

Mental Resilience



Mental resilience refers to the ability to adapt in the event of adversity, trauma, tragedy or significant stress. Commonly it could be referred to as the ability to ‘bounce back’.

Resilience is not a trait, so can be learnt and developed through actions, thoughts and behaviours.

Why be resilient?

We can look at building resilience as a shock absorber against developing mental illness such as anxiety and depression. Additionally having high resilience can help counteract risk factors, such as poor social support, discrimination, bullying and traumatic events, which increase the chance of experiencing mental illness. For those with mental illness, resilience can assist with accepting challenges and working through set-backs.

There are many identifying qualities of a resilient person, but some include:

- Problem solving skills
- Planning skills
- Playing to their strength
- Self worth and self efficacy
- Optimism
- Openness to change
- Sense of humour

It has been found that people are more resilient when they have the ability to:

- Maintain supportive relationships
- Manage strong impulses and feelings
- Make realistic plans
- Solve problems
- Communicate effectively

Statistics from ComCare suggest that the average claim cost for workers with low levels of resilience is around three times greater when compared with workers with high resilience levels. Additionally, injured workers with low resilience had four times the amount time off work due to injury compared with those with high resilience levels. When compared with workers with high resilience levels, workers with low resilience levels were less likely to be physical or emotionally ready to return to work.

On top of this, resilient individuals tend to be more flexible, learn from experience and have coping strategies for difficult times. Resilient teams are based on participation, social norms, mutual trust and social networks which adapt positively to change.

Given this – here’s some ways to improve resilience in workers and create an environment to assist with building resilience with individuals and teams.

Be supportive

Create a conversation tool for your return to work plan which seeks to better understand the injured worker, discusses and implements early intervention strategies, sets expectations, roles and responsibilities for all parties at the commencement of the claim.

Motivational interviewing can also be effective in assisting with building resilience and having conversations with injured workers to build trust. Holding honest conversations can also assist in building resilience and mutual trust within a team.

Build a team

Discuss ways workers can ‘check in’ with each other on a regular basis to build team support – and additionally discuss indicators which show a worker may be struggling with their work tasks or work demands.

Encourage interaction and support from team mates to build connectedness. Regular social interactions and informal team catch-ups help build team cohesion, which assists in workers wanting to return to their ‘team’.

Provide clarity

Provide clarity of the worker’s role, even when on suitable duties and link between their tasks to the objectives of the team or organisation. Ensure the worker is still completing meaningful work on their return, to assist with demonstrating their self worth and worth to the team. Be sure to always keep injured workers informed of team tasks, as well as any changes to their own return to work progress.



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Give credit

Be sure to give credit for achievements and progress. There may be set backs in returning injured workers back to their job, so recognising gains is important.

Consider speaking with the worker about keeping a diary regarding achievements for the day or week, as well as their pain levels. This can assist workers with long term injuries to look back and assess how much they have improved.

Set goals

As with any plan, be sure to set goals using the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) principle.

Remember setting goals should be motivating – long term return to work goals may need mini goals to break the overall goal into smaller, achievable tasks.

Internal dialogues

Always remember that an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or adjustment to injury counselling is available to workers. Many of these sessions can assist with creating resilience by building coping strategies for workers. It's important to remove the stigma of using an EAP and explain the benefits and confidentiality of the program. Be aware of injured workers negative self-talk. Encouraging them to actively practice positive talk and avoid negative self-talk is important in developing self-esteem – which can have major effects on return to work. Using cognitive behavioural-based theory and Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) theory can also assist with building coping strategies and improving self-esteem and self worth.

Return to work tips

Act EARLY – be sure your initial assessment is holistic including social connection, optimism and coping behaviours.

Identify barriers – address all the barriers in a worker's return to work.

Be positive – support the worker by being positive, show consistent messages and set expectations early.

Ensure the worker is educated regarding their pain and function, why it they are experiencing pain and why their pain may be aggravated. Knowledge is key.

Encourage injured workers to:

- Maintain positive relationships with close family and friends
- Accept circumstances which cannot be changed
- Develop realistic goals and a plan to move toward them
- Remain flexible, but take decisive actions in difficult times
- Self-discover and actively re/build skills and confidence
- Consider a broad context and long term perspective
- Maintain hope and expect positive changes

