Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life

Building resilience

Facilitator’s guide

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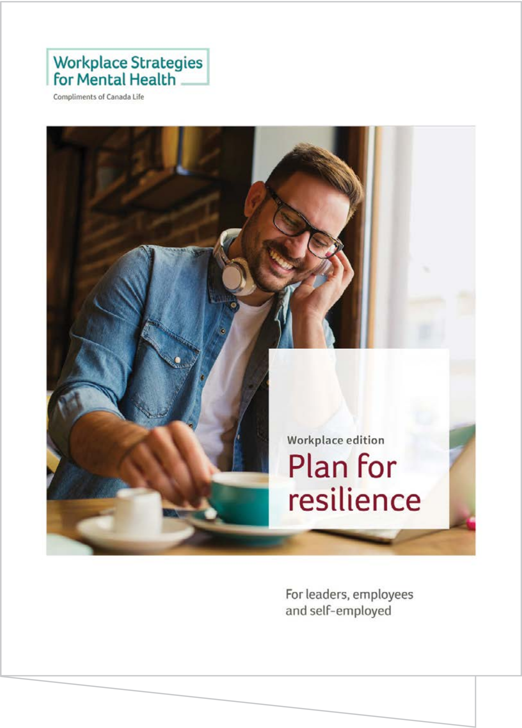
Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life

About this guide

This guide provides tips and suggested wording to facilitate **Plan for resilience** (for employees, leaders and the self-employed) and/or **From surviving to thriving** (for post-secondary students). The free, printable PDFs of each resource can be found in English and French at www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com.



Workplace Strategies for Mental Health
Compliments of Canada Life

Workplace edition
Plan for resilience

For leaders, employees and self-employed

Plan for resilience

For employees, leaders and the self-employed

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health
Compliments of Canada Life

From surviving to thriving

Developing personal and academic resilience

From surviving to thriving

For post-secondary students

Some points to note about the content

Suggested wording – this is wording you can you use to speak directly to the group.

Facilitator notes – these are tips and suggestions you may want to build into your session.

Preparing for the session

Initial contact to discuss a session

- Complete the Pre-planning worksheet in the Appendix to be prepared and organized for the session.

One month prior to session

- Connect with the organizer to review and confirm all session details in the Pre-planning worksheet and to get an update on the number of attendees.
- Ask the organizer to complete the Be aware of potential resources section for each resource you'll use and print one copy for each participant.
- Have the organizer appoint someone from the organization who's knowledgeable to review the list and answer any questions about it near the end of your planned session.
- Ask the organizer to print enough copies of Plan for resilience and/or From surviving to thriving for all participants.

2 weeks prior to session

- Connect with the organizer to ask them to send an email one week before the session asking each participant to complete the **www.viame.org** survey. See a sample email in the Pre-planning worksheet in the Appendix.
- Ensure there will be a projector and screen, microphone (if needed) and decide if you'll bring your laptop. If you'll use theirs, bring the presentation file on a USB or find a way to send it in advance.
- Review the evidence and Queen's study in the Appendix so you can respond to any questions about the validity of the tool.

2 days before session

- Check with the organizer that everything is set for the day of the session including:
  - Contact information for the person who'll be available to respond to any person in distress
  - The completed Be aware of potential resources form and someone ready to review
  - Enough printed copies of the relevant resources for every participant
  - A volunteer (or the organizer) to distribute the resources as participants arrive
  - Audio/visual equipment – projector, screen, microphone
  - A seating plan with tables for written work
  - Parking directions for any participants coming from outside the organization as well as parking instructions for you
  - A place and time to meet the organizer to set up on the day of your session
  - Any security requirements such as signing in or getting authorization
  - Wi-Fi username and password

One hour before the session – or whenever you can get into the room

- Set up your slide presentation with the title slide displayed on the screen
- Write the Wi-Fi username and password somewhere participants can see it
- Put the booklets on a registration table and ask the volunteer or organizer to distribute them to participants as they arrive; share the criteria from the slide Choose your option to help them decide which resource is most relevant
- Have the person at the registration table ask each participant if they've completed the www.viame.org survey. If they haven't, ask them to complete it before the session begins. The website and instruction will be on the slide on the screen. It will take about 15 minutes. It's not necessary to buy the full report to learn about their top strengths. This survey is part of a research project, so they'll need to provide personal information, including their name and email address for research purposes.

Suggested materials

- **Projector or monitor** – for the slide presentation from a laptop or USB
- **Cables and adapters** – if necessary for projection
- **Remote** – to control slides
- **Whiteboard or flipchart** – to record participant responses
- **Dry erase markers**
- **Sticky notes in medium and large sizes** – if available it can be easier to write responses on sticky notes at the tables and attach to a flipchart, whiteboard or the wall. Some sticky notes will have one sentence on them, but others will have more detail. You may use paper and pen or a flipchart if sticky notes aren't available.
- **Participant handout for each participant** – either digital or printed
- **Pens for participants**
- **Small stickers** – for voting at the end. You can also use pens to create checkmarks.
- Check out **virtual team discussions** in **Facilitating team discussions** for help facilitating this workshop online

Suggested agenda for the day

Choose from among these options based on the time you have available:

3 hours: This is the ideal time for the session when you want the participants to complete most or all the resources. It's recommended you include one or 2 stretch breaks.

2 hours: Go through the background slides (4 to 11) briefly and skip the Coping strategies planner and Be aware of resources. Ask participants to complete these sections on their own time. Be sure you leave enough time for participants to complete the sections where you'll identify commitments to yourself and others near the end of this resource.

One hour: You may want to skip the background slides (4 to 11) as well as Coping strategies planner and Be aware of resources. Briefly mention participants can complete these sections on their own time. Explain how to use the 4 A's and direct them to complete that section on their own time, too. Give as much time as possible for participants to complete the rest of the sections. Be sure to leave enough time for them to choose one of the commitments for themselves before wrapping up. This helps participants leave with a concrete action strategy to build resilience.

Slides 1-3 • 15 minutes

Welcome and introductions

- You're introduced by yourself or the organizer. Then, welcome the participants.
- You may skip introductions if you have many participants. If there's a small group of fewer than 12 or if the participants are in small groups you may ask them to give their name and the reason they chose to attend this session to those in their small group.
- See section in this guide called Starting the session.

Slides 4-11 • 20 minutes

Briefly describe:

- Resilience
- Burnout
- Trauma
- Conflict or bullying
- Common elements that break us down
- Common elements that help build resilience
- Post-traumatic growth

Slide 12 • 10 minutes

(5 minutes to explain and wrap up; up to 5 minutes for workbook activity)

- Identify automatic responses to stress

Slide 13 • 10 minutes

(5 minutes to explain and wrap up; up to 5 minutes for workbook activity)

- Identify healthier responses to stress

Slide 14 • 10 minutes

(5 minutes to explain and wrap up; up to 5 minutes to complete activity)

- Recognize and explore your stressor

Slide 15-19 • Up to 3 minutes per slide

- Describing the 4 A's – accept, avoid, alter and adapt

Slide 20 • 5 minutes

- Apply the 4 A's to the one stressor they previously identified

Stretch break – 10 minutes

Slide 21 • 10 minutes

(5 minutes to explain and wrap up; 5 minutes for workbook activity)

- Balancing your support network

Slide 22 • 10 minutes

(5 minutes to explain and 5 minutes to complete the exercise)

- Identify top 3 strengths and how to use them in different situations

Slide 23 • 6 minutes

(3 minutes to explain and 3 minutes to complete)

- Describe work resilience

Slide 24 • 10 minutes

Briefly describe the different options and ask each person to identify a commitment they'll make to themselves for building resilience and the person who'll hold them accountable after 3 weeks

Slide 25 • 4 minutes

Talk to the group about the Coping strategies planner and how they can post it somewhere they'll see it daily

Stretch break – 15 minutes (tell participants it's 10 minutes)

Slide 26 • 5 minutes

Talk about the resources available to the participants. Invite the person assigned by the organizer to come up and talk to the group about what is available, or if you obtained this information in advance, you can review the list with everyone

Slide 27 • 3 minutes

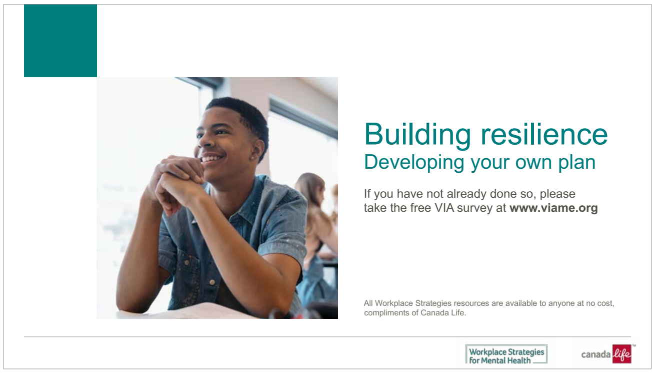
Talk to the group about the resources available to them on the Workplace Strategies for Mental Health website

Slide 28 • 10 minutes

- Give time for questions or comments
- Make closing comments

Total time: about 3 hours

Slide 1 15 minutes



Building resilience

Developing your own plan

If you have not already done so, please take the free VIA survey at **www.viame.org**

All Workplace Strategies resources are available to anyone at no cost, compliments of Canada Life.

Starting the session

Determine beforehand if the organizer is doing the welcome (including acknowledgement of territorial lands) or if you prefer to do it yourself.

The following is sample acknowledgement wording for Winnipeg and Toronto with a link to many more territories.

Acknowledgement of territorial lands

[In Winnipeg]

We're pleased to host you on original lands of Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. We respect the treaties made on these territories. We acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past. And, we dedicate ourselves to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

[In Toronto]

We acknowledge the land we're meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

[To look up other locations]

www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory

Suggested welcome wording

I'd like to welcome you all here today and thank **[name of organization]** for supporting this session to help to improve the quality of your life by building resilience.

My name is _____ and I'd like to acknowledge (the organizer, assigned counselor or other representative in the room) who have/has been instrumental in making this session happen.

We'll spend a little time exploring how you currently respond to stress, to consider other options, and to help you choose strategies that can make it easier to bounce back from whatever life throws at you.

Here are a few housekeeping items before we begin:

- We'll take breaks at…
- We'll break for lunch from… (if applicable)
- We'll end by…
- The washrooms are located…
- In the unlikely event of an emergency, exits are located at…
- Feel free to ask questions at any time throughout the presentation

Before we start, I want to remind you that later in the session we'll be working with your top 3 strengths. If you haven't already completed the Via Survey, please copy down the URL here so you can do it at break. If you can't do that, have a look in the Appendix and choose what you think are your top 3 strengths from the list.

Any questions before we get started?

Facilitator notes

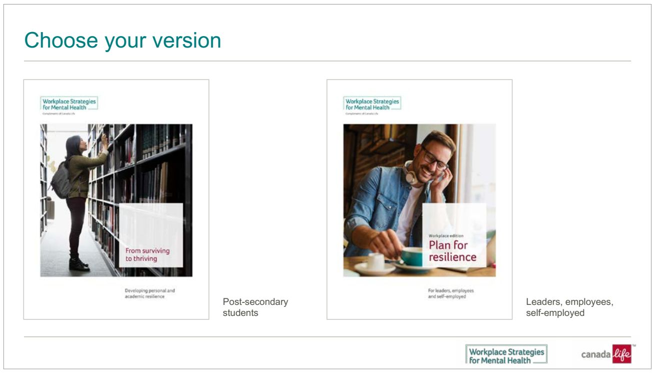
After the introductions, you may want to start with a story – perhaps one where you know of someone (including yourself) who bounced back after adversity. Explain that the core purpose of this resource is to prevent unnecessary suffering by helping us recover from whatever life throws at us. Remember to avoid mentioning suicide when presenting unless responding to a direct question.

Instruct the participants with this suggested wording

During this session I ask that you to keep what you're writing confidential. This is meant to be a time of self-reflection. Some of you'll be reflecting on personal information you're not yet ready to share. To create a safe space where everyone can be honest with themselves, we ask that you share only if you want to after the session is over.

Notes

Slide 2 15 minutes


Workplace Strategies for Mental Health
From surviving to thriving
Developing personal and academic resilience
Workplace Strategies for Mental Health
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Plan for resilience
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Choose your version

Post-secondary students

Leaders, employees, self-employed

Choose your version

Facilitator notes

This slide may not be required if everyone in your session is using the same resource, but you can use this opportunity to tell them another version is available.

Suggested wording

Both versions are very similar in nature. But there are language and examples specific to the intended user, whether students or employees. You should have selected a workbook at the registration table that's most relevant to you.

Just to check:

- If you're under the age of 20 or if you're full-time student, From surviving to thriving is likely more relevant
- If you're working or over the age of 30, Planning for resilience is probably more relevant
- If you're between the ages of 20 and 30 and not a full-time student – you can choose the one that feels best for you

If at any point you'd like the other workbook instead of the one you chose, please put up your hand and we'll arrange to get you the other version.

Notes

Slide 3 15 minutes

This is **not** a medical or crisis intervention tool

It is for building resilience when well enough to do so

This isn’t a medical or crisis intervention tool

Facilitator notes

Please provide a text, phone or location of someone available throughout this session who can help those who need assistance or support. Important distinction – this is not therapy or a medical intervention. If anyone’s in crisis now or very unwell, our suggestion is to direct them to their treating professional to complete together when they’re well enough to do so.

Suggested wording

This session and the resources we’re using aren’t for anyone who’s currently experiencing significant emotional distress. It’s intended to explore how you cope with stress now and help you choose strategies to build resilience going forward.

You’re more than welcome to take part in this session, but it’s not fair to expect yourself to develop healthier coping strategies when you’re struggling to get through the day. It’s like asking you to develop new math skills during a math exam. It’s not great for your stress levels! So, if this is your situation, relax and take from this whatever resonates with you.

On the other hand, we also have someone who’s available for you to talk to if you wish. _________ [**name of support person given to you by the organizer**] is available to talk to you for up to 20 minutes after our session ends. You can contact them by _________ [**Give phone, email, text and/or office location**].

Suggested wording if someone questions the validity of the tool

Plan for resilience was informed by a literature review on resilience, burnout, trauma and emotional intelligence. The list is available online. From surviving to thriving built on that evidence by adding student-specific research, which is also on the list. In 2017 McMaster University ran a pilot and in 2018 Queen’s University evaluated the student version of the resource. The results of that study are also available online for anyone who’s interested. And, a copy of the evidence is also included in the Appendix of this guide.

Notes

Slide 4 **3 minutes**

Is resilience just
a way to blame
the victim?

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Is resilience just a way to blame the victim?

Suggested wording

Is resilience just a way to blame the victim?

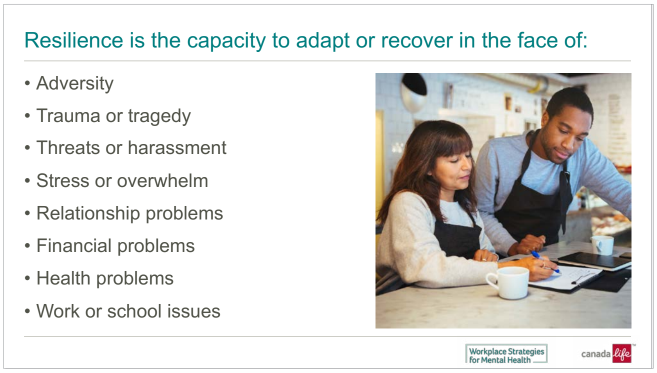
Some used to think so because of the way it was applied in some organizations.

For example: “We’ll continue to have a toxic relationship or workplace, or classroom and you need to become more resilient to put up with it.” This was sometimes said to people who were bullied, teased, humiliated or pressured with unreasonable demands. The message was, “You need to suck it up or toughen up. You need to be more resilient and less sensitive.”

In other words – let’s blame the victim. But those who used this approach may have missed the real point of resilience.

Notes

Slide 5 **3 minutes**



Resilience is the capacity to adapt or recover in the face of:

- Adversity
- Trauma or tragedy
- Threats or harassment
- Stress or overwhelm
- Relationship problems
- Financial problems
- Health problems
- Work or school issues

Resilience is the capacity to adapt or recover

Suggested wording

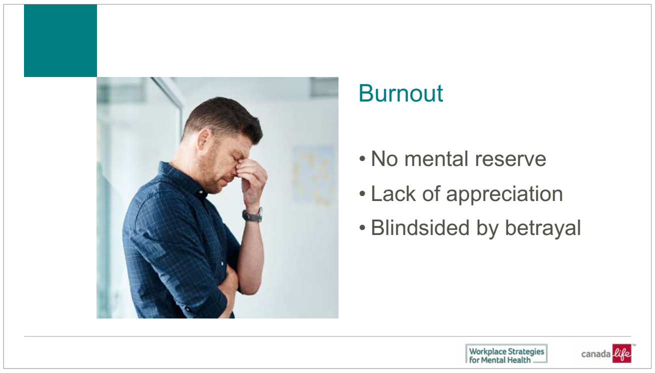
Many of these things are part of life. We won’t be able to avoid them all. So, rather than see resilience as blaming the victim, begin to see it as empowering the person. Resilience empowers the individual – you can’t always choose what happens to you but you can choose the response.

Resilience isn’t going to help you avoid stress – it does help you recover from it. Life is a series of events where we make choices and decisions about our quality of life and well-being. Resilience helps us choose positively rather than negatively. There’s no doubt we’ll suffer loss and trauma. Resilience allows us to feel it, experience it and move beyond it.

Regardless of your life circumstances or your workplace, building your own resilience will allow you to have a better quality of life. You deserve that.

Notes

Slide 6 3 minutes



Burnout

- No mental reserve
- Lack of appreciation
- Blindsided by betrayal

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Burnout

Suggested wording

As we reviewed the research around resilience, we understood it could also help prevent burnout, which can be characterized as reduced mental, physical and emotional energy.

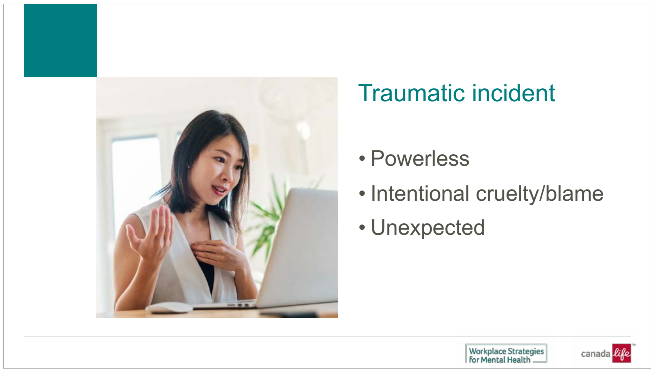
In hearing the stories of those who experienced burnout, certain patterns became evident:

- Many individuals didn’t have good personal boundaries and/or were overachievers.
- Many people who burned out were literally, burning the candle at both ends by constantly over extending themselves.
- Most felt they were neither recognized nor appreciated for their efforts.
- Those closest to them may have resented the energy they spent on work or other activities that didn’t include them. This can lead to the added stress and strain of conflict in personal relationships.

Therefore, at some point they had no reserve of energy to deal with even a moderate challenge or obstacle. In fact, many people who burned out had continually pushed their limits for years or even decades. This led them to believe they could continue at this pace indefinitely. The crash point often came when they felt blindsided by what feels like a betrayal or someone questioning their integrity. When you’ve worked, trained or studied hard for so long, this becomes part of your identity. Having your effort questioned can be devastating at a time when you have no energy reserve.

Notes

Slide 7 3 minutes



Traumatic incident

- Powerless
- Intentional cruelty/blame
- Unexpected

Traumatic incident

Facilitator notes

Include a story if possible. Example:

A soldier was asked why he thinks every soldier doesn't have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He believed soldiers who go into war expecting to be a hero were more likely to end up with PTSD. This is because their expectations were different than someone who knows in advance their job of fighting, killing and engaging in war may compromise their values. The difference is they understand and plan for conflict of emotions and expect bad things will happen to good people. This managing of expectations can allow them to put the incident in perspective when it happens.

Suggested wording

We then looked at research related to who's more likely to experience PTSD.
It explored why some people seem able to face horrific trauma and bounce back.

You guessed it – having skills related to resilience was a big factor.

Those who become disabled with PTSD – or overwhelming anxiety after exposure to a traumatic incident – often report feeling powerless in the moment. It gets worse when they perceive someone was intentionally cruel by causing the trauma. This may lead to the unsettling fear that intentional cruelty is everywhere.

Another common experience for those experiencing PTSD is being blamed – either directly for the traumatic incident or indirectly through a poorly worded question such as: "Why didn't you do this or that?"

The impact of this blame can be devastating if internalized. An example might be a paramedic who's used to seeing trauma but wasn't prepared for an accident scene where they couldn't save a child – especially if they reminded the paramedic of their own child. If upon return to the station they're asked why they didn't follow standard operating procedure, they may internalize that as blame. However, the question might be part of a standard debrief and the answer may reveal they did everything to the best of their ability in the situation.

Notes

Slide 8 3 minutes

Conflict or bullying

- Assumptions
- Cruelty
- Misperceptions

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Conflict or bullying

Suggested wording

We also looked at the many people who are shaken to the core by conflict, a breakup or bullying. Some are so affected by this situation they're off work or miss classes due to stress-related illness.

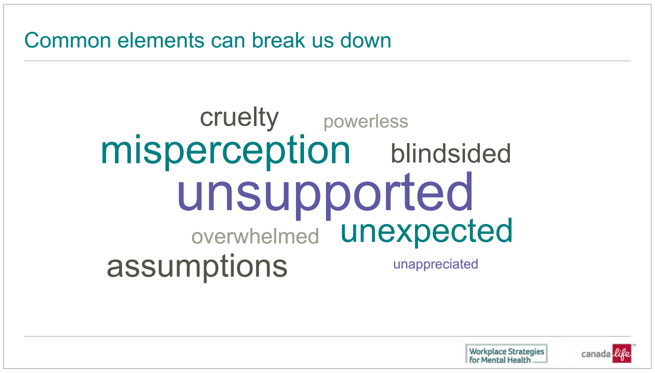
We know most bullying claims are denied. This is confirmed by WorkSafeBC, who cover some claims for bullying. This is also verified by Workers Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB in Ontario), who cover some claims for chronic mental stress at work.

This is because even though the situation was so unbearable that a claim was filed, they couldn't confirm the actions of the accused were the main or only reason for the onset of a mental health condition. Or, the motives of the accused may not be clear. In any case, this denial of claim can leave both the accused and the accuser without a healthy resolution.

What might have changed this negative outcome for these claimants? Learning how to resolve conflict successfully and/or to reduce the negative impact on yourself is also related to the skills that contribute to resilience.

Notes

Slide 9 **3 minutes**



Common elements can break us down

cruelty
powerless
misperception
blindsided
unsupported
overwhelmed
unexpected
assumptions
unappreciated

Common elements that can break us down

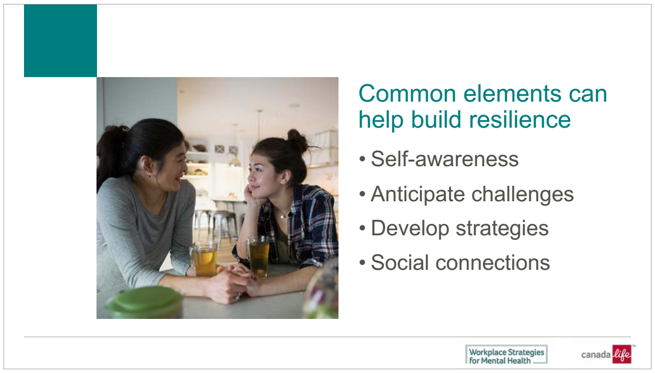
Suggested wording

When we put all the negative elements of burnout, trauma and conflict together, we can see their commonalities.

And we can see how these things have the potential to break any of us down over time – especially if we're already vulnerable due to health, family, financial, work or school pressures.

Notes

Slide 10 **3 minutes**



Common elements can help build resilience

- Self-awareness
- Anticipate challenges
- Develop strategies
- Social connections

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Common elements that can help build resilience

Suggested wording

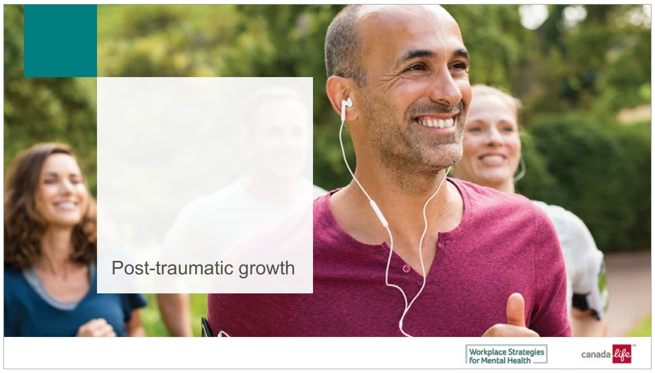
But there’s good news.

Resilience also has common elements that can be protective. We can learn and develop resilience to help us bounce back from most, if not all, these things.

Resilience won’t prevent us from being exposed to stress, conflict or trauma – but it can help us recover faster and with less emotional or physical damage.

Notes

Slide 11 3 minutes



Post-traumatic growth

Post-traumatic growth

Suggested wording

You’ve likely heard about post-traumatic stress disorder, but how many have heard about post-traumatic growth? People don’t talk about it much, but it’s part of the end goal of resilience.

I bet you’ve seen it – that person who seems to have dealt with extraordinary loss or tragedy, yet still seems to embrace and be grateful and joyful for their lives. **[Add an example here – Nelson Mandela was an example, but a locally-known average person is a better example if you have one. The average person is more relatable than a celebrity.]**

So, let’s build resilience. The objective isn’t to put up with toxic situations. We want to be able to move beyond those situations or at least prevent them from destroying our ability to enjoy life between the challenges. When you’re unfortunate enough to go through a horrible experience and can’t move beyond bitterness and anger, the pain stays with you long after the horrible experience is over. In fact, resilience can help you feel the pain more completely in the moment. Then, you can move more effectively beyond the pain when you’re healed. Resilience can help us to learn and grow from life’s challenges.

Facilitator notes

Include examples and/or stories where the person bounced back and moved forward with a better quality of life after a horrible experience:

Nelson Mandela while in prison maintained his belief in life. He knew he had value.

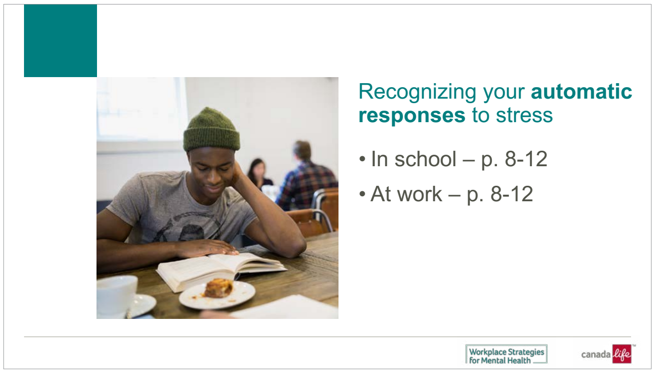
Mother Theresa – she continued to move forward even against the odds.

Yes, even Monica Lewinsky – she was an intern who had the Whitehouse affair with Bill Clinton. She was publicly shamed around the world. The point is this person suffered public humiliation, but she got through it with those people who supported her. It's not the magnitude of the trauma – it's the quantity of resilient skills employed afterwards.

Story about someone who lost 3 children but she was smiling and still going on. How do you recover from that? She said it would be a disservice to her children if she didn't go on and that she needed to make a difference in the world for them.

Notes

Slide 12 10 minutes



Recognizing your **automatic responses** to stress

- In school – p. 8-12
- At work – p. 8-12

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Recognizing your automatic responses to stress

Facilitator notes

This workbook exercise should take about 10 minutes: 5 minutes to discuss and wrap up; 5 minutes for the participants to complete the workbook exercise.

Suggested wording

Next, we're going to have you open your workbook to the page entitled Recognizing your automatic responses to stress.

You'll begin completing it based on your own situation, but before you begin:

- **Unless instructed to do so, please don't share your answers.** It's purposefully meant to give you time for quiet and private reflection about you!
- Of course, you can share whatever you wish with whoever you wish when we're done. During the session some people will want to keep theirs private, so we want to respect that. We'll have time to share and talk about strategies later.
- Think about this exercise as reflection and journaling. This helps increase your self-awareness.

I have a brief story about a friend who was breaking out in hives but didn't know why. The allergist said it was due to stress and asked her where and when it would occur. She said it was usually in the evenings at home. It turns out the hives were the result of relationship issues. She eventually left the situation and no longer gets hives.

This person was able to manage and avoid her stressors by identifying both the cause and effect. Whatever your automatic responses to stress might be, if you can recognize them as soon as they occur, you can act and reduce the negative impact of prolonged stress.

Please note it's important to rule out any underlying physical problem before you assume a response is purely related to stress. Get any identified responses checked out by a doctor.

[**Walk the group through Why this matters instructions in their workbook.**]

Why this matters (content taken directly from the Plan for resilience workbook)

- For most of us, stress is a daily occurrence. Often, our responses to stress are automatic. This means we don't choose them or plan them. However, if we can identify some of our immediate responses to stress, we're more likely to recognize and address them before they create a major life or health concern. Most of us will have automatic physical responses and changes in our behaviours and emotions.
- **Always eliminate the possibility that any of your responses may indicate an unrelated or underlying health issue you should have checked by your doctor.** Once you know it's stress related only, you can use that information to help identify the source of stress earlier and make changes sooner.
- **Understanding the automatic stress responses of others can be important information for us, as well.** When we recognize a stress response in others, we're less likely to take their behaviour personally. When we recognize the response as their defence mechanism to deal with their stress, we're less likely to feel the need to defend ourselves. In fact, we may be able to help them deal with it. For example, you may have a friend who needs personal space, or they become agitated. Once you know that, you can see the agitation and step back to give them space or help them move to a better location.

Instructions

- Read each of the responses and potential impacts on the following pages. Check off your usual responses when you're experiencing stress and think about the responses you may have seen with others. It may be in the first moment of stress or after prolonged or chronic exposure.
- The following categories include physical, emotional and behavioural responses. If you have a response that isn't listed, please add it under the heading "Other."

Suggested wording – wrap up

You may have noticed:

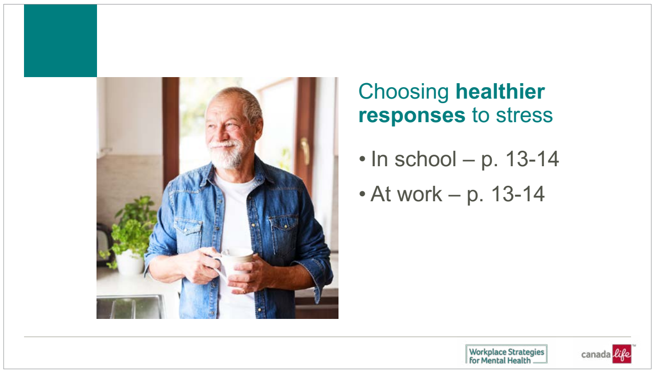
- Identify your potential physical, behavioural and emotional responses to stress before they happen so you're better able to recognize when you're having a stress response.
- Then, you can reach out for help earlier. This may lessen the negative impact of stress on your work and health.
  - You may also have noticed some of these automatic responses are things other people do that you may have attributed to their personality or character. In fact, it may be a stress response for them. Often, we assume this person is simply always negative, agitated or withdrawn. Instead, look at problematic behaviour in others and wonder if there's something more going on with that person.

Part of what we'll learn is what we can do about our stressors. If we're in this stress response for days, weeks or even years, burnout and other illnesses are more likely to come into play. All sorts of illnesses are exacerbated by stress.

For more information and resources related to the stress response you can go to the link at the bottom of page: **www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/lifestyles/your-health-mental-health-coping-stress-health-canada-2008.html**

Notes

Slide 13 10 minutes



Choosing **healthier responses** to stress

- In school – p. 13-14
- At work – p. 13-14

Choosing healthier responses to stress

Facilitator notes

This workbook exercise should take about 10 minutes: 5 minutes to explain and wrap up; up to 5 minutes for the workbook activity.

If people are sitting in small groups, they could take a few minutes to share the responses that work best for them. This allows them to learn from others. You can ask people to share with one or 2 people who are sitting near them. This will depend on whether everyone has someone seated next to them. If it's challenging to do, skip the discussion part of this exercise.

Suggested wording

We're now going to complete the section Choosing healthier responses to stress.

Even after we've identified them, we'll have automatic and involuntary responses to stress. But we can choose healthier responses to help prevent stress and to reduce stress once it's happened. Go through the list, choose what you already know works for you and circle those you might want to try out. These aren't crisis responses – they're responses that can help you over time or to deal with stress in the moment.

[Walk the group through the Why this matters instructions in their workbook.]

Why this matters (content taken directly from the Plan for Resilience workbook)

- There are many strategies that can help reduce the negative impact of stressors. The following list includes potential strategies to help prevent or manage stress. Many are evidence-based approaches, such as mindfulness, practicing gratitude and deep breathing. Others are practice-based approaches shared by those who used them successfully to manage their own life stressors.
- Not all these strategies will work for everyone. In fact, some may cause you stress because they aren't calming or enjoyable to you. Others may have neither a positive nor a negative impact.

Instructions

- Check off the strategies below that work for you.
- Put a checkmark by the strategies you think might be helpful and that you're willing to try. Pick some key ones for you – many strategies may look interesting but focus on those you feel you'll have time to work on.
- When you're done, share with the people at your table the ones you already use successfully and learn the strategies that have worked for them.

Suggested wording – wrap up

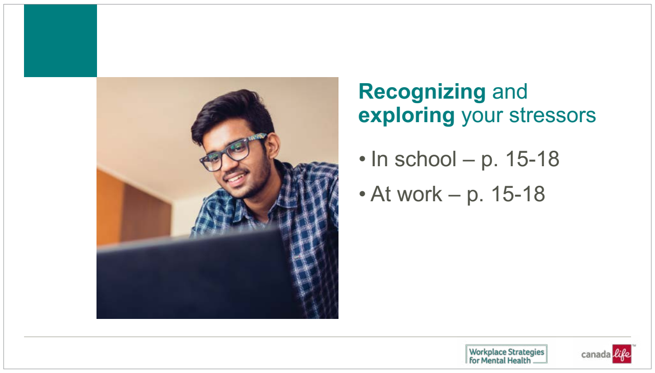
By including healthier responses into your regular activities, you not only help build resilience, you may be able to help alleviate stress in many different situations.

Challenge yourself to put some of these in play over the next few months to see if they help. If not, go back to the list to see if there are other strategies that might work.

Take your break offers healthy activities you can do alone or with others in 15 minutes or less in most settings. Check out the link at the bottom of the page: **www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/newsletter/Healthy-Break-Activities**

Notes

Slide 14 10 minutes



Recognizing and **exploring** your stressors

- In school – p. 15-18
- At work – p. 15-18

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

canada life

Recognizing and exploring your stressors

Facilitator notes

This workbook exercise should take about 10 minutes: 5 minutes to explain and wrap up; up to 5 minutes to complete activity.

This section needs to carefully be set up and debriefed. Please include the intent of the following wording, even if you say it in your own style. Also remind everyone at the end that the occupational health nurse or counselor is available to anyone who might be feeling overwhelmed.

Suggested wording

Next, we'll be looking at the section Recognizing and exploring your stressors.

Why this matters

- Resilience is the ability to bounce back after being blindsided or overwhelmed by adversity. One way we can improve our ability to bounce back is to be fully aware challenging and difficult events could happen to any of us at any time. Then, proactively consider how we might cope with them.
- This isn't intended to increase anxiety about what could go wrong, but to recognize that many people have experienced these life events and successfully moved forward with their lives.
- For example, most of us know individuals who've experienced serious illness, disability or loss and then bounced back to enjoy and appreciate life more than ever. We probably also know people who experienced a setback or disappointment many years ago and still experience anger or hurt about it every day. Our quality of life is directly affected by our ability to move forward from a crisis in a way that supports our own mental well-being.

Instructions

- The items listed on the following pages can be significant life stressors. They could happen to you or someone you care about.
- There may be times in life when we have many different stressors but are managing quite well. There may be other times when we only have one stressor but it's overwhelming. There's no ideal number of stressors and no right or wrong way to feel about them.
- Check any items you're dealing with now or know you will be in the near future.
- At the end, choose one of your stressors to explore further for potential solutions later in this session.

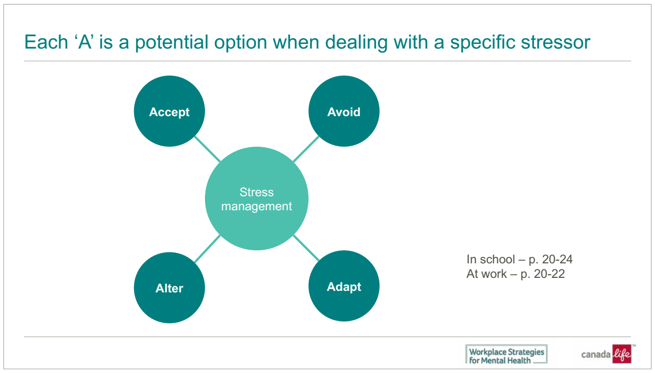
Complete right up to the end and then read the section titled Please don't compare your stressors to anyone else's. This isn't a competition – we don't win for having the most stressors. I want you to go through to identify them so they become issues you can address rather than a source of anxiety for you.

Suggested wording – wrap up

Life is very fluid and can change at any time. We want to build resiliency to cope with all of life's stressors, but this is a lifelong learning activity. We'll start with whatever's most relevant to you right now.

Notes

Slide 15 **3 minutes**


Each 'A' is a potential option when dealing with a specific stressor

Accept
Avoid
Stress management
Alter
Adapt

In school – p. 20-24
At work – p. 20-22

Description of the 4 A's

Facilitator notes

This slide should take about one minute. The next 4 slides that explain the concept more fully would take about 2 minutes each.

Suggested wording

We have choices when it comes to dealing with stress and adversity. These choices can usually be classified as one of the four A's:

- Accept
- Avoid
- Alter
- Or Adapt

The following is adapted from **https://wellness.uchicago.edu/healthy-living/health-information/stress/**.

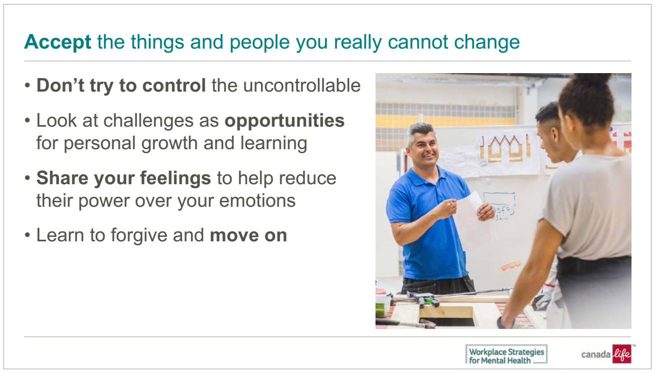
Some less helpful strategies might be problematic use of alcohol, cannabis or other substances like junk food or sugar. It can also include binge watching television or anything else that's not good for your well-being. These strategies can help distract us from whatever's causing the stress, but they rarely make things better and can often make things worse.

On the other hand, if you can step back at a time of stress and objectively consider potential approaches, you may gain perspective about what you can do.

We can use the 4 A’s shown here to help us do just that with any stressors we’ve identified. Each of them could potentially make things better or worse for you. The exercise is intended to help you identify options that could eliminate or significantly reduce your stress without causing other stressors.

Notes

Slide 16 3 minutes



Accept the things and people you really cannot change

- **Don't try to control** the uncontrollable
- Look at challenges as **opportunities** for personal growth and learning
- **Share your feelings** to help reduce their power over your emotions
- Learn to forgive and **move on**

Accept the things and people you really can't change

Suggested wording

[**Insert your story**] My friend wanted to be 20 pounds lighter. She used to beat herself up about it. At one point she decided to accept herself the way she was. If she really saw being thinner as important to her health or happiness, she would do something about it. But instead she wanted to focus on enjoying life. After she accepted herself as is, she stopped wasting energy on it.

Sometimes the best way to deal with a stressor is to accept it. As hard as it may be, accepting what's not possible to change in the moment – rather than desperately or hopelessly wishing it were different – allows you to manage your stress more effectively.

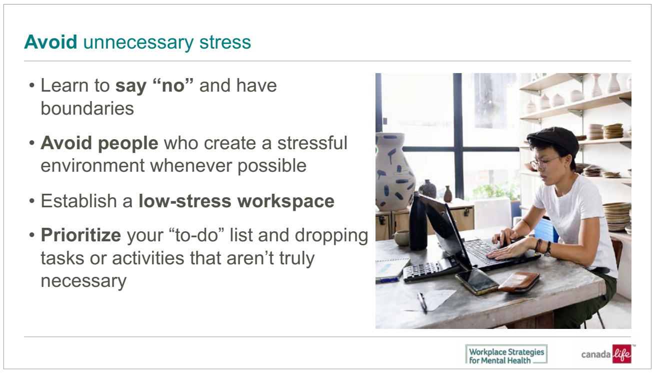
It can also help to see your ability to accept and rise above a challenge to learn and grow. So, you didn't get that special assignment you'd hoped for? What did you learn from the process of applying that you could you do differently the next time?

Talking about it helps. Simply telling someone you're not at your best is a way to start the conversation and reduce the hold your emotions might have on you.

For more on forgiving someone who has hurt you, check out the late Dr. Wayne Dyer's blog at the link provided: **www.drwaynedyer.com/blog/category/forgiveness/**

Notes

Slide 17 3 minutes



Avoid unnecessary stress

- Learn to **say “no”** and have boundaries
- **Avoid people** who create a stressful environment whenever possible
- Establish a **low-stress workspace**
- **Prioritize** your “to-do” list and dropping tasks or activities that aren’t truly necessary

Avoid unnecessary stress

Suggested wording

Some may think avoidance is never an effective way to deal with a stressor, but sometimes it may be the healthiest coping strategy. For example, if someone causes you significant anxiety, it might not be a bad idea to avoid that person. In another example, you’re a recovering alcoholic. You can reduce your stress by calling ahead to a hotel where you’re going to be staying and ask them to remove alcohol from the minibar in your room. Sure, you may be avoiding the temptation, but you’re also saving your willpower for things you can’t avoid.

Not all stress can be avoided. Any financial or health issues can get much worse if you avoid dealing with them. But when looking at the 4 A’s in relation to your stressors, don’t discount avoiding as an option.

Saying no to a potential stressor, like attending an event you really don’t want to go to, can be incredibly empowering. Consider how good you feel once you’ve made the decision not to do something that wasn’t serving you in some way.

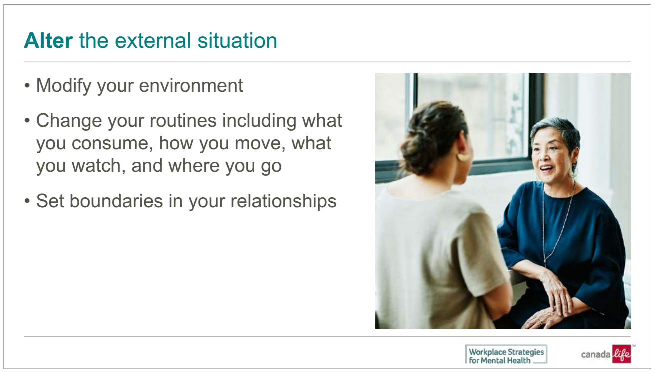
Avoiding is also about setting healthy boundaries for yourself. For example, you may decide to spend less or no time doing things, or hanging out with people, that are a constant drain on your energy.

