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Strengths-Based Resilience Workbook



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Introduction

Stressors and setbacks are inevitable in our contemporary world, where we face global pandemics, a climate crisis, racial injustice, and social inequities. In the 21st century, despite many in the world having more material goods, living longer, and enjoying unprecedented freedom, psychological well-being has deteriorated steadily. This contemporary paradox presents challenges and opportunities to intervene through programs in education, healthcare, and community settings.

The Strengths-Based Resilience (SBR) program was created to promote mental health and well-being among adolescents and young adults. Still, it is suitable for anyone wanting to cultivate resilience and well-being. Our goal in creating SBR was very focused. Rather than primarily targeting symptoms and stressors, we want you to tap into your strengths to build your resilience. We want to equip you with skills that enable you to use your strengths to adapt to and recover from challenges, setbacks, and adversities. We hope to help you cultivate an approach to life that involves appreciating and applying your strengths, which will help you build close connections with others and experience deep meaning, purpose, and joy.

We developed the SBR program before the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic altered life around the world, taking already increasing rates of reported poor mental health to even higher levels (Rashid et al., 2014). The pandemic may have caused disruptions in your learning, work, leisure activities, friendships, and household dynamics. These challenges may have been tougher for some, especially for those who were struggling with symptoms of depression, anxiety, or other mental health difficulties prepandemic. In this post-pandemic era that has introduced hybrid work and learning arrangements, people need resilience more than ever to navigate uncertainty and new ways of learning, working, and socializing. The path to resilience in the following pages unfolds over 14 modules. It invites your full-bodied engagement.

The SBR workbook takes you, the participant, through a comprehensive program to learn resilience in a structured manner. It supports you in countering common self-defeating beliefs and patterns and teaches you techniques that over time build a strong foundation for well-being. It helps you identify and manage daily stressors and emotional reactions while at the same time taking optimal advantage of resources – both your own psychosocial resources as well as supports in the community.

This workbook includes all the content you need to complete the Strengths-Based Resilience Program independently or as part of a group. This Workbook is divided into two sections: Section 1 covers the regular practices of mindfulness and relaxation that you do at the beginning and end of each Module, as well as the daily regular practice of maintaining a gratitude journal. Regular practice of mindfulness and relaxation hone your ability to focus your concentration and manage stress. Maintaining a gratitude journal builds the habit of clarifying and prioritizing what's working well in your life.

Section II covers the 14 modules of the Strengths-Based Resilience Program. As mentioned, each module begins and ends with a brief mindfulness or relaxation practice to hone your ability to focus your concentration and manage stress. Through video illustrations, personal reflection, and practical activities, you will anchor your understanding of each module's topics and their relevance to your well-being. You will also build associated self-regulation skills to cope with challenging situations. Each module also lists ways you can use associated strategies in your everyday life and concludes with a resource section in case you want to explore the topics further.

After exploring definitions and illustrations of resilience, the first module of the program, *Module 1: Resilience*, encourages you to recall and write a personalized narrative of resilience. The aim is to define what resilience means to you by reminding yourself of times in your life when you were resilient.

The next three modules, *Module 2: Fixed and Growth Mindsets*, *Module 3: Cognitive Accuracy*, and *Module 4: Cognitive Flexibility* focus on skills for appraising and processing negative experiences in a realistic and flexible manner. The goal of these modules is to improve your mental clarity and increase self-awareness about negativity bias – a common tendency to give negative events and experiences more weight and importance than positive ones.

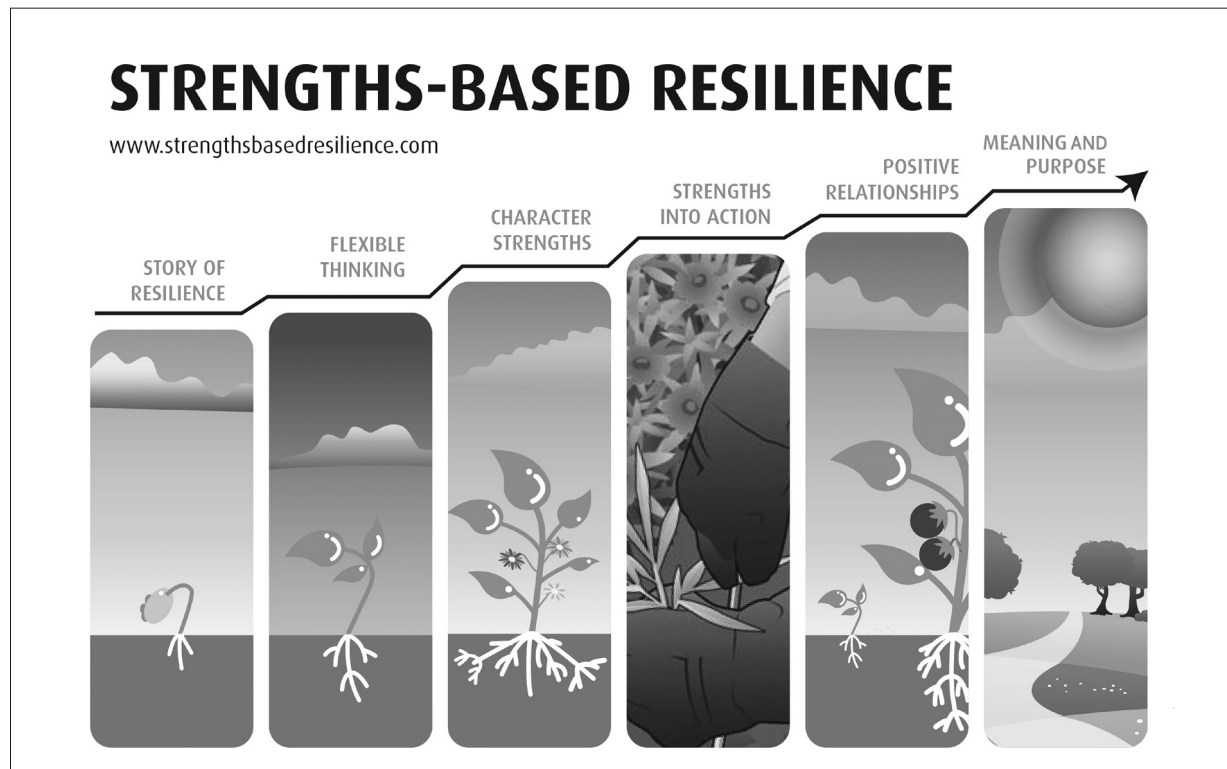
Modules 5: *Character Strengths*, 6: *Signature Strengths*, and 7: *Problem Solving and Strengths* invite you to acknowledge, assess, and express your highest strengths. You will incorporate multiple perspectives, including those of family members, teachers/colleagues, and friends/peers, resulting in a coherent understanding of your strengths. You can then learn to use these strengths in context-specific, goal-directed, and positive ways which are beneficial to you and others.

