



RECOVERY HOUSING BEST PRACTICES

# HOW TO BUILD RESILIENCE IN RECOVERY

HELPFUL TIPS FROM THE FLETCHER GROUP

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Resilience means being able to adapt to challenges and changes. It helps people stay strong during tough times.

Building resilience is important for people recovering from substance use disorder (SUD). Early recovery can be hard because it's a time of learning new ways to think and act while dealing with stress and "triggers" that might tempt a relapse/return to use. By learning to manage your emotions, creating a strong support system, recognizing your personal strengths, and using healthy coping strategies, you can become more resilient and improve your chances of long-term recovery.

(For more information, contact the Fletcher Group at 606-657-4662 or <https://www.fletchergroup.org/contact/>.)

### STRATEGIES

To help you manage your emotions and become more resilient.

# YOU CAN INCREASE YOUR RESILIENCE

Some or a combination of the techniques and suggested exercises outlined in this document can be used to help you become more resilient. .

## Strategy 1: Managing Emotions and Practicing Mindfulness

Feelings like stress, anxiety, or sadness are normal. It's important to acknowledge and accept them. Sometimes, these feelings are so uncomfortable that we try to push them aside and might even turn to drugs or alcohol to avoid them.

Developing coping skills to manage these feelings and urges to use substances is a key part of recovery. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from hard times.

Let's complete a short scale to see how you view your resilience. Respond to each statement by circling one answer per row. There's no right or wrong answer; the best answer is how you see yourself.



Brief Resilience Scale\*

	Respond to each item by circling one answer per row.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.	1	2	3	4	5

\*SMITH, B.W., DALEN, J., WIGGINS, K., TOOLEY, E., CHRISTOPHER, P., AND BERNARD, J. (2008). THE BRIEF RESILIENCE SCALE: ASSESSING THE ABILITY TO BOUNCE BACK. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE, 15, 194–200.

Now, add up all the numbers from your response to the Brief Resilience Scale on the previous page. Your total score should be between 6 and 30. Divide this number by 6 to get your resilience score.

A score from 1 to 2 means low resilience. A score from 3 to 4 is considered normal resilience. A score from 4 to 5 indicates high resilience.

Looking at your scores and responses, what stands out to you? Do you think this reflects your ability to bounce back? What are some things that help you recover from tough times?

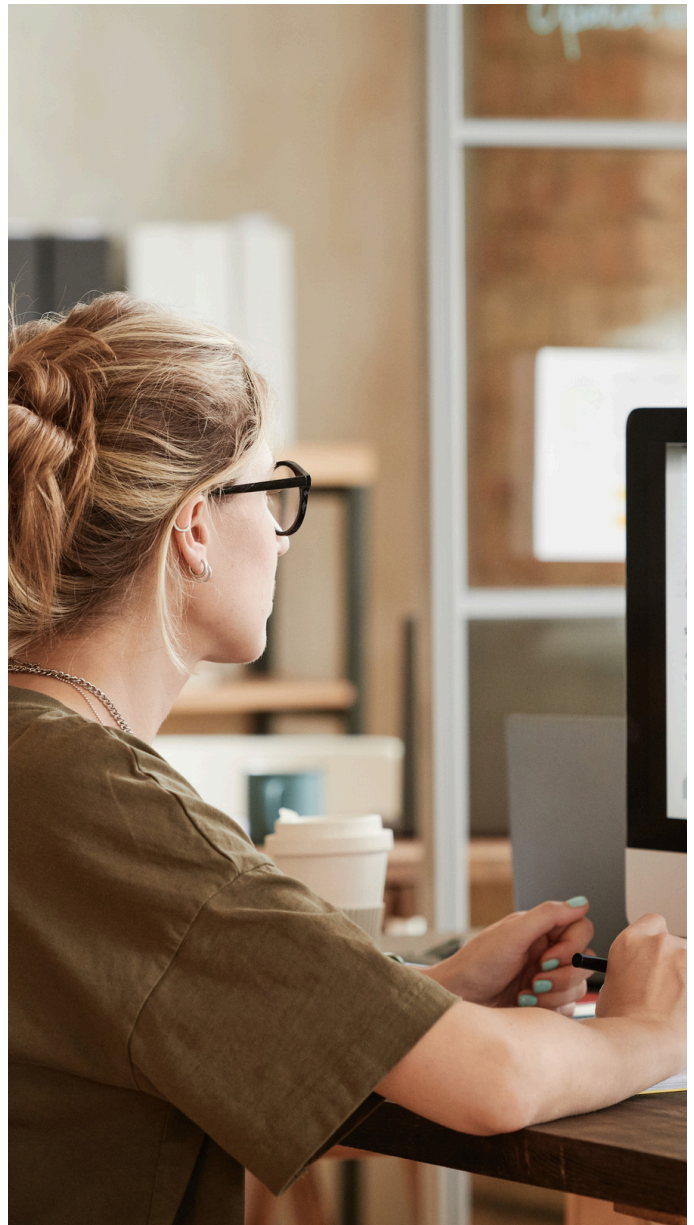
In recovery, it's important to find new, healthier ways to manage emotions and moderate stress.