Avoiding stress may also mean avoiding places that raise your stress level. One student found a corner in the highest floor of the library where almost no one ever went. She used this hiding place as a sanctuary whenever she had to focus on difficult tasks. The rest of the time she studied with her friends in a fun, noisy environment and loved it.

Write and stick to your to-do list. Make sure the tasks are what you really need to do and drop the rest. We often tell ourselves it's all important, but that's rarely true.

Notes

Slide 18 3 minutes



Alter the external situation

- Modify your environment
- Change your routines including what you consume, how you move, what you watch, and where you go
- Set boundaries in your relationships

Alter the external situation

Suggested wording

Look for ways to alter or change your external environment in some way so the stress is reduced or eliminated. Some examples include changing your daily routines like how you commute to work, what you eat or drink, activities or sports that you engage in, what you read, watch or listen to, and places you visit or hang out.

[Insert a story if you have one.]

You can alter how you operate in your home, work or study environments by clearing away unnecessary clutter. Then, do your best to surround yourself with neutral or positive things. For example, someone delivered a freezer chest to a friend's home and put it in her kitchen. She didn't want it there but couldn't move it herself. After realizing she was ticked off every day it was there, she decided to hire someone to move it. By altering this daily stressor, she was better able to cope with some of the more serious and difficult stressors in her life.

Another example of altering a situation is if you have road rage due to traffic congestion. Consider taking a different route. Even if it takes a bit longer, it could reduce your stress.

Tell people when a situation is causing you stress. Tell them what you need for it to be healthier for you. That may mean you need to close your office door or barricade the entrance to your cubicle for a while. Or maybe you need people to move their talking and socializing out of your hearing range, so you can focus and relax in your own way.

While many of us will continue to work around the clock, planning just five-minute breaks every hour can make a world of difference. Think about how you can plan and adapt your day to allow for this. Avoid getting sucked into time-wasting conversations or email trails.

Notes

Slide 19 3 minutes

Adapt your internal thought process

- **Reframe problems** as a desired solution ("I don't sleep enough" reframed as "I need to improve the quality of my sleep")
- **Consider potential consequences** of taking various actions — look at the big picture
- Set clear and reasonable expectations and standards for yourself

Adapt your internal thought process

Suggested wording

Adapting is about changing how you think about or interact with the source of stress, including when the source of stress is a person. This is an internal process rather than changing things in the external world.

[Insert a story if you have one.]

One example is stress about not being able to fall asleep. To alter the situation you could darken your room, have no electronics nearby, stop eating or watching screens for 3 hours before you go sleep. To adapt to the situation means that you change the way you think about – "I may not be able to fall asleep but I will relax and enjoy the quiet time so I am more rested in the morning." By changing the way we think about a stressor, we can reduce the stress it produces.

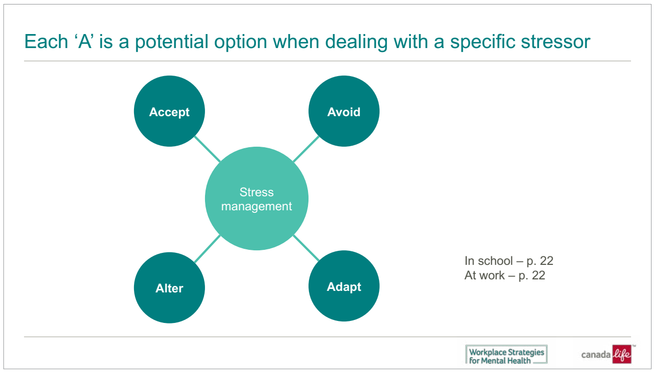
Adapting also means slowing down so that your automatic response – whether it is anger, fear, frustration or any other emotion – is challenged and replaced with thoughts that are more helpful in the situation. For example, if my stressor is that my loved one is dealing with a terminal illness, I might choose to think of ways to show my love and how much they are valued every day. It does not change the reality, but it does support actions and words that are more helpful in this situation.

Sometimes when we're stressed, we spring into action but fail to see that certain actions can create new stressors. For example, angrily confronting someone may seem reasonable when you're stressed by their words or actions. However, this action may ultimately break down the relationship in ways that are even more difficult to fix later. Ask how each of the 4 A's can make your stress better or worse.

Sometimes we need to adapt our own high standards or self-imposed demands. Lowering the bar to a more realistic level can have astonishing results. Keeping work or studying within reasonable daily limits can allow you to engage much more fully in the rest of your life, making you better at work and school.

Notes

Slide 20 5 minutes



Each ‘A’ is a potential option when dealing with a specific stressor

Stress management

Accept

Avoid

Alter

Adapt

In school – p. 22
At work – p. 22

Each ‘A’ is a potential option

Facilitator notes

This workbook exercise should take about 12 minutes.

Some possible questions you may get:

What’s the difference between alter and adapt? Adapt applies to you personally changing the way you interact with a stressor. Alter focuses more on changing the stressor.

For example, in relationships, you may alter the relationship by changing how often, when or where you meet. You can adapt to the relationship by modifying how you communicate or interact with the other person.

Here’s a quick of example of the difference between alter and adapt if the stressor is difficult communication with your parents. To alter the situation, you may prefer text, email or a phone call at specific times. You might say to your parents: “I’m working really hard right now and need to focus during these hours. Let’s plan to connect at this time on this day.”

If you can’t alter the communication, you may need to adapt by saying to yourself, “I won’t answer the call when I’m in the middle of something. When I do answer, I’ll take a deep breath, be polite and just allow my parents to speak without reacting to them.”

Suggested wording

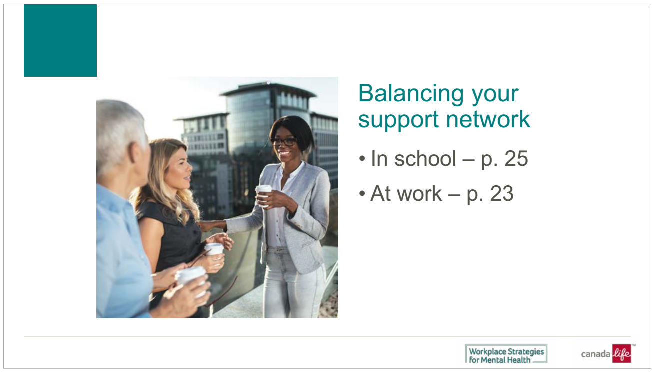
Take the stressor you identified earlier and think of its pros and cons. Use the chart under the text that says: Briefly describe the stressor for which you'll explore your options to consider how each of the 4 A's – accept, avoid, alter and adapt – might make your stress better or worse.

Suggested wording – wrap up

Perhaps you use a coping strategy that's more damaging than healthy or helpful. Considering all the four A's might help you manage your perspective of the situation and reduce your stress level. The 4 A's are used by many schools, businesses and organizations because they work.

Notes

Slide 21 10 minutes



Balancing your support network

- In school – p. 25
- At work – p. 23

Balancing your support network

Facilitator notes

This workbook exercise should take about 8 minutes: 3 minutes to discuss, 5 minutes for the participants to complete the workbook exercise.

Suggested wording

We're now going to complete the section Balancing your support network.

Let me ask you a few questions…

- How do you feel after you help someone?
- If you're happy to help others and feel good doing it, do you also feel good about asking for help? If not, why not?

Some of us were raised to believe helping others was a sign of strength but asking for help was one of weakness. But do you think people who ask for help are weak? Probably not. Resilience involves our ability to connect with one another.

[Insert a story.] I was good at giving help, but I sucked at asking for it.

Someone asked me, "Why do you help people?" I said I want to make a difference. I care about people.

They asked, "How does it make you feel?" I said it makes me feel good.

They said, "So why don't you reach out?" I said, "Because I don't want to be a burden."

They responded, "So you think people who reach out are a burden?"

I replied. “No, that wasn’t what I thought about others.”

They asked how I could have two different standards – feeling good about offering help while denying others the opportunity to feel good about helping me.

That conversation turned my thinking around. Asking for help is a way to connect with people. What was surprising is it improved my ability to solve problems effectively and it reduced my overall stress levels. The important point is you aren’t resilient if you can’t both give and receive social support.

All of us will have times when we can offer help and times when we should reach out for help.

There are times we need to be supported and times we need to be supportive. Asking for help in our personal or work lives is one of the ways we can improve our resilience.

You may discover more people than you were aware of are willing to help you. But not everyone can help with every issue. If the first person you reach out to isn’t able or willing to help, try someone else.

If you feel hesitant to reach out, think about how you feel when you can help someone. Many people welcome the opportunity to help and are relieved to find out we all need help from time to time.

Instructions

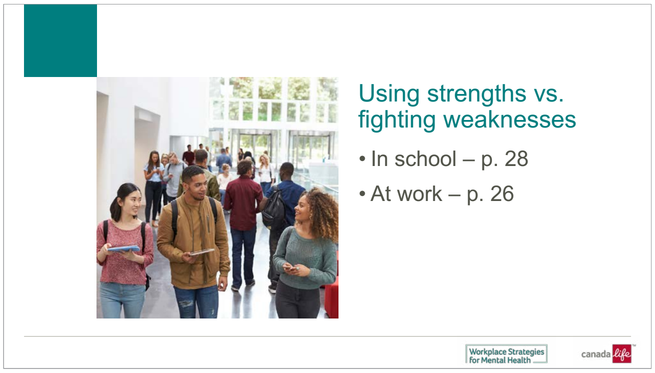
- Think about family, friends, associates, colleagues, neighbours or services you could reach out to for help.
- On the left side of this chart, list the names of people whom you can or do support for each specific task listed in the centre column. For example, some might make you laugh, while others might call you on your stuff. Some might just agree with you, and others might do errands for you. Try not to limit everything to one person as that might put a lot of pressure on them.
- On the right side, list the names of people who could provide that support to you.
- Try to include a variety of names so you can create a diverse network of support for yourself.

Suggested wording – wrap up

- You never have to be alone when you need support – there's always someone who wants to help. They may be a professional or volunteer, or organizational and community resources you can find in person, online and over the phone. Take time to find these supports now so they're available when you need them. Then, when you need them, reach out.
- The Government of Canada highlights varied supports: **https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/health-wellness-public-servants/mental-health-workplace/resources-employees-mental-health-workplace.html**
- **You may have more support than you first thought.** You might also notice your support network isn't as large as it could be.
- This isn't a popularity contest. We're fortunate if we have a few good people in our lives who'll be there to help us.
- If you don't have enough supports in place, you can find them. This can include joining a group, collaborating online or in person, volunteering or finding one person who needs your help. You might be surprised. The worst thing they can say is "no" but give people the chance to be supportive.
- International students may have difficulty finding supports due to language barriers and other challenges. If they're introverted, they could perhaps have a buddy system or tutor. [The host might have some ideas.]
- To help develop your network, look for opportunities to use your strengths to assist others.
- However you choose to build a support network, as you support more people, you may find more people are there when you need help.

Notes

Slide 22 10 minutes



Using strengths vs. fighting weaknesses

- In school – p. 28
- At work – p. 26

Using strengths vs. fighting weaknesses

Facilitator notes

This workbook exercise will take about 5 minutes.

Please ensure everyone has either:

1. Completed the free VIA Character Strengths Survey at **www.viame.org.**
2. Written down what they think are their top 3 strengths, choosing from the list from Appendix A.

Suggested wording

We're now going to complete the section Identifying and using your strengths.

This section is about knowing our strengths and understanding in advance how to use or leverage that strength in a time of crisis. Look at your top 3 strengths from VIA and how you might use them when dealing with a crisis.

[If you're running out of time, just get them to talk about it – share your strength and how you could use it at work. Encourage discussion about the positive and reflection on the negative.]

[Insert a story about your own strength.] For example, my friend's top strength was forgiveness. She was thinking, "Great – I'm a doormat." She wasn't thrilled with her top strength but when she read what it meant, she realized it isn't about her, it's about others. It's critical for her to forgive because she works with people who have depression or anxiety and might be more judgmental and critical. Forgiveness is a way of understanding people have their own reasons for behaving in ways that seem hurtful or unkind. Understanding it's less about you and much more about their current state of mind makes it easier to forgive. Now, when she's in a challenging situation, she explores how she can use this strength to consider why those involved may have responded the way they did. Forgiveness allows her to be more objective and less stressed.

Why this matters

When we talk about a person's character, we're talking about the whole person. This means considering how their thoughts, feelings and behaviours shape:

- Who they are
- How they see the world
- How they interact with the people around them
- Every person has character strengths. These positive qualities are part of who we are and come naturally to us.

It's much easier for us to use our strengths during times of adversity than to try to manage our weaknesses. For example, if patience isn't your strength, it won't be easy to be patient when faced with a delay in a work project. On the other hand, if creativity is a strength, distracting yourself from the stress and frustration of waiting while you begin a new, creative project might be helpful.

Suggested wording – wrap up

We all have many character strengths, but we don't all have the same strengths to the same degree. For example, while everyone has curiosity, it will be stronger in some people than in others.

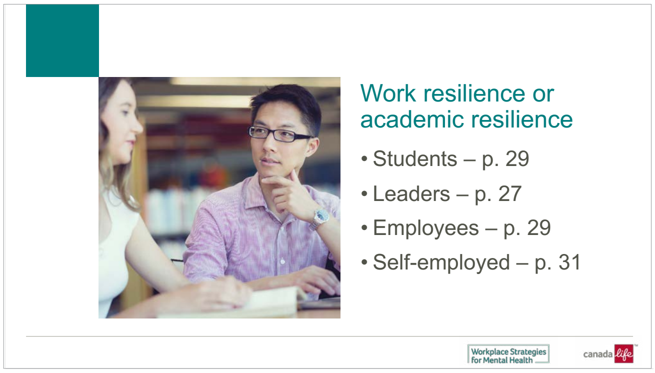
Also, any strength can be overused to the point where it becomes a problem. Using the example of curiosity, not enough can make life boring – too much can make you seem nosy or intrusive.

Recognizing strengths in ourselves and using them wisely can help us improve our own self-confidence and build connections with other people.

More information and tools to help you use your strengths to thrive in all areas of your life can be found in the link at the bottom of the page: **http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Reports-Courses-Resources/Resources/Character-Strength-Fact-Sheets**

Notes

Slide 23   6 minutes



Work resilience or academic resilience

- Students – p. 29
- Leaders – p. 27
- Employees – p. 29
- Self-employed – p. 31

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

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Work resilience or academic resilience

Suggested wording

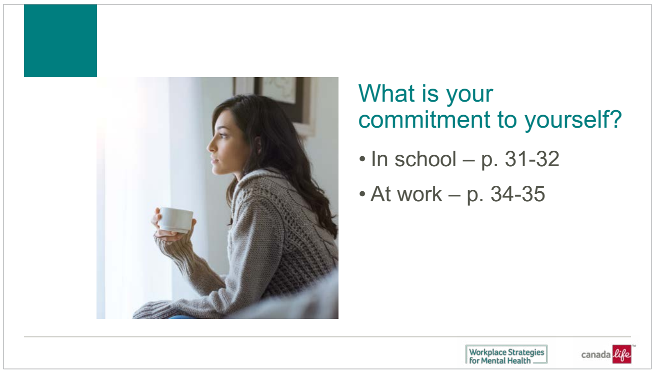
If one of your stressors is concern about being unable to complete your work due to illness or injury, you may want to fill out the appropriate section for you: Work resilience for leaders, Work resilience for employees, or Work resilience for self-employed or Academic resilience for students.

This section helps overachievers with poor personal boundaries to learn they can put plans in place so when they need to take a day off for health purposes, it won’t create a disaster of epic proportions.

Each page has slightly different questions, but they’re there for you to develop your own plan. We don’t have time today, so you may fill it out at your leisure. For those who think I may be talking about you, please return to this section when you can.

Notes

Slide 24 10 minutes



What is your commitment to yourself?

- In school – p. 31-32
- At work – p. 34-35

What is your commitment to yourself?

Facilitator notes

This workbook exercise should take about 3 minutes to discuss and 3 minutes for participants to complete the worksheet.

Suggested wording

We'll now look at Commitment to myself.

So far, we've explored how you might automatically respond in the face of adversity. We've also considered alternative responses or daily habits that might benefit you more. Now you can commit to one thing you're willing to do differently for at least 3 weeks to improve your resilience. Each of these is based on the evidence of what builds resilience. They're micro changes that will be relatively easy for anyone to fit into a busy day. Choose one at a time and don't add the next one until you feel the first one is part of your every day.

Instructions

Choose one of the 7 options listed below on the page or create your own. I'll briefly describe them to you:

1. Take time after every disappointment, challenge or frustration to consider what you've learned or how you might grow because of it.
2. Use Mel Robbins' 5-4-3-2-1 technique (author of the 5 Second Rule). She suggests you stop waiting for motivation to do what you know you should do. Instead, count down – 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 – and take off to do it. If you have

trouble with procrastination, this may be the one for you. [**Insert a story.**] For example, I don't like talking on the phone, but I have elderly relatives who really want me to call. I wait for the motivation to do it, but it doesn't come. Now, when the thought pops into my head that I should call, I don't wait to feel motivated. I simply count down 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and make the call.

3. Apply the 4 A's we discussed earlier to your stressors as they come up. They'll make you stop and reflect. Then you can choose what you want to do to solve the problem.
4. Express appreciation as often as you can. Maybe it's thanking someone for opening a door or expressing appreciation for sunlight. Be on the lookout for what's positive in your day. Your brain eventually becomes trained to look for chances to express gratitude rather than only seeing challenges and disappointments. If you've been thinking rather negative lately, this might be the commitment for you.
5. Spend time examining your mistakes and recording what you learned to do or not do next time. You'll find you likely don't mess up as much as you think – and you'll see mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures. Nelson Mandela didn't say "Trial and error." He said, "Trial and learn."
6. Just say "yes." For 3 weeks say "yes" every time someone offers to help, whether it's at work, school, home or out in the community. Learning to accept help is an important element of resilience and if you're uncomfortable or unaccustomed to doing this you may wish to consider this one.
7. Finally, you could also choose to monitor and correct your own self-talk. If someone said some of the things we say to ourselves all day – like "You idiot, how could you be so stupid?" – we'd probably have them up on harassment charges. As you learn to be gentler to yourself, you learn to speak to others better. We're often the harshest critic to ourselves. If you do this to yourself a lot, this may be the one for you.

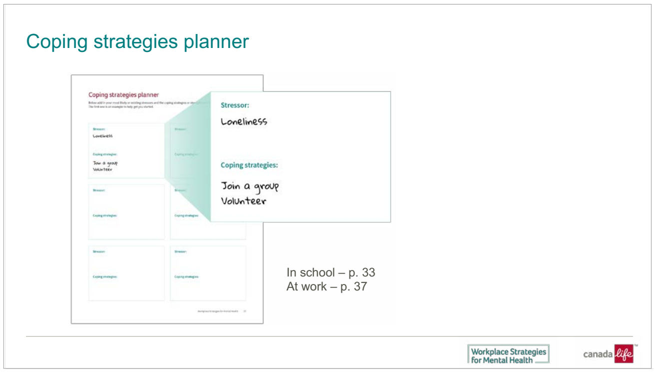
Suggested wording – wrap up

Committing to a challenge and sharing your plans with someone may help keep you accountable to your goals.

Limit your stress by choosing only one change to work on at a time. Find someone who'll follow up with you in 3 weeks and ask that person to ask you how you did on that task.

Notes

Slide 25 **4 minutes**



Coping strategies planner

Coping strategies planner

Stressor:

Loneliness

Coping strategies:

Join a group
Volunteer

In school – p. 33
At work – p. 37

Coping strategies planner

Facilitator notes

If you have time, you can ask the group to complete it. If not, leave it for them to complete on their own time.

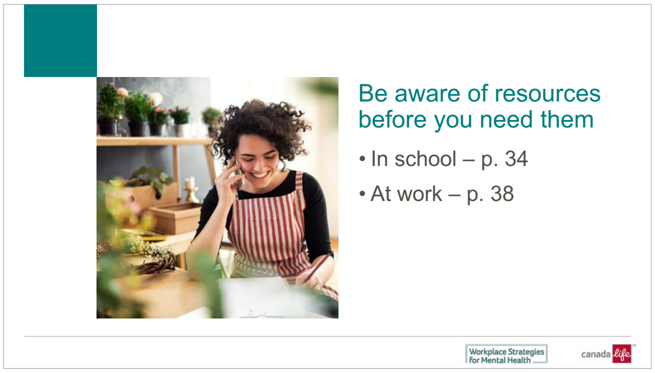
Suggested wording

Fill in the Coping strategies planner with your most likely or existing stressors and the coping strategies or strengths you'll use to deal with them. The first one is an example to help get you started. We do this because when we're stressed we're likely to forget the strategies we know will work.

We'll leave this for you to do on your own time, but it's a great visual reminder of the strategies you believe will work. Put it up somewhere where you'll see it every day. At the time of extreme stress, it's not unusual to forget what works. This can help remind you.

Notes

Slide 26   5 minutes



Be aware of resources before you need them

- In school – p. 34
- At work – p. 38

Be aware of resources before you need them

Facilitator notes

Please ask the organization to fill in as much of this as possible in advance. Ask for to hand out and review with the participants. Students and employees will each need a form relevant for them.

Suggested wording

You have a chart you can fill in with potential resources available to you. It’s useful to have these resources at your fingertips if you need them in the future.

[If you’re an external facilitator request someone familiar with organizational resources to take 3 to 5 minutes to review the resources with the group.]

I’d like to ask ____________________ to speak to you about resources available within your organization.

If this isn’t possible, you can say

Fill this in on your own or get a list of resources available to you from your organization, community or other associations. Doing this in advance will help you when you need it most. When we’re stressed out or in a state of crisis, we’re less likely to have the presence of mind to find effective resources. You can also use this to help others find support if they need it.

Notes

Slide 27　3 minutes

Yes, these resources are really free!

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health
canada life

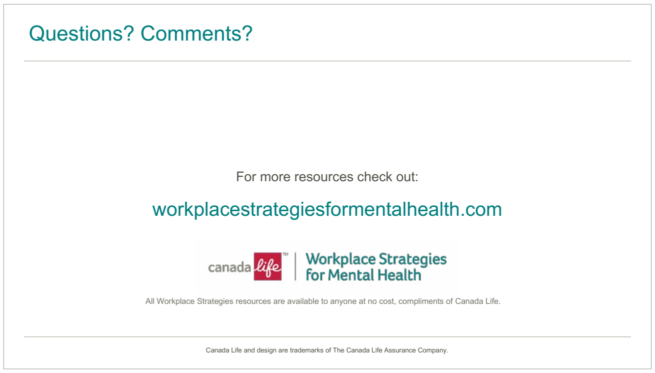
Yes, these resources are really free!

Suggested wording

This resource you completed today is available for free online. Please feel free to check out all Workplace Strategies for Mental Health resources at workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com.

Notes

Slide 28 10 minutes


Questions? Comments?

For more resources check out:

workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

canada life | Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

All Workplace Strategies resources are available to anyone at no cost, compliments of Canada Life.

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Questions? Comments?

Facilitator notes

Provide about 10 minutes at the end for questions or comments.

Suggested wording

[For large group discussion] Does anyone have any questions or comments they'd like to share?

[For table or small group discussion – you can ask for some answers after they've had a chance to share at their table] What was your 'aha' moment? What will you do differently because of what you learned?

Suggested wording – ending

Thank you for taking the time to build your resilience. Remember this resource is free and you are encouraged to revisit it yearly as your stressors change and you become ready to try new coping strategies.

Notes

Appendix

Evidence

Plan for resilience was informed by the following evidence:

Adenuga, Olusegun Adeleke. “Impact of Occupational Stress on Job Satisfaction and Mental Health of First Bank Employees: Implication for Personnel Psychologists.” *American Journal of Psychology and Cognitive Science1*, no. 1 (2015): 15-21.

Chen, Shoshi, Mina Westman, and Stevan E. Hobfoll. “The Commerce and Crossover of Resources: Resource Conservation in the Service of Resilience.” *Stress and Health31*, no. 2 (2015): 95-105. doi:10.1002/smi.2574.

Dickson-Swift, Virginia, Christopher Fox, Karen Marshall, Nicky Welch, and Jon Willis. “What Really Improves Employee Health and Wellbeing.” *International Journal of Workplace Health Management7*, no. 3 (2014): 138-55. doi:10.1108/ijwhm-10-2012-0026.

Elliott, Kate-Ellen J., Christine M. Stirling, Angela J. Martin, Andrew L. Robinson, and Jennifer L. Scott. “We Are Not All Coping: A Cross-sectional Investigation of Resilience in the Dementia Care Workforce.” *Health Expectations19*, no. 6 (2015): 1251-264. doi:10.1111/hex.12419.

Fletcher, David, and Mustafa Sarkar. “Psychological Resilience.” *European Psychologist18*, no. 1 (2013): 12-23. doi:10.1027/1016-9040/a000124.

Holt-Lunstad, Julianne; Robles, Theodore F.; Sbarra, David A. Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *American Psychologist*, Vol 72(6), Sep 2017, 517-530.

Holt-Lunstad, Julianne; Smith, Timothy B.; Baker, Mark; Harris, Tyler; Stephenson, David (2015); Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review, Perspectives on Psychological Science, Vol 10, Issue 2, pp. 227 – 237.

Kelty, Sally F., and Heidi Gordon. “No Burnout at This Coal-Face: Managing Occupational Stress in Forensic Personnel and the Implications for Forensic and Criminal Justice Agencies.” *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law22*, no. 2 (2014): 273-90. doi:10.1080/13218719.2014.941092.

Lamontagne, Anthony D., Tessa Keegel, Clare Shann, and Andrew Noblet. “Integrating Job Stress and Workplace Mental Health Literacy Intervention: Challenges and Benefits.” *Derailed Organizational Interventions for Stress and Well-Being*, 2015, 27-35. doi:10.1007/978-94-017-9867-9_3.

Maclean, Johanna Catherine, Douglas Webber, and Michael T. French. “Workplace Problems, Mental Health and Substance Use.” *Applied Economics47*, no. 9 (2014): 883-905. doi:10.1080/00036846.2014.982856.

Mayo Clinic Staff (2016). Need Stress Relief? Try the 4 A’s. Retrieved from https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044476?pg=2

O’Connor, RC. (2011). Towards an integrated motivational–volitional model of suicidal behaviour. In *Int. handbook of suicide prevention: research, policy and practice* (eds O’Connor, RC; Platt, S; Gordon, J), pp. 181–198. Chichester, UK: Wiley.

Rees, Clare S., Lauren J. Breen, Lynette Cusack, and Desley Hegney. “Understanding Individual Resilience in the Workplace: The International Collaboration of Workforce Resilience Model.” *Frontiers in Psychology6* (2015). doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00073.

Schutte, N.S., Malouff, J.M. The Impact of Signature Character Strengths Interventions: A Meta-analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies* (2018). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-9990-2

From surviving to thriving included additional evidence:

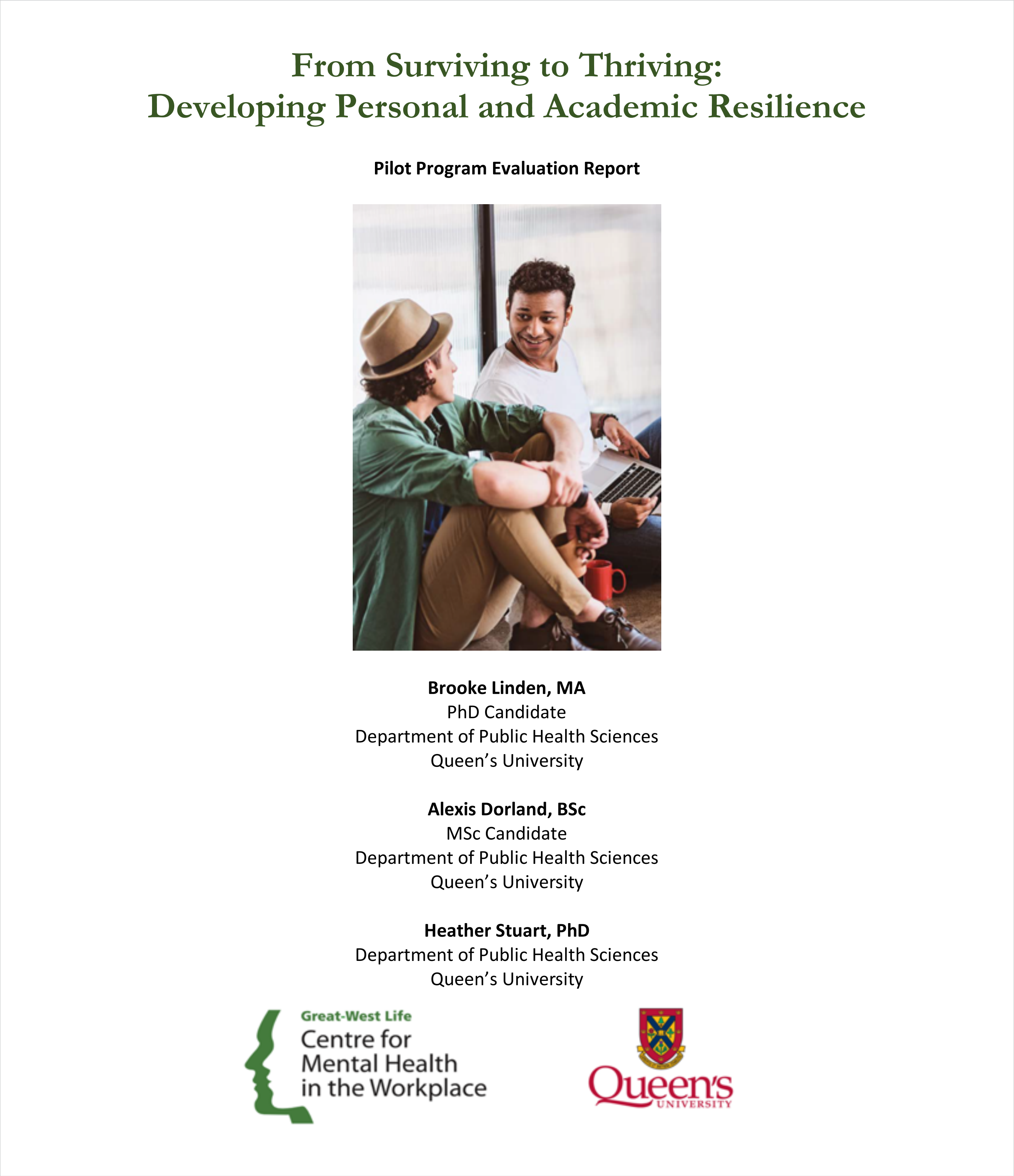
Marcotte, Diane; Villatte, Aude; Potvin, Alexandra. Resilience Factors in Students Presenting Depressive Symptoms during the Post-secondary School Transition. Elsevier, 23 December 2014, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences.* Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814064659

