

Stephen Lassen, PhD

Dr. Lassen is a Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Kansas Medical Center. He received his Ph.D. in Clinical Child Psychology from the University of Kansas. He completed his residency in Clinical Child Psychology/Pediatric Psychology at Harvard Medical School and his postdoctoral fellowship in Pediatric Psychology at the University of Washington School of Medicine. Dr. Lassen's clinical and research interests include perinatal mental health, children with chronic or life-limiting illnesses and their families, as well as the impact of parental illness on children. Dr. Lassen serves in leadership roles in various mental health and medical organizations and lectures regularly to regional and national audiences on a variety of mental health issues.



Calm in the Eye of the Storm: Becoming More Resilient

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What is resilience?

- “The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness”
- “The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress.”





BV
WEST
JAGUARS

The beginnings of resilience

- Norman Garmezy
- Schizophrenia: some patients with schizophrenia could barely function, others did better
- Children whose parents had schizophrenia: Many demonstrated good functioning across settings
- “Invulnerables”
- Continued study of children who showed positive adaptation to stressful situations and poverty
- “Protective factors”

Why resilience?

- 50% of NICU nurses report significant symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress
- 12% of NICU nurses report high levels of anxiety symptoms
- 69% of NICU nurses report feeling emotionally exhausted
- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US
- 32.8% of US adults experienced increased depressive symptoms in 2021 (27.8% in 2020, 8.5% pre-COVID)

Why resilience?

- Cigna Resilience Index (2020):
 - 37% of adults have high resilience
 - 32% report almost never having workplace discussions about impact of COVID-19 on them, their families and their mental health
- Stress in America Survey (2020):
 - 19% of adults say their mental health is worse now than last year
 - 67% reported experiencing increased stress over the course of the pandemic

Myths about resilience

- Resilience is an inherent, unmodifiable trait
- Resilience is nothing more than good stress management
- Resilient people are immune to stressors and adversity
- Resilience is just positive thinking
- Resilient people are always happy and don't have bad days

Optimism

- How to define optimism?
- Optimistic people are healthier, happier and live longer
- 20% born optimistic

Cultivating optimism

- Seeing things as temporary vs. permanent
- Avoiding the words “always” and “never”
 - “I’ll always be sad”
 - “I’m sad right now”
 - “I never follow through with my goals”
 - “I don’t follow through with my goals when I’m not motivated”
- Even when things are permanent, the way we feel about them can change

Focus on the
right things



Focus on the right things

- Ellen Langer's "counterclockwise" study (1979)
- 8 men in their 70's
- Lived for 1 week as though it was 1959
- Baseline assessments of health, cognition and physical strength all improved
- "Selective abstraction" (Beck)

Focus on the right things

- Expressing gratitude
- Gratitude consistently shown to be associated with improved health, psychological and social outcomes
- Gratitude journaling
- Emmons and McCullough research

Process difficult emotions/events

- Natural to want to avoid discussing and processing difficult things
- Research suggests benefits to allowing ourselves to release/express difficult feelings
- Expressive writing interventions (Pennebaker, 1997)
- Individuals directed to write about a difficult or traumatic event for 15-20 minutes over 3-5 sessions
- Consistent benefits (short and long-term) on measures of health and well-being

Connecting with others

- Socially connected individuals are healthier and happier
- Benefits are accrued even with just 1 supportive person

Be present

“The shadow by my finger cast
Divides the future from the past:
Before it, sleeps the unborn hour
In darkness, and beyond thy power:
Behind its unreturning line,
The vanished hour, no longer thine:
One hour alone is in thy hands,--
The NOW on which the shadow stands. ”



Mindfulness

- “Paying attention; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”
- Research on mindfulness has consistently demonstrated benefits on psychological and physical health, improved work performance
- Mindfulness training in nursing

Let's practice!

Summary

- Cultivate optimism
 - Temporary vs. permanent
 - Avoid “always” and “never”
- Focus on the right things
 - Express gratitude
- Process difficult emotions/events
 - Write about what’s bothering you
- Connect with others
- Be present
 - Practice mindfulness

Resiliency resources

- Positive psychology (happierhuman.com)
- “Wherever You Go There You Are” (Jon Kabat-Zinn)
- “Learned Optimism” (Martin Seligman)
- “Man’s Search for Meaning” (Viktor Frankl)
- Institutional Wellness Programs
- Turning Point in Kansas City
- Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; edinstruments.com)
- Resilience podcasts



Thank You!

Questions?

slassen@kumc.edu