

## **Resilience Tips By Shelley Hourston**

Disability Alliance BC (formerly BC Coalition of People with Disabilities)

The following Resilience Tips were originally published in DABC's e-newsletter, *Our Voice*. To subscribe, visit our website (<http://www.disabilityalliancebc.org/>) and enter your email address in the "subscribe box" in the top right corner of our main page.

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Resilience Tips Series 2012-2014 by Shelley Hourston, Disability Alliance BC  
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### **Tip #1: Keep a gratitude journal [April 2012]**

Researchers have found that keeping a gratitude journal or list has a positive impact on physical symptoms, optimism and outlook. Studies have also found a positive connection between gratitude and personal goal achievement, enthusiasm, and energy. People keeping daily gratitude lists report an increased sense of connection with others and were more likely than people in the control group to offer emotional support to others. (Robert Emmons: <http://tinyurl.com/2g4rx3f>)

Read "Tips for Keeping a Gratitude Journal" by Jason Marsh at: <http://tinyurl.com/88uj38e>

### **Tip #2: Do what you love [May 2012]**

Much has been said about "doing what you love" in work and in life generally. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson and other researchers have discovered that one easy way to increase our level of positive emotion—that magic ingredient in resilience—is to *experience* positive emotions. It sounds circular doesn't it? Fortunately there is an easy way to increase positive emotion: do what you love. I'm not talking about activities that require a lot of money or energy, but once you begin to think about it, you'll find that there are plenty of possibilities. One of my favourite activities is listening to the birds singing as I walk my dog through the community gardens early in the morning. You might love reading a book for 20 minutes before you start your day. We can all develop a list of things we love to do that are within our reach most days. Interestingly the list and the associated benefits are maximized as we increase our mindfulness or awareness. As we savour the experience, our enjoyment builds a reserve of positive emotions and an antidote for future stressful experiences.

### **Tip #3: Be kind-do a good deed for someone [June 2012]**

A large body of research now documents the positive effects of giving. Stephen Post is a researcher and author of several books on the impact of altruism or kindness on physical and mental health. In his 2010 annual review of scientific research on the topic, Post notes that in a US study of 4,582 adult volunteers:

- 73 percent found volunteering lowered their stress level
- 89 percent said volunteering improved their sense of well-being
- 29 percent with chronic illness said that volunteering helped them manage their illness, and

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•92 percent believed that volunteering "enriches their sense of purpose in life."\*  
You don't need to be a formal volunteer in order to benefit from giving, however. Try engaging in one small act of kindness each day for five days and see how you feel. Need ideas? Check out this list of 101 random acts of kindness at Love Is the Word blog (<http://tinyurl.com/7auertp>).

\*Stephen G. Post. It's Good to Be Good: 2010 Annual Scientific Report on Health, Happiness and Helping Others. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/83net3u>

#### **Tip #4: Laugh! [July 2012]**

The numbers vary widely but it is said that children typically laugh 300 to 400 times a day and adults only 15 times a day. If you consider times when you feel worried, sad or physically unwell, laughing even 15 times per day might feel impossible. Researchers world-wide have linked humour to well-being and resilience, gathering at fun-sounding events such as the 12th International Summer School and Symposium on Humour and Laughter (<http://tinyurl.com/88zrpxb>) held this month in Finland. The (international) Humor Project works to "help people get more smileage out of their lives and jobs by applying the practical, positive power of humor and creativity." (<http://www.humorproject.com/about/>)

Humour and laughter reduce stress hormones and boost the immune system. Laughter releases endorphins—the “feel good” chemical—and is even more powerful when we share humour with others. Even pretending to laugh will lead to better health. In fact, Laughter Yoga developed by Dr. Madan Kataria in India, begins each session with feigned hearty laughter which soon turns into real laughter as participants watch those around them (<http://tinyurl.com/y24y7vy>). If you can't find a Laughter Yoga group near you, Dr. Kataria provides information on doing laughter yoga alone: <http://tinyurl.com/8xu4vh7>.

It's also worth making a list of activities that make you laugh and exchanging ideas with friends and family. Turn to your favourite activity to make yourself laugh away stressful moments.

#### **Tip #5: Breathe! [August 2012]**

Change, disappointment or loss is stressful for everyone. Some people seem to have a natural ability to “go with the flow,” but at some point we all experience symptoms of stress. This “fight or flight response” originated as an important means of protecting the body in the face of danger (<http://tinyurl.com/celpk49>). This extreme physical reaction is problematic in today's world, however, when the perceived threat we're facing is long-term or complex. Increased heart and breathing rates and narrowing of blood vessels that prepare us for “fight or flight” also contribute to a variety of health problems not to mention significant discomfort. An effective strategy for limiting this response and thus increasing our resilience is to practice controlled breathing exercises. Free and requiring no equipment, breathing exercises can be done anywhere and produce a noticeable benefit quickly. Three easy-to-learn breathing techniques are recommended by Dr. Andrew Weil here: <http://tinyurl.com/4r49bz>.