McCormick, Melinda (2016). Bullying Experiences and Resilience in LGBTQ Youth. Dissertations. 2473. Retrieved from http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/2473

Wong, Andrew H. C.; Yohani, Sophie, An Exploratory Study of Resilience in Postsecondary Refugee Students Living in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Counselling & Psychotherapy / Revue Canadienne de Counseling et de Psychothérapie.* 2016 Supplement, Vol. 50, pS175-S192. 18p. Retrieved from http://web.a.ebscohost.com/abstract?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=19236182&AN=125399978&h=CgW0XPgECcvYwJV890iB%2fHzmMo9jGz5Ig6lvIldquZ6PCK%2bBUr%2bK6SQqesMoBrFaHBrCuHe7SyZNdEUfKY9R3A%3d%3d&crl=c&resultNs=AdminWebAuth&resultLocal=ErrCrlNotAuth&crlhashurl=login.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26profile%3dehost%26scope%3dsite%26authtype%3dcrawler%26jrnl%3d19236182%26AN%3d125399978

Queen’s University evaluation study

Note: this study was completed in 2018 when Canada Life’s Workplace Strategies for Mental Health was known as The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.



From Surviving to Thriving: Developing Personal and Academic Resilience

Pilot Program Evaluation Report

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Disclaimer
The Queen's University research team has provided this third-party, independent evaluation of Great-West Life's Surviving to Thriving Guide for post-secondary students. While funding support for this project was provided by Great-West Life, the views conveyed in this report are entirely the authors' and were not influenced in any way by Great-West Life.

Background

On Workplace Strategies for Mental Health (www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com), an initiative of the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, free resources are provided for all employers and employees who want to protect psychological safety at work. In the development of the free resource *Plan for Resilience: Workplace Edition*, it became apparent to the experts involved that developing these resilience skills could also be important as students made the transition to post-secondary school (1). The identified resilience skills were known to help prevent suicidal ideation, burnout, and the worst effects from exposure to trauma (2,3). Of course, the approach taken in developing the workplace resource had to be refined for the age and stage of a different audience.

An initial draft of the Guide, now adapted for a post-secondary setting, was then provided to researchers and students at McMaster University, University of British Columbia Okanagan, and University of Waterloo for review. Subsequently, Dr. James Gillet supervised the use of the resource with an analysis of the first draft with students at McMaster University. Once the results were available, a roundtable with a variety of experts was held to consider next steps.

All participants of the roundtable acknowledged the importance of ensuring that the resource would do no harm and would provide benefit to the intended users – post-secondary students. A new draft incorporating the analysis from McMaster University and feedback from the roundtable, was titled, *From Surviving to Thriving: Developing Personal and Academic Resilience*. Dr. Heather Stuart, who participated in the roundtable, was asked to conduct a third party, independent evaluation of the resources through a pilot study conducted among Queen’s University students before the final version would be made freely available to the public.

Purpose

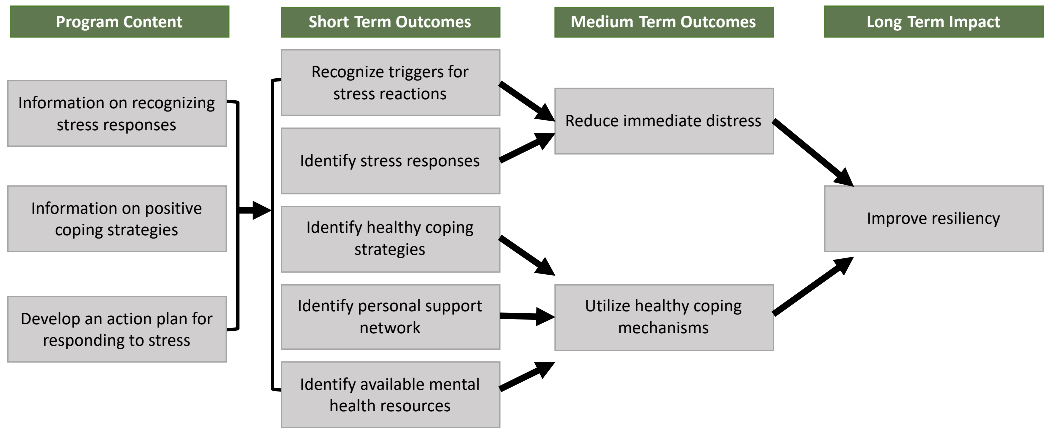
The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace's Guide, *From Surviving to Thriving: Developing Personal and Academic Resilience,* was designed to assist post-secondary students with developing the skills required to effectively mediate and respond to stress. The overall goals of the Guide are to reduce short-term distress with the long-term goal of improving students' personal resilience.

The Guide assists students in identifying their personal strengths and encourages them to reflect on frequently experienced stressors and their impacts. Students learn about automatic behavioural and emotional responses to stress and are encouraged to articulate how they might manage these context-based challenges, be it through the use of personal strategies, or by seeking help from various sources. Major sections of the Guide include:

- Recognizing and understanding responses to common stressors;
- Identifying healthy coping strategies;
- Recognizing and understanding personal triggers for a stress response;
- Outlining personal social support networks, as well as available mental health resources;
- Identifying personal strengths; and
- Designing a plan of action for managing commonly experienced stressors.

It is important to note that the Guide was not intended as an intervention for someone in crisis.

Figure 1. Logic Model


Program Content
Short Term Outcomes
Medium Term Outcomes
Long Term Impact
Information on recognizing stress responses
Information on positive coping strategies
Develop an action plan for responding to stress
Recognize triggers for stress reactions
Identify stress responses
Identify healthy coping strategies
Identify personal support network
Identify available mental health resources
Reduce immediate distress
Utilize healthy coping mechanisms
Improve resiliency

Note. The short-term outcomes shown on the logic model mirror the **objectives** of the program, while the overall **goal** of the program is expressed through the long-term impact. See definitions for these concepts below (4).

OBJECTIVE
Statements describing the results to be achieved, and the manner in which they will be achieved. You usually need multiple objectives to address a single goal.

GOAL
The long term expectation of what should happen as a result of your program (the desired result). Serves as the foundation for developing your program objectives.

Methods

Figure 1 depicts the theory of change we developed to assist with the evaluation of the Guide. This theory of change, which allows us to highlight the mechanisms of action, is expressed through the use of a logic model. A logic model shows the logical series of events through which the desired outcomes of a program or service are expected to be reached (5).

EFFICACY
The extent to which an intervention produces the expected, beneficial results under the ideal conditions of a randomized controlled trial.

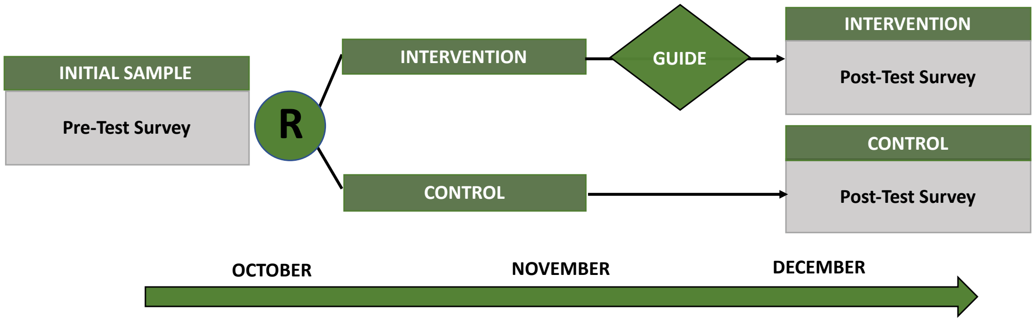
Study Design

The efficacy (6) of the Guide was assessed through the use of a randomized controlled trial conducted among students at Queen's university during the fall semester of 2018.
This study design randomly splits the sample into two "arms" – one arm receives the intervention (e.g., the Guide), while the other arm (referred to as the "control arm") does not. All participants were invited to complete the evaluation survey at pre- and post-test (e.g., before and after the intervention group received the Guide). Including a control arm in our study allowed us to separate any "background noise" and improved our confidence that the observed results could be directly attributed to the Guide and not to external factors.

Sampling and Participants

A random sample of 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students was drawn. The initial sample of students were invited to participate in the pre-test survey. Following receipt of the pre-test surveys, the research team randomized respondents into to either the intervention or the control arm of the study using an online, unbiased randomizer (Figure 2). Students randomized into the intervention arm of the study were e-mailed the Guide and asked to complete it within the next 4 weeks. A follow-up, the post-test survey was sent to both the control and intervention groups in early December 2018.

Figure 2. Study Design and Timeline


INITIAL SAMPLE
Pre-Test Survey
R
INTERVENTION
CONTROL
GUIDE
INTERVENTION
Post-Test Survey
CONTROL
Post-Test Survey
OCTOBER
NOVEMBER
DECEMBER

Procedure

Both the control and intervention groups completed online surveys at pre- and post-test (e.g., before and after the intervention group received the Guide). The survey was distributed to students through the Qualtrics Surveys platform. Students' pre- and post-test responses were linked through the use of a unique identification code in order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality of responses. In order to maximize participation rates, participants were invited to enter their e-mail into a draw for a chance to win one of several $100 grocery gift cards to Metro. This project was reviewed and approved for ethical compliance by the Queen's University Health Sciences and Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board (HSREB).

Measures

Demographics

Demographic information was collected from students in order to understand the variability of our sample and assess the equivalence of our study groups. Students were asked to share the following information: sex, age, year of study, faculty of study, level of study, number of children, relationship status, living arrangement, location of residence, and estimated grade point average (GPA). Students were also asked to rate their current quality of social support received from friends/family on a scale of 1 to 10.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6)

The K6 is a brief, 6-item scale designed to detect serious emotional disturbance among youth. It is comprised of symptoms of depression and anxiety, which are strong predictors of mental illness. Response options range on a 5-point scale from 'never' to 'all of the time'. Responses are scored from 0 to 4, generating a scale with a total score ranging from 0-24, with higher values indicating a higher level of distress. A score of 13 or higher discriminates between respondents with and without a serious mental illness, though we used a continuous scoring scheme, as recommended by the developers, to assess changes in overall distress (7). If the guide were efficacious, we would expect to see a statistically significant decrease in distress scores from pre- to post-test in the intervention group and no or minor improvements in the control group.

Connor-Davidson Resiliency Scale (CD-RISC)

The 10-item CD-RISC is a brief scale designed to measure a person's ability to cope with adversity (e.g., resiliency). Examples include being able to adapt to change, achieving goals despite obstacles, and staying focused under pressure. Respondents rate items on a scale ranging from 0 (not true at all) to 4 (true nearly all of the time). Responses are then summed to provide a score ranging from 0 to 40, with higher scores reflecting a greater level of resilience (8,9). The scale has been demonstrated to have good psychometric properties among samples of university students. Given the short time window of this pilot test (four weeks), we were uncertain whether we would be able to detect a significant change in resilience. However, if a change was detected, a statistically significant improvement in resilience from pre- to post-test in the intervention group would be desired.

Impressions of the Guide

In addition to the measures outlined above, the post-test survey asked intervention arm participants for their impressions of and opinions about the Guide and its utility. Additionally, in order to determine whether there were any unanticipated negative consequences resulting from the Guide, students were asked if there was anything in its contents that caused them distress or made them think more negatively about their current situation.

Results

Demographics

A total of 519 participants completed the pre-test survey (17% response rate). Of these, 259 were randomized into the control arm, and 260 were randomized to the intervention. Of the 260 students who were sent the Guide, 133 returned a completed post-test survey. A total of 159 controls completed the post-test survey (Figure 3).

The majority of participants who completed the post-test survey were female (72%), with an average age of 25 years. The majority were in their second (40%) or third (30%) year of fulltime (98%) study. Most students were single (83%), did not have children (93%), and lived in off-campus housing (98%) with friends (41%) or roommates (26%). The sample showed good diversity across levels of study (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, etc.) and department of study. The majority of participants reported their GPA to be in the 80-100% range (69%). Participants rated their quality of social support to be an 8 on a scale from 1 to 10 (where ten was high).

Figure 3. Participation Flow Chart

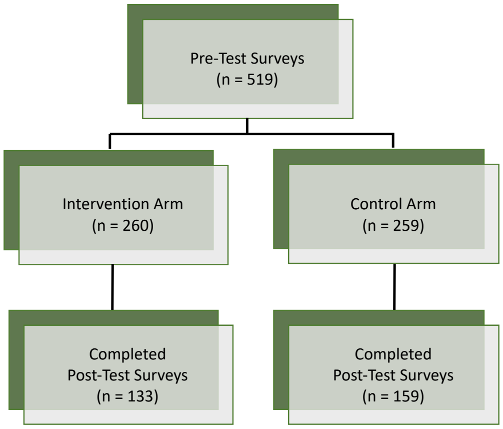


Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown for the total sample of participants who completed the post-test survey, as well as the breakdown by control and intervention groups. Demographic comparisons between participants in the control and intervention groups were not statistically significant, indicating that randomization was successful (e.g., the groups shared similar demographics, with an equal distribution of confounding factors).

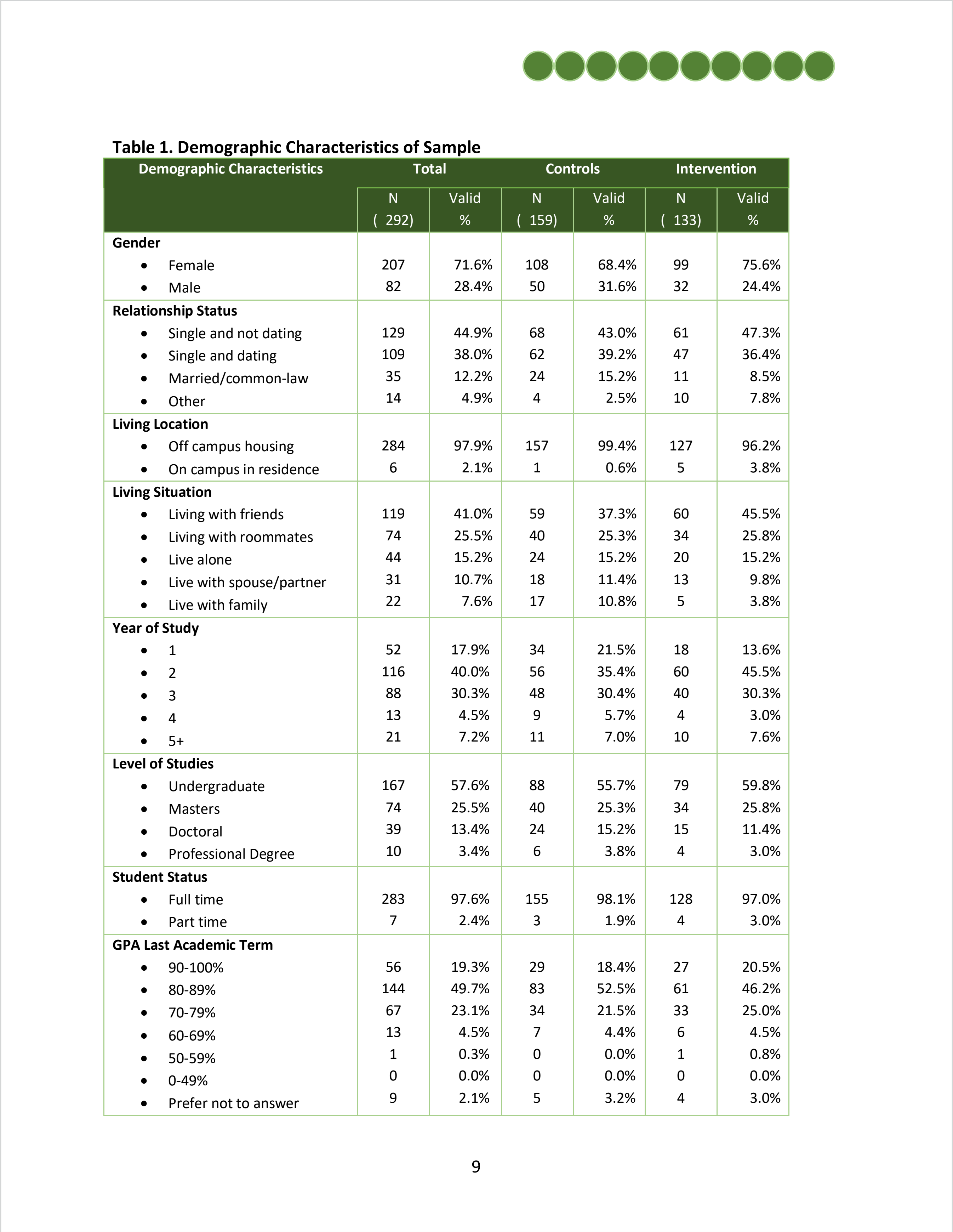


Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Demographic Characteristics	Total		Controls		Intervention	
	N (292)	Valid %	N (159)	Valid %	N (133)	Valid %
Gender						
• Female	207	71.6%	108	68.4%	99	75.6%
• Male	82	28.4%	50	31.6%	32	24.4%
Relationship Status						
• Single and not dating	129	44.9%	68	43.0%	61	47.3%
• Single and dating	109	38.0%	62	39.2%	47	36.4%
• Married/common-law	35	12.2%	24	15.2%	11	8.5%
• Other	14	4.9%	4	2.5%	10	7.8%
Living Location						
• Off campus housing	284	97.9%	157	99.4%	127	96.2%
• On campus in residence	6	2.1%	1	0.6%	5	3.8%
Living Situation						
• Living with friends	119	41.0%	59	37.3%	60	45.5%
• Living with roommates	74	25.5%	40	25.3%	34	25.8%
• Live alone	44	15.2%	24	15.2%	20	15.2%
• Live with spouse/partner	31	10.7%	18	11.4%	13	9.8%
• Live with family	22	7.6%	17	10.8%	5	3.8%
Year of Study						
• 1	52	17.9%	34	21.5%	18	13.6%
• 2	116	40.0%	56	35.4%	60	45.5%
• 3	88	30.3%	48	30.4%	40	30.3%
• 4	13	4.5%	9	5.7%	4	3.0%
• 5+	21	7.2%	11	7.0%	10	7.6%
Level of Studies						
• Undergraduate	167	57.6%	88	55.7%	79	59.8%
• Masters	74	25.5%	40	25.3%	34	25.8%
• Doctoral	39	13.4%	24	15.2%	15	11.4%
• Professional Degree	10	3.4%	6	3.8%	4	3.0%
Student Status						
• Full time	283	97.6%	155	98.1%	128	97.0%
• Part time	7	2.4%	3	1.9%	4	3.0%
GPA Last Academic Term						
• 90-100%	56	19.3%	29	18.4%	27	20.5%
• 80-89%	144	49.7%	83	52.5%	61	46.2%
• 70-79%	67	23.1%	34	21.5%	33	25.0%
• 60-69%	13	4.5%	7	4.4%	6	4.5%
• 50-59%	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	1	0.8%
• 0-49%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
• Prefer not to answer	9	2.1%	5	3.2%	4	3.0%

Department						
- Arts and Science	124	42.8%	62	39.2%	62	47.0%
- Engineering	51	17.6%	28	17.7%	23	17.4%
- Business School	33	11.4%	21	13.3%	12	9.1%
- Health Sciences	33	11.4%	19	12.0%	14	10.6%
- Other	25	8.6%	15	9.5%	10	7.6%
- Education	16	5.5%	8	5.1%	8	6.0%
- Law	5	1.7%	2	1.3%	3	2.3%
- Policy Studies	3	1.0%	3	1.9%	0	0.0%

Distress

Table 2 shows the improvements among the intervention group[1] for individual scale items from pre- to post-test (where a decrease in distress, and therefore a *positive* percent difference is considered to be an improvement). Participants demonstrated improvements on all but one item, with the largest change being 11.3% fewer participants reporting feeling "nervous."

Table 2. Proportion of Intervention Group Reporting "Distress" at Pre- and Post-Test

During the past 4 weeks, how often have you felt…	Pre Test Distress	Post Test Distress	Percent Improvement
Nervous	37.1%	25.8%	11.3%
That everything was an effort	29.5%	20.8%	8.7%
Hopeless	19.7%	12.5%	7.2%
So depressed that nothing could cheer you up	10.6%	6.7%	3.9%
Worthless	12.9%	12.5%	0.4%
Restless or fidgety	34.1%	34.2%	-0.1%

Note. Distress determined by the percent of participants who reported experiencing these symptoms "most of the time" or "all of the time". A decrease in score is an improvement.

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[1] All results in the body of this document are primarily reported for the intervention group. The same analyses for the control group can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 4. Boxplot for Distress Scores in Intervention Group at Pre- and Post-Test

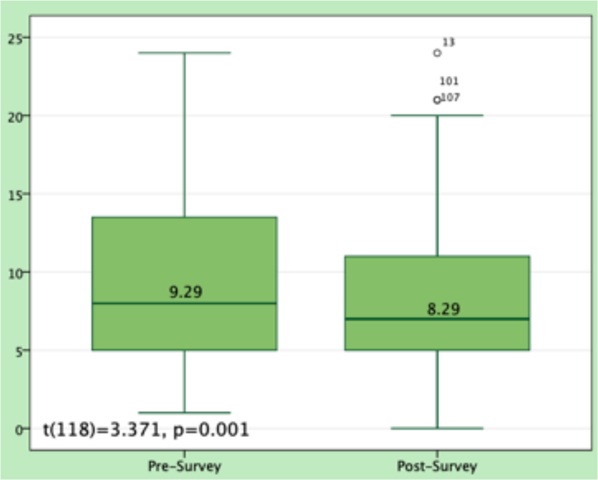

Figure 4 shows a box and whisker plot for the distribution of distress scale scores at pre- and post-test for the intervention group. The shaded box shows the 25th to 75th percentiles, with the line showing the median (50th percentile). The whiskers extend out to the extreme values on either end of the distribution of scores. The figure shows an improvement from an average score of 9.29 to 8.29. A paired t-test was statistically significant (p<0.001). Cohen's *d* for the standardized effect size was 0.31 (95% CI 0.05, 0.56), indicating a small effect (10,11). No statistically significant differences were observed in the control arm (See Appendix A).

Resilience

Table 3 shows the improvements among the intervention group for individual scale items from pre- to post-test, with an increase in the proportion of participants reporting that each item was true "often" or "nearly all of the time". Participants demonstrated improvements on all but two items. The largest improvement was observed for the first two items, feeling "that coping with stress could strengthen you" (+11.0%) and "that you think of yourself as a strong person" (+10.6%).

Table 3. Proportion of Intervention Group Reporting “Resiliency” at Pre- and Post-Test

Over the past 4 weeks, how often have you felt…	Pre Test Resiliency	Post Test Resiliency	Percent Improvement
That coping with stress could strengthen you	42.7%	53.7%	11.0%
That you think of yourself as a strong person	48.1%	58.7%	10.6%
You could deal with whatever comes	51.9%	60.3%	8.4%
That you are not easily discouraged by failure	34.4%	42.1%	7.7%
That you can stay focused under pressure	51.1%	57.0%	5.9%
That you can achieve goals despite obstacles	60.3%	65.3%	5.0%
That you could handle unpleasant feelings	45.0%	48.8%	3.8%
You tried to see the humorous side of problems	58.8%	62.0%	3.2%
That you tend to bounce back after illness or hardship	59.5%	54.5%	-5.0%
You were able to adapt to change	67.2%	60.3%	-6.9%

Note. “Resiliency” determined by percent reporting items true “often” or “nearly all the time”

Figure 5. Boxplot for Resiliency Scores in Intervention Group at Pre- and Post-Test

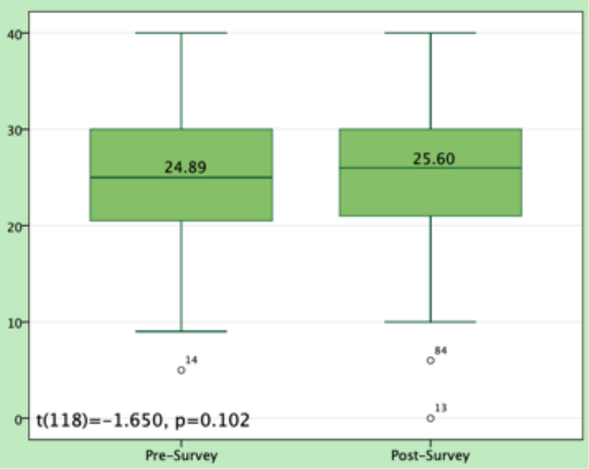

Figure 5 shows a box and whisker plot for the distribution of resilience scale scores at pre- and post-test for the intervention group. The figure shows an improvement from an average score of 24.89 to 25.60, however, a paired t-test did not demonstrate statistical significance ($p>0.5$) for differences in scores. Additionally, Cohen's d for the standardized effect size was -0.16 (95% CI -0.41, 0.10), indicating no effect (10,11). Similarly, no statistically significant difference was observed among the control arm.

Response to the Guide

Of the students who received the Guide, approximately sixty-five provided qualitative feedback regarding its utility. The following results are based on this sub-sample of participants.

Table 4 shows the main competencies (objectives) of the Guide. Across all categories, the majority of participants indicated feeling that they better understood each of these competencies following receipt and completion of the Guide. This demonstrates that the short-term objectives of the Guide were met.

Table 4. Guide Competencies

Since receiving the Guide, do you feel you better understand…	Yes	Maybe	No
Your personal strengths	60.0%	12.7%	27.3%
Sources of social supports in your life	58.2%	18.2%	23.6%
Your stressors and their impacts	65.5%	12.7%	21.8%
Healthy coping strategies that work for you	63.6%	14.5%	21.8%
Your stressors and their triggers	63.6%	18.2%	18.2%
Where you can go on campus for help	61.8%	10.9%	27.3%

Despite the fact that no statistically significant change was observed in aggregated resiliency scores between pre- and post-test, over a quarter (26%) of participants reported that they felt better about their personal resiliency after having received and reviewed the Guide (Figure 6).

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Similarly, the majority of students reported that they found the Guide to be useful either all of the time (42.8%) or sometimes (37.5%) (Figure 7).

Figure 6. How do you feel about your personal resiliency after completing the Guide?

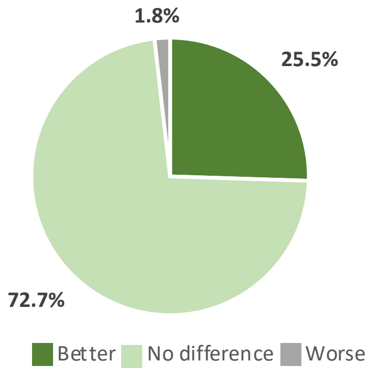
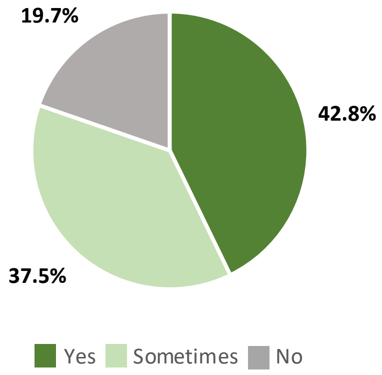


Figure 7. Did you find the Guide to be useful?



