

How to Harness Resilience during the Pandemic

Understanding and coping with the impacts on us as individuals and with our families, friends, and the community

By Jan Kuhn
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I want to talk to you about our reactions to the events of the last few months. How many have experienced some anxiety, worry, fear, maybe even depression? Those are normal reactions to what we all have faced lately. As you probably have heard over the years, emotions are not good or bad. It is how we react to them.

For many of us, we felt we lost some of the control of our lives as we learned more about the virus and were told we needed to stay in our homes. Stores and restaurants were closed, and somewhere on the internet it was posted that paper products and some food items would be out of stock. This led to a frenzy that was contagious. In some cases, this led to the great toilet paper chase of 2020. Grabbing as many paper towels and rolls of toilet paper as possible was one way to feel somewhat in control by taking care of our families.



Each of us have been dealing in different ways with the virus, riots, protests, changing information, loss of money, and killer hornets. We all have different comfort levels and ways we deal with stress. Some of us have ventured out to stores, some of us have not left the house, and some have had to continue to go to work.

Whatever your comfort level, I want to talk with you about resilience. Resilience is the ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, threats, or significant sources of stress. There is good news here. In the past, it was believed that resilience was something you were either born with or not. Now we know that it can be learned. I want to explain how that can happen and to give you some tools to use.

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Mental Resilience Tools

There are many aspects of yourself that can be resilient. Let's take a look at the mental aspect. How can you be resilient in this regard? Keep your mind active with positive things.

Do crossword puzzles, Sudoku, or read a book. Let me take a sidetrack here. Nick Arnett, a firefighter/EMT out west, has conducted webinars and written several books on resilience. You can find [his books on Amazon](#) and [a resilience training video on YouTube](#).

Another thing you can do is to **take a class online**. Something that you have an interest in like another language. Learn a language for fun or for use in a future trip. You can also **take yoga, meditation or Tai Chi classes** which are good exercise but also good for relaxation.

Don't focus on the news. It's good to stay current with what is happening, but don't binge watch. After the headlines, the news can be sensationalized so that may not be helpful in staying positive.

Set realistic goals for yourself each day. This may be as simple as cleaning the house or cooking something interesting. You may want to work on a project you have been wanting to do. Just make sure the goals are realistic for the day.

Practice mindfulness. This has been a real buzz word for a while now, but what it could mean for you is to focus on the moment. If we were together, I would be asking you to close your eyes and would be passing around an item that I would want you to identify by its touch or feel or smell. This causes you to focus on that item for that moment and let go of everything else.

Put worry in its place. If you are finding it difficult not to worry about what is happening around us, **set a time of day that you will worry.** For example: "I will worry at 4:00 for 20 minutes." If you find yourself worrying at other times of the day, say firmly "I will not worry until 4:00." Then when 4:00 comes, worry like crazy for 20 minutes. Then force yourself to stop.



You can also create a God Box or a Worry Box. I use the term God, but it can be adapted to any religion or spiritual belief. Write down each of your worries on separate pieces of paper and place them in the Box, turning your worries over to God or the Worry Box.

Everytime you find
some humor in a
difficult situation,
you win

Find humor. No matter how bad things can get, find some humor in your life. Many funny things can happen in the course of a day. Allow yourself to laugh. It is great for building resilience.

Accept change. This is difficult for all of us, but at this point, we all know that some things are going to change when this is all over. We don't know how many or what changes there will be but accept that things will be different in some way.

Reach out to other people who have the same interests as you on Facebook or in groups. There are many groups in Lakewood Ranch, and most likely they are finding a way to meet online.

Physical Resilience Tools

Another aspect of us is our **physical body.** How can you build resilience in your body? By keeping it healthy. **Exercise or at least move every 20 minutes or so.** If you are uncomfortable going to the gym, walk around your neighborhood. You can take a mask with you in case you encounter someone. It has been my experience and I have heard from many others, that if you do encounter someone on your walk, they have a tendency to give you wide berth like you give them.

Don't stay in your pajamas all day. Take a shower and get dressed every day. Try to keep a schedule as close as possible to what you did before the virus.

