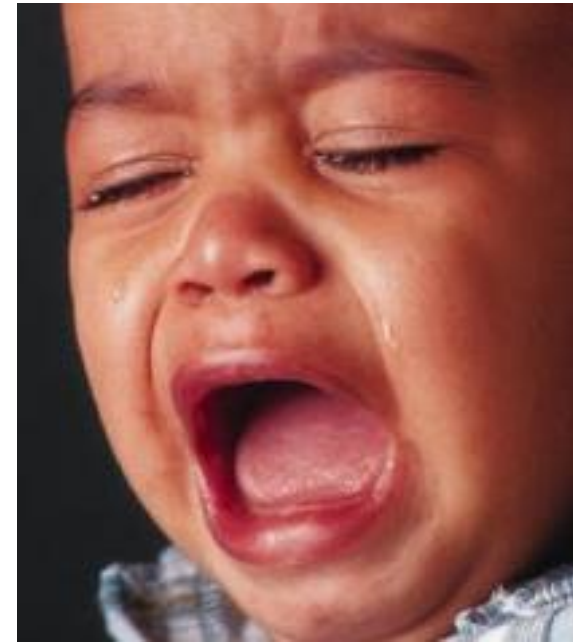
However...we must not overestimate children's capacity to simply "get over" traumatic events.

Children are not simply resilient, they are malleable

Caregivers must recognize that children's integration of traumatic material **needs to be facilitated** as an active, expressive, psychological and physiological process.



Bruce Perry



Factors of Resilience --in Adults:

- Develop supportive and caring relationships
- Stay connected—not isolated
- Make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out
- Maintain a positive view of self
- Strengthen skills in communication and problem solving
- Increase your capacity to feel intense emotions and manage impulses

**All of these are
traits or
behaviors that
you can develop
in yourself.**



Research:

- One study followed more than 400 supervisors and managers from Bell Telephone company for 6 years after facing job loss.
 - Some employees suffered performance, leadership and health declines including heart attacks, strokes, obesity, depression, substance abuse.
 - Others “thrived”, they maintained their health, happiness, and performance and felt renewed enthusiasm.

(Maddi, 1982)

3 Hardiness Factors

- **Commitment:** The ability to stay involved; staying engaged in ongoing events rather than isolating
- **Control:** Rather than lapse into passivity and powerlessness; you need to believe that with effort, you can influence the course of events in your life.
- **Challenge.** Believing that growth and wisdom are gained from difficult or challenging experiences. Life, whether positive or negative, provides opportunities for new learning.

(Maddi, 1982)

Strategies for Building Resilience

- Developing resilience is a personal journey.
- People do not all react the same to traumatic and stressful life events.
- What works for one person might not work for another.
- People use varying strategies depending upon cultural differences and personal preference.

10 Ways to Build Resilience

1. Make connections.

- Good relationships with close family members, friends, or others are important.
- Seek out and actively build your social circle.
- Stay involved rather than isolating (make the phone calls, reach out, go to social events and meetings)



2. Express yourself.

- Talk about it.
- Express vulnerable or painful emotions. This allows greater access to acceptance, compassion, and joy.
- Accept help and support from those who care about you and listen to you.
- If needed seek psychotherapy.
- If you're not ready to share with another write in a journal; journaling about difficult life events has been shown to increase mental and physical wellness.

3. Get creative:

- Paint your emotions, dance it out, become a poet, make music, listen to music.
- Often the linear left brain can restrict access to our inner wisdom and guidance.
- Give your right brain creative license through any creative channel that you choose.
- Don't worry that it looks or sounds good for anyone else; It is the process not the product that is important.

- 4.Practice acceptance:** Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed will help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.
- 5.Look for opportunities for self-discovery.** Explore how difficult life events have strengthened you. How have you grown as a result of your struggles in life?

6.Nurture a positive view of yourself. Research indicates the human tendency to focus on the negative. A positive approach is a practice that needs to be developed. Review how you have already been able to solve problems and trusted your instincts.

7.Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Get back to basics: Exercise regularly. Eat well. Sleep.

8.Stay active: Remain involved and engaged in life. Develop realistic goals and ask yourself what steps you can accomplish each day that help move you towards achievement of your goals.



9. Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Maintaining a hopeful outlook can enable you to expect that good things will happen once again in your life.

10. Personalize your list: Make a list of times when you felt supported, loved, and safe. Make a list of places where you feel at peace (the ocean, the mountains). Make a list of people in your life who are your circle of support. List the activities that you can do regularly that bring you into balance (spiritual practice, meditation, yoga, exercise, walking in nature).

Being Flexible in a Changing World

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most adaptable to change"



Charles
Darwin

Acknowledgments:

- American Psychological Association: Pamphlet on Resilience www.apa.org
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- Bruce Perry: www.childtrauma.org
- Martin Seligman:
www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu