

Bouncing Back  
Rohnert Park Chamber of Commerce Article for August 23, 2021  
By: Steven Campbell, Intelligent Heart

When our daughter took her first step, she also fell.

She then looked up with little tears in her eyes and said, “Well mom...dad...I **guess I was never meant for walking!**”

Is this what she said? Of course not! She got up, took two steps and then she fell. This was followed by three steps and then four.

She is now 45. Can she still fall? Of course she can, because she is still walking! You can't fall unless you are walking.

The ability to bounce back from what life hands us is one of our most impressive characteristics of being human. And although resilience has been carefully studied for decades, we still have much to learn.

## **Trust Your Brain**

To me the least known and most wonderful thing about resilience is that **ALL of us are capable of it**. I have met and worked with so many people who were absolutely sure there was no return; people who have felt very old who were barely 25.

But now they are back on their feet, making friends, and getting their lives back. In her book [The Happiness Track](#), Emma Seppala shows how our brain is amazingly plastic and malleable!

**Change, growth, and understanding are always possible.**

## **Adjust Your Perspective**

When I was in my 20s and filled with the sense of invulnerability that comes with youth, I thought resilience was an individual matter. If you are smart, young, and psychologically tough, you can find your way through even the most serious problems. But recovery from all the stuff that happens to us can take years.

Fifty years later, and a bit more battle-worn, I realize that to thrive in new circumstances, I must oftentimes change my expectations and view of the world. When I taught this to my college students, I would explain the difference between being younger and being older. When you're younger and you plan something, and it does not work out the way you expected, you become "very surprised and irritated." When you're older and you plan something, and it **does** work out the way you expected, you become "very surprised and irritated."

### Don't Fight Your Defenses

When we suffer through and survive terribly traumatic, tragic, negating, and life-threatening situations, we find methods to bounce back. Even neurosis, psychosis, and a myriad of defense mechanisms (such as denial and dissociation) serve to enable us to endure, and preserve the possibility of a new life. According to Stephen Diamond in Evil Deads, we must sometimes go underground for protection, hibernating; waiting for a time to heal.

### Accept What You Cannot Change

In Lynne Soraya's book, Asperger's Diary, she describes a conversation she had with a playground monitor when she was in the fifth grade.

"I talked about being bullied and being afraid I would be taken away from my parents. I told her about my brother, who'd been told he would lose the ability to walk by age 30, my stepfather who'd had two heart attacks and a severe motorcycle accident, my mother who was born with a heart valve defect. The monitor said, "Wow, your family has been through a lot." I remember telling her, "I don't view these things as bad, I view them as interesting." This, to some degree, is still my attitude. You can sit around and say, "It's not supposed to be this way," but in the end, what good does that do if you can't change it? —*Lynne Soraya, "Asperger's Diary"*

### Seek Out That Hidden Strength

Many years ago a diminutive little man walked up to me after one of my presentations in Oakmont, grabbed my hands, hugged them to his chest, and announced that his name was "Harry! And I'm 95 years old!" and that "You MUST share what you're sharing with the whole wide world...because I know it works."

When I asked him how he knew, he became very quiet, and (with little tears forming his eyes) told that he was in the Dachau Concentration Camp during World War II. He survived with the help of others and through his own fierce will, optimism, and bravery. As he described the camps, I wondered whether I'd have the personal power to survive something so terrible.

I'll never forget the sense of relief his answer gave me: "Worrying about that question is futile. Don't even try to imagine how you'd handle the things that life may give you, because in the face of a crisis like that, you become someone else—someone with strength you couldn't even picture or imagine now."

I love what Henry Ford said one time. "Whether you believe you can or cannot do something, you are usually right!"