"Mindfulness," means focusing on yourself and what you're experiencing to center yourself, solve problems, and cope with stress.

Some mindfulness techniques are:

- **Meditation:** Sitting quietly and focusing your mind to feel calm.
- **Deep Breathing:** Taking slow, deep breaths to relax.
- **Grounding Techniques:** Paying attention to the present moment, like noticing how the ground feels under your feet.

Working with a counselor can also be helpful. Therapies like cognitive-behavioral therapy teach people how to change negative thought patterns, make healthier choices, and build resilience.



### *Directions for Simple Meditation*

1. Sit up straight on a cushion or chair.
2. Rest your hands in a comfortable position.
3. Tilt your chin downward and close your eyes.
4. Start your timer. Begin with just a few minutes and slowly add minutes.
5. Focus on your breathing.
6. Observe your breath without analyzing it.
7. Bring your attention back to your breath if it wanders.
8. Understand that meditating isn't always easy.



## *Practice Square Breathing*

Square breathing, also called box breathing, is a simple technique to help manage stress and improve focus. You can practice square breathing anywhere and at time. Here's how:

1. *Inhale*: Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose for a count of four.
2. *Hold*: Hold your breath for a count of four.
3. *Exhale*: Exhale slowly and completely through your mouth for a count of four.
4. *Hold*: Hold your breath again for a count of four.

Repeat this cycle several times. The method is called "square" or "box" breathing because each step is equal in length, like the sides of a square.



## *5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Method*

1. Sit or stand with your feet flat on the ground.
2. Inhale deeply through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth.
3. Feel the contact between your feet and the ground. Notice the sensations, such as pressure, temperature, and texture.
4. Engage your five senses:
  - Look around and identify five things you can see.
  - Notice four things you can physically feel, like the ground under your feet or the fabric of your clothes.
  - Listen for three distinct sounds in your environment.
  - Identify two different scents around you.
  - Focus on one thing you can taste, even if it's just a lingering taste in your mouth.

This technique helps anchor you in the present moment and can be very calming.



# JOURNALING EXERCISE

Use your journal to make a written plan for how you will manage your emotions and moderate stress. Consider the following:

- What kinds of stressful situations or "triggers" are you currently facing or expect to face?
- Can you list some ways you will practice mindfulness? When, where, and how often will you practice?
- Do you currently see a counselor who provides cognitive-behavioral therapy? If not, can you find one?

## *Strategy 2: Build a Strong Support System*

A strong support system can deepen your connectivity to others and is a key part of resilience.

Connecting with people who understand the struggles of recovery can provide motivation and accountability. Support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Celebrate Recovery, and SMART Recovery offer communities where people with shared experiences can support each other.

Some of these support groups offer online support and/or have Apps to help you access them even if you can't attend an in-person meeting. These are easy to find. For example, just google "find an AA meeting" and you will see how to find meetings (including online support) or how to download an App to your phone.

Having trusted people to lean on can make a big difference in preventing relapse. It's important to build positive relationships and avoid negative influences that could lead to setbacks.



# JOURNALING EXERCISE

Use your journal to write about your support system.

- Who are the people or groups you rely on the most?
- Do you need to expand your support system? If so, how can you do that? Make a list of groups or people who could support you.
- Are there people, groups, or even places that you should avoid because of their negative influences? Who are they? Make a list that you can use for reference.

### *Strategy 3: Recognizing and Using Personal Strengths.*

Assessing your personal strengths can help clarify the purpose and meaning of your life. By doing this, you will increase your resilience.

Everyone has skills, talents, and qualities that can support their recovery. These might include problem-solving skills, creativity, determination, or the ability to connect with others.

Participating in activities that highlight these strengths can boost confidence and commitment to recovery. For example, someone who enjoys helping others might like volunteering, while someone who loves learning could set educational goals.



## **JOURNALING EXERCISE**

Use your journal to assess your personal strengths as they relate to the purpose and meaning of your life:

- What personal strengths do you have that can support your recovery? Write about them and why you see them as strengths.
- What activities can you participate in to build on your strengths and give more purpose and meaning to your life?
- Consider committing to an activity you're not already involved in—what could it be?

### *Strategy 4: Engaging in Healthy Coping Strategies*

Replacing substance use with positive coping strategies is crucial for staying resilient. Healthy habits include:

- Exercise and Yoga: Help reduce stress and improve mood.
- Creative Activities: Writing, painting, or playing music can be great outlets for emotions.
- Setting a Daily Routine: Having structure and clear goals provides a sense of purpose.
- Self-Care: Eating well, getting enough sleep, and making time for enjoyable activities all support overall well-being.

Journaling and self-reflection are also helpful tools. These activities allow you to understand your emotions and find effective ways to manage stress.



## JOURNALING EXERCISE

Use your journal to evaluate how your practices and habits contribute to your resilience. Consider the following:

- What healthy habits do you currently practice that help you stay resilient? Write about them and why you find them helpful.
- Do you have a regular daily routine that includes time for practicing healthy habits?
- Consider committing to at least one additional coping strategy you're not already involved in—what could it be?
- How can the Serenity Prayer contribute to resilience? ("Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; and Wisdom to know the difference.")



