

Jot This Down

Research shows that regularly writing down what’s on your mind can help you release emotions and make sense of what’s going on in your life. This is particularly true during periods of transition or change, like the COVID-19 pandemic’s disruption of day-to-day activities. Journaling also can help improve your relationships with others, lower your blood pressure, and decrease symptoms of depression.



Journaling Could Boost Your Well-Being

There’s No ‘Write’ Way

There are many different ways to go about journaling. You could write about your thoughts and feelings. Or, you could use your journal to help problem-solve. Try taking a big problem that you’re facing and then make a list, breaking it down into smaller, more manageable parts that you can tackle one at a time so the issue no longer feels so overwhelming.

You could also journal by jotting down a few things that you’re grateful for. Shifting your focus from your daily hassles to gratitude can help lower stress, improve your mood, boost the quality of your sleep, and even reduce inflammation in your body, studies show.

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The key is finding what feels best for you. To make journaling a part of your daily routine, try linking it with a habit that you already do. For example, after brushing your teeth in the morning or in the evening, take a few minutes to write in your journal. Over time, writing will become just as automatic and beneficial as reaching for your toothbrush.

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This Claremont EAP website provides tips and tools to enhance resilience.

The Power of Resilience



When tragedy strikes with the death of a loved one, a serious illness or a job loss, some people fall apart, while others adapt to such life-changing events more easily.

Being resilient is what makes the difference.

“Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy or significant stress -- it means bouncing back from difficult experiences,” says Patricia O’Gorman, Ph.D., a psychologist in private practice in East Chatham, N.Y., and a spokeswoman for the American Psychological Association. “We all share a special ability to take charge of our lives. This is what resilience can give us-- the ability to align ourselves with our strengths and to recognize our personal power.”

Resilience is used to describe people who lead normal, fulfilling lives despite having experienced trauma or tragedy. These people are resilient because they have the ability to recover from adversity and retain a positive self-image and view of the world.

“People who are resilient accept that they have difficulties, but also know they have inner resources and abilities they have drawn on in the past,” says Dr. O’Gorman. “This gives them a starting place that’s positive, a place where they can search for solutions to their problems.”

Building resilience

Resilience isn’t a trait people either have or don’t have-- it involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed.

Consider writing your thoughts about stressful events in your life. Try meditation and other spiritual practices. Many people find these activities help them build connections with others and restore lost hope.

“Becoming conscious of your strengths makes you stronger,” says Dr. O’Gorman. “Resilience

increases as you recognize the magnitude of what you’ve already accomplished and survived in your life and helps you believe you can meet the challenges that lie ahead.”

Getting help

Getting help when you need it is crucial in building resilience.

“Beyond caring family members and friends, you may want to turn to support groups, mental health professionals or spiritual advisers if you’re not able to bounce back from a setback on your own,” says Dr. O’Gorman.

Here are some strategies for building resilience:

- **Nurture a positive view of yourself.** Develop confidence in your ability to solve problems and trust your instincts.
- **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.** “You can’t prevent stressful events from happening, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events,” says Dr. O’Gorman. “Try keeping a long-term perspective.”
- **Accept that change is a part of living.** Certain goals no longer may be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that can’t be changed can help you focus on circumstances you can affect.
- **Look for opportunities for self-discovery.** Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship report better relationships, a greater sense of strength, an increased sense of self-worth and a greater appreciation for life.
- **Make connections.** Good relationships with family, friends or others are important. Accept help and support from those who care about you.
- **Maintain a hopeful outlook.** An optimistic outlook enables you to expect good things to happen in your life.
- **Take care of yourself.** Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, get enough sleep, eat a healthful diet and limit alcohol consumption.



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People in More Diverse Countries Are Less Prejudiced

The Greater Good Science Center describes a new study that finds that people in diverse communities feel a greater sense of commonality with others—and have greater well-being, too.

How does living in a diverse community affect how we think about others?

