

Wellness and Resilience Strategies: Strength

Section 10



In the compass model, the four sectors – Mind, Spirit, Strength, and Heart – not only contribute to your overall wellness, but also provide guidance on strategies to help build your compassion resilience. Strength is one of the sectors. Strength encompasses stress resilience and care for the body. Stress resilience allows us to maintain a non-anxious presence as we encounter the inevitable stressors of our job.

Developing our ability to care for our bodies and listen to the signs that our bodies give us supports our whole health and minimizes any unhealthy responses to stress. Becoming stress resilient and caring for our bodies often require assistance from others. Help seeking is a key skill for both of the areas in the strength section of the Wellness Compass.



Stress is a normal aspect of life that we all feel and experience at times. Our bodies have many ways to send us signals that things are out of balance. Learning to be attuned to our body so we pick-up on the clues is a key skill needed to become stress resilient.

Our body sends warning signs when we are under stress. Some physical or emotional responses might include muscle tension, eating too much or too little, anger, irritability, insomnia, headaches, or a general lack of focus.¹ Practicing mindfulness helps us to recognize these signs.

There are three questions to ask ourselves when our body is sending us those signals. First, ask ourselves *“is it possible for me to avoid this situation right now?”* While that often sounds like an easy yes or no answer, many people continue in situations that lead to high levels of stress and do not or cannot make the choice to walk away. If avoiding the cause of stress is not applicable, move to asking ourselves, *“what might be another way of thinking about this situation?”* Switching our perspective could help us to embrace any positives related to the stressor. This too can sound easy yet it requires willingness to give up the narrative that we have developed about the situation. Here’s a fascinating [TED Talk](#) by Kelly McGonigal on making stress our friend. This video was referenced in Section 7. If you didn’t get a chance to view it then, it may be helpful to view it now.

Finally, if we can neither avoid the situation nor change our perspective in a way that in turn reduces any negative impact of the stress, adjusting our lifestyle may be beneficial. Ask ourselves *“what changes could I make to my lifestyle that could help minimize the impact of the stress I am feeling?”* There are many strategies to help adapt our lifestyle to build our stress resilience.

¹ Mayo Clinic Staff. (2016). [Stress symptoms: Effects on your body and behavior.](#)

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Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a therapeutic approach that can inform our understanding of stress resilience. One aspect of ACT that is particularly relevant is the emphasis on acceptance. By mindfully accepting a feeling or thought we allow ourselves to feel the pain, naming it for what it is, “this is stress” or “this hurts,” without trying to change it in that moment. This gives us a bit of space needed to relate more positively to the stress. The practice of listening to and accepting the signs our body sends is important in our ability to be stress resilient.

When we take a moment to name and accept the reality of our uncomfortable feelings or thoughts, we are more likely to recognize that we have a choice of how we respond to a stressful situation. We have the opportunity to consider other strategies to help us approach the situation with a level of calm.

Consider this quote by Viktor Frankl, author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*:

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

In order to respond with a level of calm, despite the stressful situation, it is helpful to know our core values and to have clarified our goals. Knowing what is important to us will help guide our response in stressful situations. In the section on Spirit, we had the opportunity to develop a [Professional Mission Statement](#) (activity in preceding section: Spirit). Reflecting on our statement may give us guidance as we choose our response to situations that cause stress in our day-to-day work.

[This blog](#), from a well-respected resource on wellness and mindfulness, offers a summary of some of these ideas and a few others!

We know that physical movement has many benefits to our mind and bodies. As we consider building upon our stress resilience and caring for our body, research is profoundly clear that physical activity is important to our physical and mental health, emotional well-being, and ability to grow our stress resilience.



Wellness and Resilience Strategies: Heart – Relationships and Emotions. The concept of self-compassion will be further explored.