#### **Tip #6: Practice self-compassion [September 2012]**

While self-esteem has been considered the ticket to happiness and mental wellness for 20 years, researchers today promote self-compassion instead. Psychologist and self-compassion researcher, Kristin Neff notes that “There is always someone richer, thinner, smarter, or more powerful, someone that makes us feel small in comparison. ... Our culture has become so

competitive we need to feel special and above average just to feel okay about ourselves.”\* Events that require resilience can also lead us to doubt our strength or capabilities and put a dent in our self-esteem. Neff writes, “Research indicates that self-compassion offers the same benefits as self-esteem (less depression, greater happiness, etc.) without its downsides.”\* Research published earlier this year described self-compassion as “a self-attitude that involves treating oneself with warmth and understanding in difficult times and recognizing that making mistakes is part of being human.”\*\* The safe and nonjudgmental approach of self-compassion actually encourages people to explore areas for personal improvement with greater motivation. For more about increasing your self-compassion, visit Kristin Neff’s website at <http://www.self-compassion.org/>.

\* Kristin Neff. “Why self-compassion is healthier than self-esteem.” Psychology Today Blog. June 25, 2011. <http://tinyurl.com/3fqcz9z>

\*\* Juliana G. Breines and Serena Chen. “Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation.” Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 2012 38 (May 29, 2012) <http://psp.sagepub.com/content/38/9/1133>

### **Tip #7: “Taking in the good” [October 2012]**

Neuropsychologist Rick Hanson (<http://www.rickhanson.net>) advocates a practice he calls “taking in the good.” By noticing, appreciating and nurturing positive experiences and events researchers say we can re-wire our brains. How could that be? Hanson writes, “In a profound sense, we are what we remember—the slow accumulation of the registration of lived experience. That’s what we have ‘taken in’ to become a part of ourselves. Just as food becomes woven into the body, memory becomes woven into the self.”\* Memories of negative events are vivid and recorded immediately thus aiding survival. Positive events and experiences, however, must be held in our awareness for 5-20 seconds before they are recorded as an emotional memory.\* By mindfully savouring positive experiences we can create an “antidote” for negative events from the past and build resilience for the future.

\*Rick Hanson. "Taking In the Good: Key Points" in Train Your Brain: The Five Essential Skills. <http://tinyurl.com/9rahtst>

Remember to watch for our “Everyday Resilience” column in each issue of Transition magazine. <http://bccpd.bc.ca/library/transition.htm>

### **Tip #8: Humour [November 2012]**

Researchers have found humour to be a coping technique that lowers stress, increases self-esteem and reduces psychological symptoms that come with negative life experiences.\* In one study, people with a good sense of humour were less lonely, less depressed, and experienced lower levels of stress. In another study, those who scored high on the sense of humour scale also reported better quality of life. That a sense of humour would reduce the anxiety of difficult life situation seems obvious. The challenge of course is to find ways to feel humour in the midst of a mini or even a medium-sized crisis.

Interestingly, humour and creative thinking are closely aligned. Creating a joke (seeing humour) requires an element of surprise or juxtaposition as does thinking creatively. Is it possible that people with a sense of humour are more inclined to laugh in the face of tribulations because

they can think of more potential solutions? For more about humour and resilience, watch for our next issue of Transition magazine where we'll talk about some simple strategies for maximizing the power of humour as Everyday Resilience.

\*Mary Payne Bennett and Cecile Lengacher. "Humor and Laughter May Influence Health: II. Complementary Therapies and Humor in a Clinical Population." Evidence Based Complementary Alternative Medicine 2006 June; 3(2): 187-190. Available: <http://tinyurl.com/afdeg63>

### **Tip #9: A New Year's Tip: Make a Jar of Happy Memories [December 2012]**

Busy schedules and constant stimulation in our digital world make it easy to forget about small but meaningful moments that occur each day. Whether a phone call from a friend or the sweet sound of birds singing as you wait for a bus, positive experiences seem to increase as we develop a practice of noticing them. Positive psychologists call this "savouring" and neuropsychologist Rick Hanson calls it "taking in the good."

This resilience tip was recently circulated on Facebook accompanied by an image of a jar filled with slips of coloured paper.\* A variation of the gratitude journal, the jar helps us develop a practice of savouring positive moments. At the end of each day write a brief note about positive moments or events and place them in the jar. At the end of 2013—or any day when you need a reminder—open the jar read about the things that made your day. A "gratitude jar" is a great activity to help kids learn the power of savouring and would be fun to do with a group of friends. If you decide to try a gratitude jar, let us know what you think. We'll collect photos and stories about the experience next year so be creative and get started January 1<sup>st</sup>!

\*Posted by Patron of the Arts (<https://www.facebook.com/patronofthearts>), a California-based nonprofit supporting artists and filmmakers.

### **Tip #10: Start from where you are [January 2103]**

In her book *Healing Into Possibility: The Transformational Lessons of a Stroke*, Alison Bonds Shipiro writes about her journey of recovery following two strokes at age 55. Her experience led her to identify eight principles of transformation, one of which is "Start from where you are." The essence of this principle is to carefully and realistically explore your challenging situation or experience to gather information and insight. Bonds Shipiro compares life to an iceberg with only a small portion above the water and in our awareness. By considering the whole iceberg—including aspects normally ignored and sometimes distorted—we can draw on strengths, experiences and knowledge previously overlooked. "The less we like or approve of something, the less attention we're likely to pay to it. But paying close attention to what we don't like is critical if we want to change things. Paying attention to what is, just as it is, without pretending or prejudging, allows us to start from where we are."\*

\*Alison Bonds Shipiro. *Healing Into Possibility: The Transformational Lessons of a Stroke*. Tiburon/Novato, CA: H.J. Kramer/New World Library, 2009. (p. 244)

### **Resilience Tip #11: Grow your support network [February 2013]**

Living with a disability or chronic health condition can shrink your social support network just when you need it most. Those of us who are shy often find it difficult to build new relationships and disability-related issues such as fatigue, pain, mobility challenges, medication side-effects or low self-esteem can make social connection even more complicated.

Over several decades researchers have confirmed the link between social relationships and health. People who are “more socially connected are healthier and live longer than their more isolated peers.”\* Positive social relationships impact physical and mental health and contribute to an increased sense of control and meaning in life. Maintaining your social support network is like stockpiling resilience for the future.

Tips for creating and maintaining successful social connections:

- ❑ Listen—it’s a precious gift.
- ❑ Appreciate—say thank you and express your admiration or gratitude.
- ❑ Competition is for athletes! Be happy for your friends when they succeed—not jealous.
- ❑ Be kind.
- ❑ Keep in touch.
- ❑ Take care of yourself.

\*Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas Montez. “Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 2010 51: S54-S66.  
([http://hsb.sagepub.com/content/51/1\\_suppl/S54.full](http://hsb.sagepub.com/content/51/1_suppl/S54.full)) (p. S54)

### **Resilience Tip #12: You know more than you think [March 2013]**

One of the benefits of hindsight is realizing that we know much more than we think we know. Experts call this “tacit knowledge”—the vast knowledge we accumulate through experience. Each interaction, activity, observation, insight and intuition is merged to create our ever-growing tacit knowledge. Some describe it as the submerged portion of the “knowledge iceberg.” Tacit knowledge is different for each of us and is difficult to communicate. Learning to appreciate and access our own knowledge bank is a critical resilience strategy.

Research has shown that arts-based or visual tools are helpful in accessing tacit knowledge. Collage and concept mapping are two techniques that have been useful. Another simple and effective tool is mind mapping developed by Tony Buzan. A simple mind map can be created with a pen or pencil and a blank sheet of paper. Write a word or phrase in the centre of the page, draw a circle around it and then add words and phrases as they come to mind. Connect related concepts/topics with lines and work quickly to bypass your internal editor. Return and add new topics until your mind map feels complete. Using colour and images enhances the process. For inspiration, check out the following video and Pinterest board or do a web search for mind mapping software.

How to Use a Mind Map – with Tony Buzan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0XzZCd2tPE>

Examples of mind mapping at B.J. Nicolas’ Pinterest Board

<http://pinterest.com/bjnicolas/mind-mapping/>

### **Resilience Tip #13: Practice mindfulness [April 2013]**

There has been much discussion in recent years about the benefits of mindfulness meditation. Research on the well-known MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) technique developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn confirms the benefits for pain, stress, anxiety and coping with illness. Mindfulness is commonly discussed in the positive psychology literature and was included in a recent article as one of the individual characteristics and behaviours contributing to resilience. The authors describe mindfulness as “moment-to-moment awareness of bodily activities, feelings, emotions, or sensations, while purposely perceiving and discarding any distracting thoughts that come into awareness” (p. 5)\* It’s helpful to recognize the “practice” element of developing a “mindfulness practice.” Rather than feeling overwhelmed with the notion that success requires a daily 30 minute or more meditation session, practice mindfulness often throughout your day. Use mindfulness as tiny and expanding islands of calm in the midst of life rushing past. Rick Hanson describes the benefits gained through mindfulness in savouring and “taking in the good” (<http://tinyurl.com/d8bpkao>). If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness as a resilience tool, check out BCCPD’s *Mindfulness Meditation for Stress Reduction and Self-care* video and guided meditation audio at <http://tinyurl.com/cxjsyly>.

\* Wu, Gang, Adriana Feder, Hagit Cohen, et al. "Understanding resilience." *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 7 (2013), <http://tinyurl.com/bq4wmuz> (accessed April 15, 2013).

### **Resilience Tip #14: Listen to music [May 2013]**

It’s no surprise that music and mood are connected. We’ve all experienced a burst of positive energy when we hear a favourite “happy song” on the radio. Maybe you’ve even intentionally played upbeat music to improve your mood. Recent research at the University of Missouri confirms the positive influence of enjoying upbeat music but only when the listener focuses on the pleasure of the music rather than waiting watchfully for their mood to improve.\*

Results of another research project at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands also confirmed that music can affect your mood. Even more interesting, however, is the additional finding that listening to happy or sad music can change the way we perceive the world. When our brain receives information through vision, we process it based on memories and expectations—previous knowledge. These researchers found that listening to happy or sad music could over-ride visual perception. The task required research participants to identify computer generated (animated) “faces” as happy or sad. Interestingly, those listening to happy music identified “smiley faces” even when the images weren’t happy faces.\*\*

We’d like to hear your suggestions for “happy music.” Please share your favourite music and we’ll publish the top 20 suggestions in the June issue of *Our Voice* e-newsletter.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/M8NQV58>

“Trying to Be Happier Works When Listening to Upbeat Music, According to MU Research.” University of Missouri News Bureau (May 14, 2013). <http://tinyurl.com/kpg4wr4>

\*\* “Jacob Jolij and Maaïke Meurs (2011) “Music Alters Visual Perception.” *PLoS* 6(4). <http://tinyurl.com/3mmd7cr>

### **Resilience Tip #15: Do you know what your problem is? [June 2012]**

Decision making and problem solving demand creative thinking skills and very often a serving of courage. Time and effort can be wasted if we don't identify the core issue. Metacognition is a term researchers use for "thinking about thinking" and "knowing what we know." Reflecting on what we think and know is beneficial in identifying the *essence* of our problem and revealing potential solutions or options for assistance.

Taking time to question our assumptions is a simple and powerful technique for exploring a challenge. An assumption is the act of accepting something as a fact without proof. By questioning things we assume to be true we look for the evidence to prove that our belief is either true or false. If there is no evidence to support our assumption we may need to reassess our interpretation of the problem.

Our resilience is increased when we know how to clarify problems and identify potential solutions or sources of support. For information about problem solving techniques visit Mind Tools at: <http://tinyurl.com/oerysp>.

### **Resilience Tip #16: Standing up to Fear [July 2013]**

Developing a relationship with Fear is a critical for resilience. My dictionary describes Fear as "an unpleasant emotion caused by exposure to danger, expectation of pain, etc. ... anxiety or apprehension..."\* Some people are more comfortable co-existing with Fear than others despite having lived through scary experiences. Others feel immobilized and can practically hear "Fear" panting from around the next corner. Anxiety, dread, panic, unwillingness to step forward or initiate change are common symptoms. Many of us mistakenly believe that the solution is to simply co-exist with Fear. We make an agreement: I'll give up and stay away from change, goals, dreams and being the best I can be if you, Fear, just stay over there in the corner.

Fear is happy with this living arrangement because Fear's best friend, Disappointment, is about to move in too. I know from experience that Disappointment is just as much a bully as Fear. When you get both of them in the room together it's impossible to feel resilient. Fear prances around making threats but Disappointment actually kicks us in the stomach.

Let's say Fear and Disappointment have already taken up residence in your home. It's not too late... it's never too late to develop some house rules. Fear likes to tell us that we're the only one in his life. The truth is that Fear has been busy and has at one time or another bullied every single one of us. Talk to other people about Fear and Disappointment and you'll find some helpful suggestions. Just sharing the burden can help you feel stronger. It's not always possible to evict Fear but you can demand that he live in the basement most of the time. And once you've put Fear in the basement, Disappointment won't come around as often.

\* The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001).

### **Tip #17: Spend 20 minutes at the park [August 2013]**

Increasing your resilience may be as simple as enjoying more times outdoors. A growing body of research points to the benefits of spending time in nature—a park or other natural environment. Canadian researcher Holli-Anne Passmore, notes that people who felt connected with nature experienced a "high degree of overall mental well-being ... [and] a high sense of meaning in their lives."\* Terms such as "nature deficit disorder" and "nature starvation" have

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emerged to describe our increasing separation from nature. Passmore cites a 2005 survey showing that 90 percent of Canadians spend almost all of their time indoors!

Richard Ryan at the University of Rochester\*\* describes the energizing effects of connecting with nature. In multiple studies participants reported an increased sense of vitality and improved mental and physical health from time in a natural setting. Just 20 minutes per day is enough to generate positive results. Interestingly, simply *remembering* an outdoor experience creates feelings of happiness and health too.

For instructions on using nature walks as a wellness practice, visit the Skillful Means Wiki at <http://tinyurl.com/llyp28q>.

\* Passmore, Holli-Anne. "Feeling Blue—Get Green: The Benefits of Nature on Our Mental Health and Well-being." *Earth Common Journal* 1, no. 1 (2011): 80-86. <http://tinyurl.com/k845v5v> (accessed August 19, 2013).

\*\* "Spending Time in Nature Makes People Feel More Alive, Study Shows." University of Rochester News (June 3, 2010). <http://www.rochester.edu/news/show.php?id=3639> (accessed August 19, 2013).

### **Tip #18: Thinking about thinking [September 2013]**

Thinking is something we've all done for a long time without a lot of ... well ... thought. This can be a problem when we're facing a challenge and need to be resilient. Although most of you reading this are superb "thinkers" like I am, stressful situations can wreak havoc with clear, efficient thinking. The automatic nature of thinking is perfect for the mundane and repetitive things we do on a daily basis. Most often thoughts and actions are based on our individual recipes of experience, values, beliefs and assumptions. When we receive bad news or face sudden, uninvited change, it's natural to cling to what we "know"—our experience, beliefs, etc. Unfortunately combining autopilot with the negativity bias\* that enabled our ancestors to survive millions of years ago, can lead to anxiety and tunnel vision. We can become more resilient by practicing effective thinking skills regularly. Learning strategies to challenge common thinking errors such as overgeneralization, jumping to conclusions, personalization and blame, labeling, and denial can improve daily life too. For simple and practical tools, visit the Skillful Means Wiki.\*\* If you have tips for improving resilience through effective thinking, please share them with me for a future "Everyday Resilience" column in *Transition* magazine. Contact Shelley at [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca) or call 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400).

\*Rick Hanson. "Confronting the Negativity Bias" *Psychology Today Blog* October 26, 2010. Available: <http://tinyurl.com/6qr3v2y>

\*\*"Common Errors in Thinking" Skillful Means Wiki. Available: <http://tinyurl.com/meoutcl>  
"Disputing Negative Thoughts." Skillful Means Wiki. Available: <http://tinyurl.com/k595w89>

### **Tip #19: Find a mentor [October 2013]**

Most of us have had mentors in our lives although we may not have used the label. A mentor is "an experienced and trusted advisor or guide" according to *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. A mentor may be passive, sharing wisdom through their story or example. Others may be part of a formal mentoring program with specific techniques for sharing their experience and training with

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a *mentee*. Recognizing and utilizing mentors is a powerful resilience strategy but one that some people may resist because it feels like “asking for help.” If this is an issue for you, consider the way you feel when someone asks about your experience with a situation. When done respectfully, it is a compliment to learn that someone values your experience and knowledge.

Consulting mentors can increase resilience in a variety of ways. Simply knowing that others have faced similar challenges can be beneficial. Even more helpful is hearing that they shared your fears, anxiety, disappointment, anger or grief and yet have moved forward. Mentors view a situation from a different perspective and can help you see alternatives. They may have concrete knowledge that can help or perhaps they have a philosophy that appeals. Mentors can offer hope because they have lived through adversity.

Finding a mentor can be as simple as compiling a list of people you know who would be willing to talk to you about a challenge or situation. Perhaps family members or neighbours can suggest people with experience to share. Support groups, volunteer opportunities, community events and recreational activities are places you might find people willing to exchange life experiences and ideas. It’s not essential that your mentor have lived through challenges identical to yours—diverse stories often share common threads. Your willingness to BE a mentor will help in finding mentoring relationships. Remember that mentors need not be alive. Some people count writers, philosophers and individuals who’ve written about life hundreds of years ago among their mentors.

For more about mentoring, visit your local public library and check out PeerNetBC at <http://www.peernetbc.com/>.

#### **Tip #20: Nurture hope [November 2013]**

“Don’t lose hope!” When we’re facing a challenge in life there is often someone telling us to “be hopeful.” Depending on your situation, hope may feel like a distant memory and this advice can be irritating or seem insensitive. Feeling hopeful is wonderful and uplifting but it’s not something we can count on, right? Researchers have found that we have more control over our sense of hopefulness than we think.

Shane Lopez is a psychologist and the Gallup Senior Scientist in Residence and Research Director at the Clifton Strengths School. In his most recent book, *Making Hope Happen: Create the Future You Want for Yourself and Others* (<http://www.hopemonger.com/>), Lopez explores the importance of hope in living a satisfying and resilient life. “Hope can lift our spirits, buoy our energy, and make life seem worth living. But it also changes our day-to-day behaviour. How we think about the future has a direct influence on what we do today.”\* Lopez describes hope as active and sustainable thinking about the future. “Hope is the belief that the future will be better than the present coupled with the belief that you have the power to make it so.”\*\* Unlike hope’s “weak cousin” called wishing which is “passive and counterproductive,”\*\* hope is based on optimism, planning (including a “plan B” for backup) and willingness to seek support and help when needed. Lopez also notes the importance of focusing our effort on a limited number of goals we value highly and are committed to achieving. Scattered focus taxes our limited energy and dilutes our success. Hope is intertwined with many of the other Resilience Tips we’ve explored to date. Self-care, creative thinking skills, a strong social network and mindfulness play a role in making hope happen—and vice versa.

Do you have stories or tips for “making hope happen?” We’d love to hear from you. Contact Shelley at 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400) or email [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca).