Researchers who study this have two basic theories. On one hand, diversity can strengthen stereotypes because of “confirmation bias”—our tendency to look for information that confirms what we already believe. In other words, if we have negative, preconceived notions about different ethnic groups, we may selectively pay attention to details in our encounters with them that corroborate our beliefs, creating greater animosity and distrust and making it harder to feel a sense of shared purpose and identity.

On the other hand, diversity can reduce stereotyping, because having more contact with people from different ethnicities helps us see that we are all more alike than different. Our preconceived notions might disappear as we experience people as individuals with multiple interests and identities, allowing us to find commonality with one another.

So, which theory is more correct? A new study aimed to find out.

Researchers considered data from 46 countries around the world (with varying levels of diversity)

showing how people rated different ethnic groups within their country on their levels of warmth and competence. This gave researchers a measure of commonality—how much people saw themselves as similar to versus different from others.

After analyzing the data, they found people living in places with more diversity experienced a stronger sense of commonality than those living in less diverse places—a finding that coauthor Bai Xuechunzi didn’t necessarily expect, but was happy to report.

“The more we’re exposed to diverse groups, the more we’re going to find that they’re actually not that different from ourselves,” she says. “It seems that living in a diverse environment can change the stereotypes about others that may come from living in a homogeneous environment.”

Coauthor Susan Fiske was more surprised than Xuechunzi by the results, given her prior work on stereotyping.

“I thought as diversity increased, people would develop stereotypes, and that if you don’t have any exposure to different groups, you don’t really know much about them and don’t even stereotype them,” she says. “I was happy to be wrong.”

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To corroborate their finding, the researchers also surveyed over 1,500 Americans coming from all 50 states to see how diversity affected their perceived similarity to others. They found the same basic result: The more diverse a state was, the stronger the sense of commonality among ethnic groups there. The age, gender, social class, group identity, residence (i.e., rural or urban), and personal well-being of the people surveyed did not affect these results.

Xuechunzi says that this likely reflects the strong influence our environment has on how we create mental maps of those around us—strong enough to overcome the societal messages that otherwise might encourage stereotyping.

But, to further test this idea, she and her colleagues did one more study: They surveyed American college students at two points in time—just after graduating high school and after finishing college—to see if their sense of similarity to others would change as they moved from one environment to another.

Again, if the students moved to a more diverse learning environment, their sense of commonality with others increased. This strengthened the argument that diversity reduces stereotypes. Though Xuechunzi says that they can't rule out other reasons for this finding—such as social norms that people encounter in different settings—it is encouraging.

“Diversity actually leads people to find more commonality; so, we can say that promoting diversity is probably a good thing,” she says.

Somewhat surprisingly, she and her colleagues also found that those students who felt higher levels of commonality with others rated all groups as warmer and more competent—and they reported feeling greater life satisfaction.

“This suggests a link between how we perceive others and our emotions,” says Xuechunzi.

While some past research has suggested the opposite—that increasing diversity in a community makes people uncomfortable and unhappy, at least initially—it seems that, in the long run, people feel better in diverse communities.

“If you see your connections with other people, it increases your well-being,” says Fiske. “I’m sure there are people who won’t go there—maybe they’re frustrated, angry, and pessimistic. But the majority of people do, we found.”

Fiske feels hopeful that these findings suggest you don’t have to create complicated webs of interdependence to decrease stereotyping—meaning, there doesn’t necessarily have to be equal status and rewarding experiences between diverse groups in order for contact to reduce prejudice. Instead, she says, simply living in a more diverse place and running into people—at the store or coffee shop or church—may naturally make us consider people from different groups more alike than different, if we give it time.

“If nothing terrible happens, if you don’t have a civil war or a demagogue for a leader who exacerbates tensions, people get used to each other,” she says. “It doesn’t mean that you love everybody or get to know them well. But you do see them as similar to you, and that’s reason for optimism.”

BY JILL SUTTIE, Greater Good Science Center, Greater Good Magazine, February 3, 2021



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