

Staying positive

In these turbulent times, we all need to grow inner strength. **Beverly Landais** shares some practices she believes can help us all.

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Resilience is a skill set that enables us to find the inner strength to deal with difficult situations. I can't think of a time in recent history when we've needed it more. The enormity of what we face is all the more significant as it impacts everybody. As a certified Positive Psychology coach, I help people choose habits that build positivity and make life worth living, using techniques that can help dial up your resilience, energise you and inject bursts of positivity into your day.

What is Positive Psychology?

Positive Psychology supports the idea that you can gain greater happiness, well-being, and achievement through conscious choices and actions, particularly when you:

- Cultivate the positive: positive emotions, experiences, values, strengths, expectations, and relationships.
- Cope effectively with the negative: painful emotions, experiences, challenges, stress, and disappointments.
- Commit to personally meaningful goals and take sustained action toward achieving them.

How can you do this? By tapping into your strengths, resources and values, you can create positive experiences and emotions. Savouring these helps to develop a bank of positivity upon which to draw when needed. Topping up this bank is simple. Do something kind for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. The key is to look out, as well as in. In addition to making others happier, this enhances your positivity, boosts your ability to cope and bounce back from challenging times.



When you're washing your hands, use those 20 seconds to think of three things you are grateful for.

Three Zones of Challenge

The starting point is to acknowledge where you are. A helpful reference is the Three Zones of Challenge. Developed by Dr Chris Johnstone, author of *Seven Ways to Build Resilience*, it allows you to understand your reactions to different situations.

The **Green Zone** includes everyday activities that feel familiar and safe, such as doing the same things and mixing with the same people. When most of your actions are in this zone life is 'comfortable' but you do not learn very much nor develop yourself.

The **Orange Zone** is the area of novelty, exploration and adventure. This zone is not a comfortable place – but it is a stimulating one. It is where we stretch and challenge ourselves mentally, emotionally or physically.

The **Red Zone** is the area where you feel out of your depth or threatened either mentally or physically. Tipping into the Red Zone can occur when people

experience extreme uncertainty and rapid change. The Red Zone is to be avoided as it activates the primitive part of our brain that governs our survival instinct. When this happens, we can fall into the trap of 'fight, flight or freeze' which are panic-driven responses.

Recently, many of us have found ourselves in the Red Zone which is exhausting. Recognising this is vital so that you can take steps to become more Orange or Green. It helps to establish what stretch looks like for you. This can be a positive place because as you learn new skills, you experience personal growth and build self-esteem.

In everyday life, it is crucial to know when stretch becomes overload as this can force you into the Red Zone. In a crisis, it is vital as you want to conserve your energy and focus on the things you can control rather than being tipped into a panic by the things you can't. The key is being self-aware.

Try this: Five senses check-in

If you find yourself in the Red Zone, pause and breathe into the moment. Then check in with your five senses, one at a time. Ask yourself:

- What am I seeing (Look around you)?
- What am I hearing (How many sounds can you hear)?
- What can I smell (Take a big sniff)?
- What can I taste (Allow your tongue to wander around your mouth)?
- What can I feel in my body (What sensations can you feel?)

Finish by thinking of a time when you successfully dealt with something that initially felt difficult. What were the skills, resources and networks that you accessed then which might support you now? Focus on what you can do rather than what you can't. This will restore your



mind to a calm and resourceful state.

Feeling anxious? Soothe your mind with RAIN

Let's explore a technique called **RAIN** which stands for Recognise, Acknowledge and Accept, Investigate, and Nurture. The practice works as it helps interrupt excessive rumination by encouraging calm reflection. Then you can choose how you wish to respond rather than being trapped in a loop of negativity.

Here's how to apply it:

- **Recognise.** Find a quiet and private space. Have a pen and paper to hand. Focus on your breathing. Breathe in for the count of three, hold for the count of four then out for the count of five. Spend a few minutes tuning into your thoughts, notice them objectively. Describe what you have seen without self-criticism. Naming your thoughts and emotions helps depersonalise them. For example, try replacing 'I feel anxious' with 'There's anxiety'. Now you are better equipped to deal with these feelings from an objective viewpoint.
- **Acknowledge and Accept.** Next acknowledge what you are experiencing, feeling and thinking. Accept it as the present reality. As you do so be kind to yourself as you would with a friend facing difficulties. Acceptance does not mean passively tolerating the

things you do not like. Instead, it recognises your humanity and the way things are right now. Then you can move on to what you can do about it.

- **Investigate.** Now ask: What do I need now? Who and what can support me? What resources are available to me now? Which of my strengths can I draw upon? What are some actions I could take to help myself? What is the first simple thing I can do? Make notes so that you can review afterwards.
- **Nurture.** Now reflect on what you have observed. It is not about suppressing or punishing yourself – it is a self-compassionate way of acknowledging that all your feelings are valid, but some are not helpful. What might be a more useful emotion for you? Gently lead your mind in that direction. Pause, breathe then review what you have written and decide what you will do. It doesn't need to be a big step, just something that will boost your well-being and sense of self-efficacy.

It also helps to remember that thoughts and emotions are not who you are; they are part of an experience you are having. Applying RAIN takes courage and effort, so be patient with yourself.

Use your superpower: show gratitude

Gratitude is one of the character

strengths connected with happiness.

When you are going through a difficult time, attending to what is right in your life can shift your perspective and decrease negative emotions. Boost your strength of gratitude with this simple 'Three Good Things' activity. Just think about three things that went well today and why they went well.

It can be hard to remember the good things in life when the news is so grim. Gain perspective by focusing on what makes you smile and brings you comfort. Even during a lockdown, there are many small moments to savour, for example, the smell of coffee, the feel of hot water as you shower, sunshine on your face. Pausing to take in these moments gives your brain a chance to process the pleasure, which boosts your serotonin – the feel-good neurotransmitter that helps elevate your mood and make you feel calm.

Here's a great tip from Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky, psychologist and author *The How of Happiness*. When you're washing your hands, use those 20 seconds to think of three things you are grateful for. Taking this time to reflect on what you're grateful for will help you meet NHS guidelines for lowering your risk of viral infection while reinforcing a more positive mindset.

Remember that showing appreciation to others isn't cancelled and can lift their mood as much as yours.

Try this: Bring to mind the face of someone you appreciate. Take a sheet of paper or a card. Write some words of appreciation. Give specifics. Decide how you wish to share it. You might post it. Or give it to them in person, if you are able. Or you might phone them and talk it out. It is up to you. This exercise works because it helps you shift focus from the obstacles and the negatives in your life to the positives. Additionally, when you write things down, it gives them more emotional impact.

While anxiety about the situation is normal, it doesn't need to rule your life, and you can act to stay positive, boost your resilience and grow your inner strengths. All of which will serve you well when we move past this crisis and life gets a reboot.



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