### *Strategy 5: Reframe Thinking*

Reframing thinking involves shifting your perspective on a situation to see it in a more positive or constructive light.

This mental shift can contribute to personal resilience by helping you manage stress, overcome challenges, and maintain a sense of control.

When you reframe negative experiences as opportunities for growth or learning, you reduce feelings of helplessness and boost your ability to cope with adversity.

This positive mindset fosters emotional strength and adaptability, allowing you to navigate difficult situations more effectively.

#### **Example of Reframing:**

Instead of thinking, "I'm such a failure," you can reframe it as, "I made a mistake, but I can learn from it and do better next time."

This shift in perspective helps reduce negative emotions and encourages personal growth, making you more resilient in the face of challenges.

This publication is produced by the RCORP Rural Center of Excellence on SUD Recovery at the Fletcher Group. It is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$3.3 million with 0% financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.

## JOURNALING EXERCISE

Use your journal to think about how you would reframe your thinking in these stressful situations:

- You learned that you paid nearly twice as much for a new coat that your friend paid at another store. You now believe that you are a bad manager of your finances. How can you reframe this as a learning experience?
- Your date just stood you up. Rather than thinking you're a loser that no one would want to date, how can you reframe this experience?

## *Strategy 6: Practice Positivity*

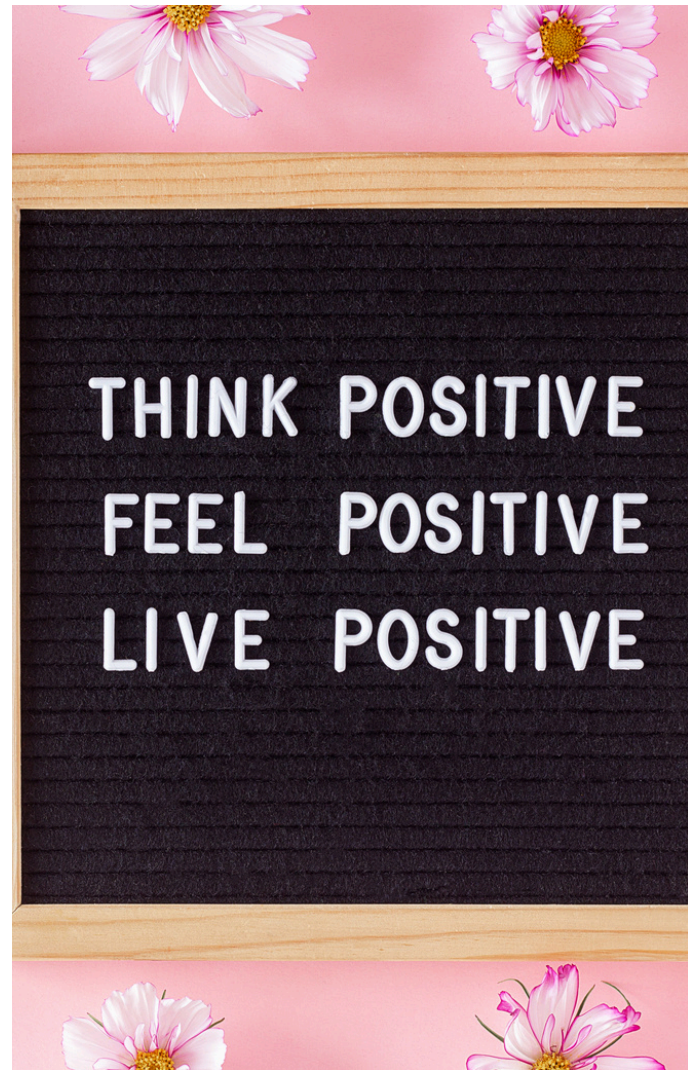
Practicing positivity involves focusing on the good in situations, expressing gratitude, and maintaining an optimistic outlook.

This can contribute to personal resilience by helping you stay motivated, manage stress, and recover more quickly from setbacks.

By regularly practicing positivity, you build mental strength, which allows you to face challenges with confidence and hope.

### *How to Practice Positivity*

An example of practicing positivity is starting your day by listing three things you're grateful for. This simple habit of maintaining a "gratitude journal" helps shift your focus to positive aspects of your life, boosts your mood and strengthens your ability to handle challenges.



## **JOURNALING EXERCISE**

Use your journal to list three things that you are grateful for today. As you make your list, think about why you are grateful for these things (people, pets, situations, etc.) and why your life is more positive because of them.

## **CONCLUSION**

By making resilience-building habits a part of daily life, you can not only maintain your sobriety but also improve your overall mental and emotional well-being.

Serenity evolves from being resilient. Serenity helps a recovering individual stay calm, clear-minded and emotionally balanced, as they rebuild their lives.

Being serene helps a person accept situations they cannot control and reduce their levels of stress and frustration. A serene person can make better decisions, manage cravings, and develop peace and clarity which are essential to long-term recovery.

