

Building Personal Resilience in Twelve Steps

Step 4: Know Your Tipping Point



“One step each week. You will be amazed at the difference it will make”

April is stress awareness month and as a team we’ve all written about the topic countless times in our professional lives. But never before have we used terms such as social distancing, shielding, self-isolation and furlough, but these are the new norms and inevitably we may well experience considerable stress as we seek to adapt. You will probably know the two alternatives fight or flight as the body’s stress response first identified in our prehistoric ancestors faced with the sabre-tooth tiger - do I stay and be eaten, or do I run for my life? Stress gives us a jolt of adrenaline to make us decide to act quickly but comes at a

biological price -- the constant rush of the hormones adrenaline and cortisol that sap our energy over the long-term and damage and reduce our immune system. So, whilst a limited amount of stress at work or in general life can contribute positively, high levels of stress from many sources and over a prolonged period can seriously affect our wellbeing and critically impact on our physical as well as mental wellbeing.

The current global health crisis has created a perfect storm of factors that can negatively weaken our physical and emotional resilience. Almost overnight we face sudden and dramatic changes, economic and work uncertainty, wholesale adjustment to our routines, decreased social and familial contact, and the risk of social and emotional isolation, will be experienced by so many of us during the next few months. We feel out of control of our own destiny as well as fearful for the health and welfare of those we love.

It is in the toughest of times that our need for resilience is greatest, of course, but it is also true that we can and do find coping resources deep within us that can see us through. What we do need to do, however, is look out for the “warning signs” or “tipping point” in ourselves and in those we know to ensure that we manage stress to build our personal resilience.

For each of us those warning signs and our “tipping point” will be different. So, it is important to think about the signs or symptoms that indicate that you or those around you are reaching your limits. Know your personal tipping point and read those signs - just as you would read the warning signs on your car dashboard.

Perhaps the signs are physical --- tiredness, headaches, aches & pains or an upset stomach. You may find it harder to sleep at night, or become irritable, aggressive, impatient and snappy, being tearful, unable to concentrate. Relationships may seem to be on edge and mood swings seem to be too frequent and too extreme.

Knowing the thing/s that cause us stress is the first step in confronting and managing them. These can then be nipped in the bud before they become major problems. What we want to avoid is bad coping habits developing such as drinking too much caffeine or alcohol, skipping meals or not getting any physical activity.

How you “nip things in the bud” is up to you. Self-help books abound, recommending everything from aromatherapy to a good walk, from mindfulness to dancing or singing, from talking things through with someone to quiet time alone. We all have different ways in which we can respond. The key is to spot your tipping point and then take whatever preventative action you can to ensure it does not lead to ill-health and burnout.

This week take a moment to focus on the things that make you feel stressed, factors that give rise to some of the negative feelings/symptoms we touched on earlier. If you know that you, or those around you, are about to go through a potentially very stressful time then think through now what actions you can take to lessen the risk and minimise the damage. You will feel more in control both because you are more aware of the tipping point ahead, and because you have thought of some ways to respond.

Write down the potential stress tipping points in one column. Alongside in the next column write down the actions you could take to prevent or reduce the risk of stress.

Don't forget that you can reach out to others. There are many helplines available, or ring someone in your trusted network. People are pleased to be able to help and indeed you will also be able to support others when they call on you for assistance.

Resilience is very much about self-awareness, believing in yourself and drawing on your personal resources. It's about maintaining your strength for the future, not merely coping with the present. And understanding your tipping point goes a long way to preventing a breaking point.

The Wellbeing Team

Next Week Step 5: Being Change Aware?