Need inspiration? Check out "This Gives Me Hope: Cathryn Wellner's Search for 1001 Reasons for Optimism" at <http://thisgivesmehope.com/>

\*Shane J. Lopez. “Making Hope Happen In the Classroom.” *Phi Delta Kappan Magazine*, October, 2013 (Vol. 95, #2, pp. 19-22). p. 21

\*\*“The Science of Hope: An Interview with Shane Lopez.” [video] University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality and Healing. <http://tinyurl.com/mljpxxd>

### **Tip #21: Disabling stigma [December 2013]**

I've always been intrigued with the "quirkiness" of life... you know, those things that are common yet completely nonsensical. Stigma is one of those things. Sometimes from birth, and sometimes later in life, people find themselves a member of a group without ever signing up. Examples include poverty, racial/ethnic heritage, LGBT, age and disability/chronic illness. Other people who believe themselves spared from membership in one or more of these groups create (or accept) elaborate fictional stories about a specific group's members without even meeting them! Stigma is a negative life story assigned to you and created by an unauthorized person (e.g. not you). Internalized stigma occurs when members of stigmatized groups believe these negative, unauthorized stories. The shame and fear evoked by someone else's fiction about your life can make you forget that you are responsible for creating your life story. In fact, stigma can completely derail your life story if you let it. By harvesting our life experiences and strengthening our own story we can combat internalized stigma. If and when we feel strong and/or safe enough to share our stories with the world, we can also help others see stigma for what it is. [Continued... read more at <http://blog.disabilityalliancebc.org/?p=1939>]

### **Resilience Tip #22: Never leave wisdom on the table! [January 2014]**

I believe that many of us experience fear and uncertainty moving forward because we've failed to harvest our wisdom. The Danish writer Soren Kierkegaard said, “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” This quote is curiously insightful given that he died early at only 42 and is described as a man who “led a somewhat uneventful life.”\* It's true, though. Ironically, we commonly cite the benefit of life experience and yet leave piles of wisdom on the table when we move on, forgetting the vast knowledge we possess.

To be fair, some of us are more reflective and analytical than others. And it's always easier to see the nuggets of wisdom after we've gained some distance from the chaos (Kierkegaard was right!). Whether our decisions along the way have led to successes or failures, reflecting on these experiences will yield insight and understanding—unique keys to resilience and confidence going forward!

Simply put, wisdom is hiding in our stories. Journaling and autobiographical writing are excellent tools for examining our lived experience. Story review requires only some time, paper or a notebook and curiosity. Work alone or find a journaling or writing group in your community or online. If you cannot or prefer not to write your stories, consider telling your story orally and recording it for future review and reflection. And remember, when listening to others share their stories, offer supportive and empathetic feedback only. We're looking for wisdom.

\*Soren Kierkegaard. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (Rev. July 27, 2012)  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kierkegaard/>

Looking for resources on journaling or autobiography? Living with HIV and/or Hepatitis C and interested in a Guided Autobiography program called SOAR (Stories of Adversity and Resilience)? Contact Shelley at 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400) or email [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca).

**[no tip for February 2014]**

**Tip #23: Attend to loneliness: you're not the only one [March 2014]**

Most of us know that social connections increase our resilience. However, we may not be aware of the fact that absence of a strong social network—loneliness—has a direct impact on our health. Loneliness is complicated by stigma. Admitting that you're lonely is often perceived as admitting that you're a failure in some way. Lonely people must surely be misfits or socially inept. Especially in this age of social networking, it's easy to believe that loneliness must mean that you are truly unworthy of human connection or companionship.

Psychologist John Cacioppo notes that loneliness is a bigger problem than people realize and has serious consequences.\* Chronic loneliness is linked to a range of health issues such as low immune function, heart disease, depression and ultimately a shorter life. Chronic or long-term social isolation increases our stress response as if our bodies are waiting for a dire threat. Cacioppo points to the evolutionary nature of this reaction. Being alone, for our distant ancestors, meant abandoning the protection of the group and jeopardizing one's genetic contribution to the next generation.

Loneliness is not measured by the number of social connections we have but rather by the quality of those relationships. Our fast-paced, urban and insular lifestyle is often cited as a cause of loneliness. A recent Globe & Mail article\*\* provides perspectives on loneliness, "the longing that dare not speak its name." For those of us living with disabilities and chronic illness, addressing loneliness is vital. Strategies for increasing and improving social connections, however, are diverse and will require some self-reflection. If you feel that you could benefit from growing or nurturing your social network it may be useful to consider activities you enjoy and existing relationships you might enhance. If you have suggestions for ways of managing loneliness that have worked for you and that you're willing to share, let me know and I'll compile them for a future newsletter. Contact Shelley at 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400 or email [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca)).

\* "Psychologist John Cacioppo explains why loneliness is bad for your health" (January 25, 2011). Available: <http://tinyurl.com/kth7fr9>

\*\* Elizabeth Renzetti. "Life of solitude: A loneliness crisis is looming." Globe & Mail (November 23, 2013). Available: <http://tinyurl.com/kupgcys>

### **Tip #24: Ask a provocative question [April 2014]**

There's nothing like a challenge or crisis to make you feel low on resilience. Life turbulence and all that anxiety, anger or fear restricts our ability to generate creative options. It can feel as if you're trapped in a corner... and this just adds to the problem. We're told that Albert Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." I don't think he really meant to say that we created our own problem, but sometimes we do! Regardless of how we ended up in a jam, changing the way we think about it isn't easy. Innovation consultant, Lisa Bodell, writes, "Transformative power lies in asking questions that make us rethink the obvious." She describes these questions as "provocative inquiry."\* Posing provocative questions is intended to shake up assumptions and expectations, ultimately leading to creative options. According to Bodell such questions "usually begin with "how," "which," "why" or "if" and are specific without limiting imagination. ... They awaken the mind rather than put it to sleep."\*\* Examples might include: What strengths or expertise have I gained through my experience with my chronic illness? If I could eliminate three activities from my weekly chore schedule what would they be? How can I share my skills, strengths and experience in ways that are rewarding for me and useful to others? Try different ways of exploring your provocative questions—perhaps with a trusted friend or colleague or through journaling or Mind Mapping. Be sure to record your ideas as they appear.