We provided respondents with a list of on-campus mental health resources. About 31% of participants indicated that they became more aware of these resources after completing the Guide, while 44% reported becoming moderately more aware (Figure 8). Nearly half of participants indicated that they had looked into these resources since receiving the Guide (23.6%) or planned to do so in the future (20.0%) (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Did you become more aware of campus mental health resources after receiving the Guide?

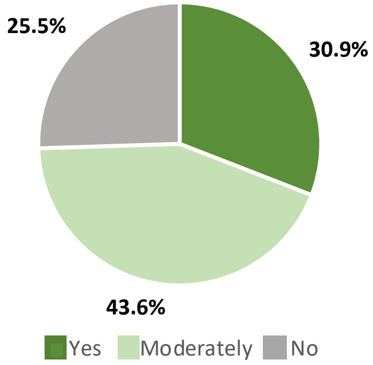
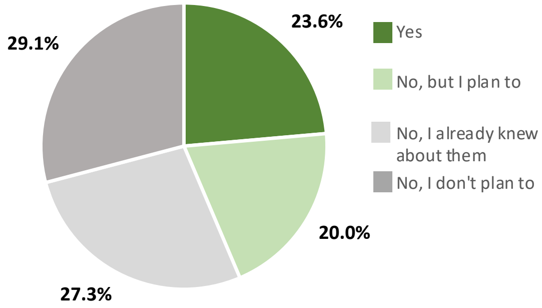


Figure 9. Have you looked into these resources since receiving the Guide?



Discussion

Based on the results of this analysis, there is evidence to suggest that the Guide achieved its intended short-term objectives, which were considered to be the key stepping stones for longer term improvements in resilience. The Guide appeared to improve students' ability to recognize common stressors in their lives, triggers for these stressors, as well as typical emotional responses they experienced as a result. Additionally, data suggested that students' understanding of and ability to apply healthy coping strategies was greatly bolstered by the Guide. Students learned how to map out healthy emotional responses to stress by gaining a better understanding of the social supports and formal resources available to them on their campus.

In terms of outcomes, the Guide improved students' immediate level of distress. We observed a statistically significant improvement in students' self-report distress scores before and after receiving and completing the Guide. However, we did not observe a statistically significant change in resiliency scores at the aggregated (group) level. This may suggest that the period of study was not long enough to detect a significant change. Due to the time and scope restraints of this study, participants were asked to complete the Guide and provide feedback within just four weeks. It is possible that one month is not long enough for an individual to make or experience a significant improvement in their personal resiliency.

The construct of resiliency is complex and has been defined and evaluated in a multitude of ways within the academic literature over the past decade (12). Many define resiliency simply as the ability to bounce back through adversity; this conceptualization of resiliency implies that "resilience" is something that can be easily developed when given the right tools. It also suggests that we can all be resilient, if we choose to make the effort. Many others have defined resiliency more narrowly as an individual, intrinsic trait, that takes work and personal growth to develop, and can vary over the course of one's lifespan at both individual and cultural levels (12,13). Studies focusing on the determinants of resilience have found a number of important predictors of an individual's resiliency, including genetic, psychologic, and socio-cultural vulnerabilities. While this demonstrates the complexity of the concept of resiliency, is also explains the difficulty in attempting to measure such a complex (and potentially, personal) construct in a short time frame. However, there may be components of “resilience” that can be assessed in an attempt to understand individuals’ progress.

In some studies, positive, effective coping has been conceptualized as a facet, or component, of resiliency (14), which can be drawn on “as a buffer against a wide range of future adversities” (5, p.481). “Coping” is also a more straight- forward concept that is much easier to operationalize and evaluate. In this study, while we did not observe a statistically significant improvement in aggregate resiliency scores, we did observe substantial improvements on many of the individual items within the CD-RISC scale, several of which assessed coping directly. For example, the largest improvement was observed in the proportion of participants who reported that “coping with stress could strengthen [them]” (+11%). A similarly large improvement was observed in the proportion who felt “[they] could deal with whatever comes” (+8.4%). Additionally, three of the six main competencies of the Guide directly targeted improvements in coping ability: 1) identifying sources of social supports in your life, 2) understanding healthy coping strategies that work for you, and 3) knowing where you can go on campus for help. For all three of these, 60% or more of the respondents indicated that they felt their understanding of these things had improved.

Improved understanding of one’s stressors and their triggers, as well as the knowledge of how best to mediate them through the use of effective and positive coping mechanisms (e.g., social support, formal resources) are key components of developing or improving resilience. Therefore, we concluded that “From Surviving to Thriving: Developing Personal and Academic Resilience” provided students with an important toolkit to take the first steps towards becoming more resilient individuals.

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Appendix A

Control Group Analyses

Analyses for the participants in the control arm of the study are presented here.

Table A-1. Proportion of Control Group Reporting "Resiliency" at Pre- and Post-Test

During the past 4 weeks, how often have you felt…	Pre Test Resiliency	Post Test Resiliency	Percent Improvement
You tried to see the humorous side of problems	47.5%	53.9%	6.40%
You could deal with whatever comes	48.1%	53.9%	5.80%
That you tend to bounce back after illness or hardship	53.8%	57.8%	4.00%
That you are not easily discouraged by failure	34.2%	36.4%	2.20%
That coping with stress could strengthen you	45.6%	47.4%	1.80%
That you can achieve goals despite obstacles	65.2%	64.3%	-0.90%
That you can stay focused under pressure	53.8%	52.6%	-1.20%
That you think of yourself as a strong person	54.4%	53.2%	-1.20%
That you could handle unpleasant feelings	49.4%	46.1%	-3.30%
You were able to adapt to change	62.7%	59.1%	-3.60%
You tried to see the humorous side of problems	47.5%	53.9%	6.40%

Table A-2. Proportion of Control Group Reporting "Distress" at Pre- and Post-Test

During the past 4 weeks, how often have you felt…	Pre Test Distress	Post Test Distress	Percent Improvement
Hopeless	15.2%	9.9%	5.30%
That everything was an effort	24.7%	21.7%	3.00%
Restless or fidgety	37.3%	36.2%	1.10%
Nervous	30.4%	30.3%	0.10%
So depressed that nothing could cheer you up	8.9%	9.2%	-0.30%
Worthless	8.9%	9.9%	-1.00%

Figure A-1. Boxplot for Distress Scores in Control Group at Pre- and Post-Test

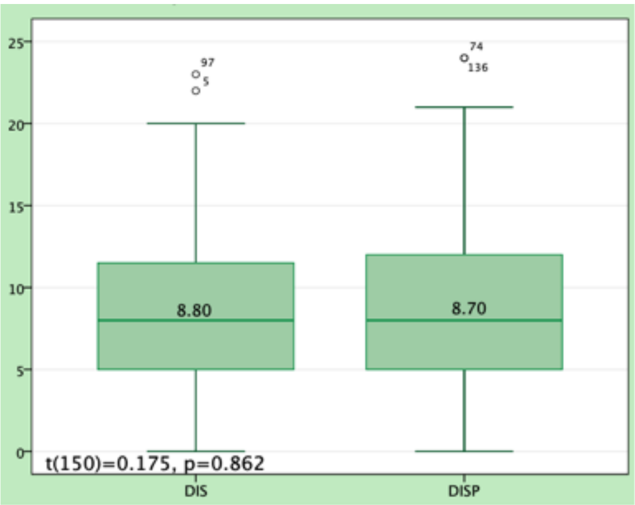
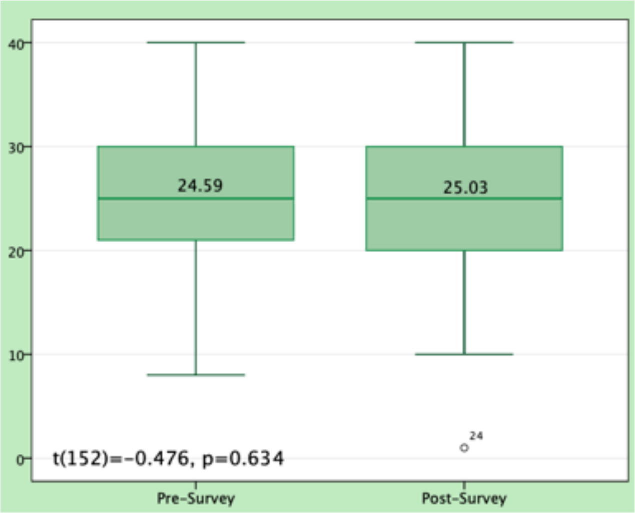


Figure A-2. Boxplot for Resiliency Scores in Control Group at Pre- and Post-Test



Appendix B

Qualitative Feedback

Three questions asked participants what they found to be useful, what (if anything) they found to be harmful, as well as what they would suggest for improvement (Tables B1-B3).

Table B-1. Did you find anything in the Guide that caused you distress?

Mentions	Topic	Details
12	Stressors Checklist	• Helpful to identify stressors. • Variability of stressors including non-school related stressors. • Knowing the stressors were common.
8	Resiliency Skills	• More confident in their resiliency • Having plans to accept and avoid certain stressors. Being proactive.
8	Resource List	• Good to know about.
6	Guide Quality	• The guide was comprehensive, easy to understand, honest, and well researched.
5	Recognize Automatic Stress Behaviours	• Knowing their automatic behaviours helped them better understand their stressors, themselves, and the impacts of these behaviours.
4	Thriving from Stress	• Being taken out of their comfort zone. • The focus on self-improvement.
2	Stress is normal	• Felt comforted knowing it was normal.
2	Reaching out is not Weakness	• Felt supported by the guide and not weak when needing help.
2	Guide was Interactive	•
1	Practical	•
1	Overview	• The guide was an overview, not just dispersed information.
1	Relax Item List	•
1	Personal Strength	• Being able to identify their person strength.

Table B-2. Did you find anything in the Guide that caused distress or made you more stressed?

Mentions	Topic	Details
5	More Stressed	• Checklist made them see their situation more negatively. • Made them feel overwhelmed.
2	Negative Impacts	• Worried that they had already triggered some of the negative impacts of behaviours to stress.
1	Unavailable Services	• They were unable to reach some of the services.

Table B-3. Having completed the Guide, do you have any suggestions for improvement?

Mentions	Topic	Details
6	More Interactive	• Be able to 'click' the checkboxes on the pdf. • Include more activities or videos. • Better pictures, not just smiling/happy people.
4	Lengthy	• Guide was too long.
4	Campus Information	• Include contact information for support on their campus.
3	System Approach	• The intervention should address the school/system, not just individuals that are suffering. Identified as 'victim'-blaming.
3	Accessibility	• Make the format mobile-friendly. • Make the URLs direct link instead of text.
3	Specific Stressor Tips	• Include information on how to approach specific stressors, not just a general overview. • Identify how the tips help/benefit
1	Resiliency or Resilient	• Choose one or the other. Using both was confusing.
1	Define Resiliency	• Define resiliency at the start of the guide.
1	Meditation	• Include how to meditate as a coping skill.
1	Case Studies	• Include case studies as an example of how these behaviours work.
1	Repetition	• Include a repetition element that can reiterate the information when the person is distressed.
1	Ask for Help	• Better explain how to 'ask for help'.
1	Spelling	• Found at least 2 spelling errors.
1	Timing	• Give the guide at the start of the semester.
1	Mental Health Input	• Need more input from mental health experts. Felt too 'common sense'.
1	Common Stressors	• List only common stressors, not all stressors, to decrease the size of the guide.
1	Coping Strategies	• Add more coping strategies.
1	Information Density	• Spread the information over more pages to decrease the density of information and making it easier to read.
1	Table of Content	• Make information easier to find by having more detail in the table of contents and overview.
1	Include Disabilities	• Make the guide more inclusive by including people with disabilities.
1	Great-West Life	• Great-West Life is attached to this intervention, but they have poor coverage for psychologists and psychotherapists.

Pre-planning worksheet

Confirm the following with the organizer

Organizer contact information

Name: ______________________ Email: ______________________

Text: ______________________ Phone: ______________________

Address: ______________________

Date of workshop: ______________________

Start time: ______________________ End time: ______________________

Number of expected employee participants: ________ Number of expected student participants: ________

Location: ______________________

Room name/number: ______________________

Seating arrangement (need desks or tables to write on): ______________________

Maximum seating capacity of room based on seating arrangement: ______________________

Time you will have access to set up: ______________________

A/V details including projector, screen, microphone, podium, laptop or need for USB: ______________________

Is there Wi-Fi available? ○ **Yes** ○ **No** If so, what's the password? ______________________

Contact person for the day of the workshop: ______________________

Contact person name and address information where to ship the materials:

____

Host for the session

Is host introducing the trainer? ○ **Yes** ○ **No**

Is host doing the land acknowledgment? ○ **Yes** ○ **No**
(If no, refer to acknowledgment of territorial lands on the Starting the session page)

Contact information for counselor available for those who may need support during the entire length of the session

Name: ______________________ Email: ______________________

Text: ______________________ Phone: ______________________

Office location: ______________________

Have there been any significant incidents in the last 2 months such as suicide, death, violence or rape that may be on the minds of the participants?

____

Ask the organizer

To have someone complete the Be aware of potential resources section of the resource.

- Have someone from the organization prepared to run through them for 5 to 10 minutes near the end of the session.
- Provide the completed forms by email or in print for each participant.

To contact each participant **6 working days in advance** of the session (with the sample email below) and request they complete the Character Strengths Inventory at **www.viame.org**:

Dear participant:

Please complete a VIA Strengths Inventory before our session. You can find the survey at **www.viame.org**.

Click on **Take the Free VIA Survey**. You'll be prompted to register before you can get started.

Once you've registered, it takes fewer than 15 minutes to complete the survey. If you log out before you've completed the survey, your answers will be saved so you can log back in and complete it later.

Once completed, you'll receive a free inventory of your strengths.

Please note there are options to pay for additional reporting – you don't need those for session.

Please bring your report digitally, as a photo on your phone or in printed. You can also write down your top 3 strengths and bring the list to the session, which will begin at [time] on [date] and run until [time].

If you have any questions, please feel free to respond directly to this email.

Thank you,

[Organizer]

Ensure there are enough resources for each employee and/or student participating in the session.

Q&A

Q: What's the difference between the different strengths surveys such as Strengths Finder and VIA?

A: Strengths Finder is about work skills; VIA is about character strengths. The intent is for you to become more self-aware. Training on traits doesn't matter if you disagree with your findings – that's your choice, you know yourself best. The survey is only as good as how you answer.

Q: How do I find out more about Mel Robbins?

A: Check out her videos on YouTube. She also wrote a book.

Q: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 didn't resonate with me. What other strategies are available to address procrastination?

A: Discuss different approaches and strategies to find out what works best for them.

Notes

Notes

We’d love to hear how you used this free resource!

Contact us through social media or at clwsmh.com

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