Modules 8: *Grudge and Gratitude*, 9: *Empathy*, and 10: *Slowness and Savoring* build essential intra- and interpersonal skills, i.e., those that strengthen your relationship with yourself and others. These modules invite you to pay closer attention to both positive and negative reactions you experience. They also encourage the value of being mindful of reactions to present experiences and how these might be impacted by the past.

Modules 11: *Positive Relationships*, 12: *Positive Communication*, and 13: *Altruism* continue to focus on cultivating healthy interpersonal and community connections. In the final module, 14: *Meaning and Purpose*, you will review your story of resilience, which you wrote in the first module. You will then incorporate learning from the program to write a story about your future self.

We hope that as a result of your active engagement in completing the SBR program, you will be able to balance your stressors and strengths in a personalized and meaningful way. You will gain a greater understanding of yourself and your relationships with others. You will cultivate skills to turn this understanding into beliefs, habits, and actions that enable you to become an architect of your resilience and well-being.

The infographic below shows six learning themes.



- Through writing a Story of Resilience in Module 1 that examines a past experience, participants understand the roots of their own resilience.
- Flexible thinking is introduced in Modules 2, 3, and 4 through exercises in cognitive accuracy and flexibility. These activities open our mind to alternative perspectives and build cognitive muscles to combat negativity bias.
- Tuning into our Character Strengths - introduced in Module 5 and further discussed in Module 6: Signature Strengths – nurtures the blossoming of our natural or inbuilt capacities and talents, strengthening our personality’s foundation to cope with and adapt to change and setbacks.

- The Strengths into Action theme (Modules 7–10) invites us to apply our strengths in solving every day problems optimally, whereby we “weed out” negative habits that diminish our resilience, by cultivating gratitude, savoring, and empathy.
- We can then turn our attention in Modules 11–13 to the theme of seeding Positive Relationships through activities that enable us to celebrate collective strengths within our families, circle of friends, and communities we serve.
- The theme of Meaning and Purpose in Module 14 invites us to envision a path for our future that gives a sense of direction to our life and serves the common good.

There are downloadable materials available for purchasers of the book, and these are highlighted with a download symbol in the modules. You will find details on how to access these in the relevant modules and in the section Notes on Supplementary Materials on p. 171.

Section I: Regular Practice

Regular Practice 1: Mindfulness and Relaxation

Core Concepts of Mindfulness and Relaxation

- According to Jon Kabat-Zinn “simply put, mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness. It is cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment’s thought to. It is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based on our inner capacities for relaxation, paying attention, awareness, and insight.” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 2)
- Mindfulness offers us the opportunity to sustain moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, emotions, and behavior. According to Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn “mindfulness is a universal quality, a degree to which we can pay attention in our lives” (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997, p. 35). This allows us to be observant of specific events and the experiences associated with them. This can help us to understand our reactions to events and to observe patterns in our reactions. Some experiences make us sad, angry, anxious, or ambivalent and keep us stuck. Sometimes we act on these feelings without much awareness.
- Mindfulness helps us to become aware of our experiences without judging them. Through mindfulness, we also learn to identify our emotions without trying to change them. Thus, mindfulness helps us to foster the ability to learn to regulate our emotional reactions. We learn to respond to different situations in a more refined and sophisticated manner. In doing so, we create more mental space, without our emotions clouding our reactions. We also cultivate thoughts and a behavioral repertoire to react more adaptively and positively.
- Mindfulness also helps us to be more thoughtful and better reflect our deepest values – that is, becoming aware of specific emotions and experiences without judging allows us to think about what is most important to us and which experiences need a different response consistent with what we truly value. This process can create a healthier inner space between ourselves and troubling emotions, thoughts, and actions.