If you have suggestions for ways to problem solve or increase options during life turbulence, let me know! Contact Shelley at 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400) or [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca).

\*Bodell, L. (2014). Soft skills for the future. T&D Magazine (American Society for Training & Development) March 8, 2014. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/kvczl5n>

\*\*Bodell, L. (2013). 10 disruptive questions for instant innovation. Forbes April 10, 2013. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/l97pcuq>

### **Tip #25: Focus [May 2014]**

For many people with chronic illness or disability, difficulty focusing is an unexpected and often unrecognized challenge. Difficulty focusing can be an invisible side effect of your primary health condition or disability. While your health care provider may mention to you that your chronic pain or depression or MS or... [fill in your disability here]... may affect your ability to focus, this is probably not going to be at the top of your list of concerns at first. And more to the point, difficulty focusing may not happen or become obvious to you immediately. Or it may not appear until you begin a specific medication or treatment. Or ... you may notice a problem focusing as a consequence of worry—about money or stigma or another hurdle. And to complicate the issue, what I call "difficulty focusing" you might label "lack of concentration," "fuzzy-headedness," "attention deficit," "lack of will-power," or "inability to achieve goals." Sometimes these labels are assigned by others and can cause us to give up before we even start.

Whatever name you use to describe focus or the lack of it, the person best equipped to address it is you. There are dozens of tips for improving concentration, achieving goals and increasing focus, but in my experience, not all will work for you. The challenge is identifying the strategies that produce results for you and your situation. Perhaps you already know what works or maybe you need to experiment with new tools. Tips for adults with attention deficit disorder (ADD) can be useful for people without this diagnosis. Research indicates that mindfulness meditation can improve focus. Psychologist Bill O'Hanlon has created a user-friendly hand-out called "Developing Focus" which you will find reprinted on our blog at:

<http://blog.bccpd.bc.ca/?p=2192>.

Resilience Tips by Shelley Hourston, Disability Alliance of BC  
(formerly BC Coalition of People with Disabilities). Tips may be reprinted with the following information:  
Resilience Tips Series 2012-2014 by Shelley Hourston, Disability Alliance BC  
[www.disabilityalliancebc.org](http://www.disabilityalliancebc.org)

What are your best tips for improving focus? I'd love to hear what works for you. Email me at [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca) or call 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400).

**Tip #26: Change happens ... constantly! [June 2014]**

This deceptively simple resilience tip eluded me until I was well into my adult years. Often when we think of change, we feel anxious at the thought of losing our comfort with the way things are. One day I realized that there are two sides to this coin. When I'm feeling anxious *because* of the way things are I remind myself that both the feeling of anxiety and the situation causing the anxiety are subject to the rule of change. Knowing that everything will change takes away the constricting sense of permanence that can accompany an unwelcome situation. Realizing that my anxiety is connected to my perspective/thinking/reaction to the unwelcome situation frees me to experiment with a few interventions. Often my interventions involve changing my physical environment—going for a walk is my favourite. Another time it might be listening to music that makes me happy or watching a lighthearted TV rerun. When I'm exhausted I'll take a nap or go to bed knowing that I won't feel the same way in the morning. There is power in knowing that the moment we're living right now will change and even more in knowing that our reactions will also change. The key is to remember that change is inevitable and we can use that to our advantage.

**Tip #27: Be curious! [July 2014]**

Curiosity is a characteristic common to all humans (and many animals) although we vary in the focus and degree. Psychologist and researcher Todd Kashdan has studied and written extensively about the benefits of curiosity. Inquisitiveness is linked to "... greater well-being, intelligence, creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, goal effort and progress, preference for challenge in work and play, perceived control, and less perceived stress, negative emotions, and reliance on stereotypes and dogmatic thinking."\* Kashdan and colleagues also note that some research indicates that curious older people live longer regardless of age, gender or physical health.

Curiosity can be an effortless pondering about creative options and opportunities or a more active questioning to identify explanations, alternatives and imaginative connections. Some of us share our curiosity with others by asking questions of people around us. Others channel curiosity through writing, painting, music or other means. Let us know what you're curious about and what curiosity does for you and we'll report back next month. Contact Shelley at 604-875-0188 (toll-free 1-877-232-7400) or email [wdi@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:wdi@bccpd.bc.ca).