Try not to snack throughout the day. **Eat healthy, but treat yourself from time to time.** I believe many of us were using comfort food in March and April to sooth our nerves. However, now is the time we need to get back to healthy eating habits.

One way to stay healthy is to **keep up with doctors' appointments.** Check ups are important. Doctors' offices I have seen are taking great precautions to keep patients safe. If you absolutely do not feel safe leaving your house, most doctors will do tele-health on your phone or computer. Please utilize that service to stay in touch with your doctor(s). Ignoring an issue because of fear of the virus could lead to a serious condition.

Spiritual Resilience Tools

Your spiritual self needs attention. This can include religion for some folks. If that is true for you, practice your faith even if it is a service on television. Praying to a power higher than ourselves can be important and soothing for some folks. But spirituality is more than that. It is what sparks your motivation to do the things that you love. What feeds your spirit?

Spiritual resilience is what sparks your motivation to do the things that you love

We have **talked about some things like walking, reading, movies, games.** Maybe you like **dancing.** Put music on and dance with your family or significant other or your dog or just dance by yourself.

If nature is comforting to you, get out in nature. For some, this might mean just getting out by the pool or in the yard. For others, you may feel comfortable driving somewhere where you can walk in nature. There are many trails in Lakewood Ranch that may be appealing to you.

Some folks have been zooming with friends and family. I have heard of some people having their book club, happy hour or even meals with those they love on their computer.

Feel and express gratitude. No matter how much you may have been affected by all these events, you have much to be grateful for. You woke up this morning. You live in a beautiful area. You have food to eat. Find things that you can put on your gratitude list every day.

Interpersonal Resilience Tools

Resilience can be built by helping others. **Volunteer at the food bank or somewhere important to you.** If you do not feel comfortable leaving your home, you can call people and check on them, particularly people who live alone. We talked about zoom meetings, try that out. The fact that you are here tonight indicates that you can master this new ability.



Find a purpose in your life. That is so important. We stress out the things we care about and caring creates resilience. Caring for others, people or furry friends can help you build your resilience. Remember when we had pet rocks? You may find other unusual things to care for that will lift your spirit.

When to seek help

Isolation and uncertainty can lead to despair. If you or someone you know is not able to deal with everything that is happening, seek help. How do you know if you have reached the level of needing someone to talk to? If your concerns are significantly interfering with your daily life, get help. You are not eating, sleeping or associating in some way with others, get help. If you are drinking too much or relying on meds to sleep or to just get by, get help. If life seems to be so overwhelming that none of the suggestions I have made will help, you have lost hope, or you are too exhausted to try, get help.

You can go online to [Psychology Today](https://www.psychologytoday.com) and find many therapists listed there. Therapy can be done online or by phone. If you are unsure who to call, please feel free to reach out to me for suggestions.

So what does all this mean for our future?

We may see some negative effects ongoing after the pandemic is over. Addiction, depression, anxiety, and also some folks may choose isolation to returning back to more interpersonal interactions.

But we cannot allow the events we have talked about to define us. We are not the fear and the worry and the virus and the crazy world we live in. But we can use it all to mold us into someone stronger and ready to adapt to whatever the world will look like.

Have you heard the story about the little girl who goes to the beach with her dad and sees hundreds of sand dollars that have washed up? She picks one up and puts it gently back in the ocean. Her father says, "Honey you can't save all of them." She says, "No but I can save this one."

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Start small. Begin with yourself. Try the things I have mentioned or something else that feeds your spirit. Maybe then move on to your community. As you feel comfortable, get actively involved in LWR CERT or some other group. We can be strong again, and I firmly believe we will.

Please stay safe and well.



Jan Kuhn is a licensed clinical social worker and currently serves as Vice President of LWR CERT. A LWR CERT member since 2009, Jan holds a bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Social and a master's degree in Social Work from the University of South Florida. With nearly 30 years in the field, Jan spent the last 21 years working in a psychiatric hospital at Sarasota Memorial as a Clinical Supervisor where she supervised people and programs in

both inpatient and outpatient. Jan has served on COAD committees specifically planning for the needs of the mentally ill in case of a hurricane or other disaster. She also spent many years on a committee that ran a local Veteran's Homeless "Standdown" which offers homeless veterans many services, all in one place, on a specific day.