\* Kashdan, T.B., Steger, M.F., & Breen, W.E. (2007). Curiosity. In R. Baumeister & K. Vohs (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* (pp. 213-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (<http://tinyurl.com/krrc34d>)

**Tip #28: Polish your listening skills [August 2014]**

Being a good listener is important and is assumed in many resilience tips we've discussed, including Grow Your Support Network, Find a Mentor, Ask a Provocative Question and Be Curious. There are many factors that limit successful listening and some of these emerge at the very time we need to be most resilient. Stress and anxiety, fatigue, social isolation and difficulty focusing all create barriers to effective listening.

Michael Webb\* describes eight different obstacles to effective listening that are common in all conversations. Some are not obvious and all require attention to minimize their impact. For example, "knowing the answer" restricts our listening ability because we've already decided that we know what the speaker is going to say. Sometimes we're forming our counter-argument or perhaps we interrupt even before the speaker has finished. Another barrier is "trying to be helpful." We make assumptions about what the speaker is going to say and in our mind, begin formulating our solution. "Reacting to red flag words" results in distraction because of our emotional response to words used by the speaker that may or may not match our interpretation. Essential information and creative solutions may be missed if we fail to gather accurate and complete information from the speaker. Think about the hurdles we sometimes face in reaching the right person to provide information, service or solutions. Why waste our effort because of poor listening skills? Listening requires practice and attention. The Charrm'd Foundation website (<http://tinyurl.com/ounrvv4>) offers articles, worksheets and tips on effective listening.

\*Michael Webb. "Eight Barriers to Effective Listening." <http://tinyurl.com/ludejgg>

### **Tip #29: Watch your mindset [September 2014]**

Psychologist Carol Dweck\* writes, "When I was a young researcher, just starting out, ... I was obsessed with understanding how people cope with failures, and I decided to study it by watching how students grapple with hard problems." Over the course of her research, Dweck discovered that people have "fixed mindsets" or "growth mindsets." People with fixed mindsets believe they are endowed with a set level of intelligence and ability. They "play it safe" and perceive failure as a threat to their image of their intelligence. Alternatively, people with growth mindsets see failure as a source of important information—an opportunity to learn and grow. Our mindset determines how we approach our life and that can make all the difference.

While important for everyone, a growth mindset is critical for people living with disabilities or chronic illness. Socially defined assumptions about limitations of disability illustrate and reinforce the fixed mindset. It can be difficult to challenge others' attitudes about what we can do. And when our attempts are less successful than planned, a fixed mindset is quick to note that we need to accept our limitations. Fixed mindsets can be found everywhere but it's most dangerous when it's our own.

Developing a growth mindset requires self-awareness and practice, especially if you have been committed to a fixed mindset so far. Dweck suggests four steps to changing your mindset at <http://tinyurl.com/o88n6ye>. Listening to your self-talk or your "mindset voice" is key to challenging responses and behaviour that may have become "autopilot." Forming a group of people who are willing to nurture growth mindsets could be especially helpful.

\*Carol Dweck. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007) p. 3. Preview available at Amazon.ca <http://tinyurl.com/kuylpts>

### **Tip #30: Got a problem? Enjoy yourself!**

It feels counterintuitive to go looking for positive emotions when life throws another curve ball. And yet, research shows that nurturing "feel good" emotions is exactly what we should be doing. Barbara Fredrickson, the leader in this field, has developed the "broaden-and-build theory." Her research shows that positive emotions (joy, gratitude, interest, serenity, hope, amusement, inspiration, pride, love and awe are the top 10) broaden our attention and thinking even after the

positive activity or experience is over. “Over time, frequent experiences of positive emotions can trigger upward spirals between positive affect and expansive, creative thinking, which lead to personal growth and flourishing.”\* Positive emotions “momentarily expand the scope of people’s attention and thinking. Such cognitive expansion allows one to see the proverbial ‘big picture,’ become more creative, and create and execute action plans outside of one’s typical routine.”\* Researchers report that positive emotions increase our access to a “wider array of information” than usual and in one study, participants experienced improved peripheral vision! In addition, positive emotions erase the effects of negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, etc. which can also limit our resilience. For maximum advantage, Fredrickson recommends a “positivity ratio” of three-to-one: three positive emotions for every negative emotion.

So does this mean that to be resilient we have to become perky and Pollyanna? Fredrickson warns that forcing positivity will backfire.\*\* The benefits of positive emotions demand authenticity and Fredrickson suggests that “frequent, mild doses” are best. Simply being open, curious, kind and appreciative will nurture positivity.

*\*Applied Positive Psychology: Improving Everyday Life, Health, Schools, Work and Society.* Edited by Stewart I. Donaldson, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Jeanne Nakamura. New York: Psychology Press, 2011. p. 35-6.

\*\* 2-Minute tips: How to be more positive [video] with Barbara Fredrickson  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5\\_BFsWfMkJ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_BFsWfMkJ4)

For more about positivity and Barbara Fredrickson’s research:  
Positivity  
<http://www.positivityratio.com/>

PEP Lab  
<http://www.positiveemotions.org/>