

Tactics for Tight Times – Farmer Health

Building emotional resilience

Emotional resilience is the willingness and capacity to accept that there will be good and bad times ahead, understand our reactions to these experiences, and have strategies to manage them.

Key points

- > Really understand the 'why' in your life – be clear as to why you are in this industry.
- > Accept where you are in life and what life is throwing your way.
- > Listen to your inner voice, and if negative, change your 'self-talk'.
- > Look for ways to be connected within the community.
- > Learn to get comfortable with feelings and be able to express them openly.
- > Surround yourself with positive people.
- > Look after your health.
- > Resilience can be planned for, developed and practiced.

Resilience is a process, not a trait of an individual or an event. It takes preparation and even practice to develop and maintain emotional resilience. Being resilient does not mean a person won't experience difficulty or stress.

It is an individual's tendency to cope with stress and adversity as a result of their processes, behaviours, thoughts and actions. This results in an individual 'bouncing forward' to a more normal state of functioning in the midst of adversity and challenging times.

A resilient person has the capacity to find the resources they need, apply strategies, and make plans to overcome challenges, allowing them to function effectively for their business, family and community.

Seasons will be volatile, good things and unfortunate things will happen, change and challenges will occur. It is not whether these things will happen or to what extent, it is just a matter of when. Resilience is about how we deal with these events.

Resilience is your ability to:

- > recognise and accept challenging times in life
- > recognise your own reactions and symptoms to challenging situations
- > have strategies to enjoy life's ups and downs so you stay well, in control and feel energised.

Facts up front

- > Each year one in five Australians (aged 16-85) will experience a mental disorder.
- > Each year 14 per cent of Australians will experience some form of anxiety disorder.
- > 17 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men will experience depression in their lifetime.





Five key strategies to help build mental and emotional resilience

If you lack resilience or strategies to respond appropriately, you may display flight, fight or freeze behaviours.

- > **Flight:** Avoidance behaviours where individuals do not talk about the situation, deny the nature of it, and even lie about the seriousness of the situation.
- > **Fight:** Individuals get annoyed or angry and often 'shoot the messenger' rather than addressing the message.
- > **Freeze:** Individuals feel overwhelmed and don't know what to do.

The way individuals react, and what they need to manage their reaction in a positive way, will vary from person to person.

Five key strategies to build resilience

1. Look after yourself

By looking after yourself you increase your capacity to handle the challenges around you.

- > **Physical health:** Exercise, a balanced diet and rest are crucial factors. Make it a priority to see a doctor and dentist. This may be difficult in some rural areas, but schedule them at least twice a year, every year.
- > **Mental health:** De-stressing and quality of sleep. Think about whether you get a good night's sleep, are able to wind down and de-stress. If not, consider why.

- > **Connectivity and social networks:** Stay connected with your friends, family and in your community through local groups, clubs and online social networks.
- > **Spirituality:** This will mean something different for each individual. It is about what you believe and your values, and could involve spending time in nature, meditating, appreciating music, art, or prayer.

Feeling good doesn't just happen. Living a balanced life requires taking the time to renew yourself and improve your personal well-being.

What type of self-talk do you have?

Think of a major change you would like to achieve or a challenge you will face in the future. When you think about the change or challenge, what do you hear yourself say?

- > Is it positive? 'I can do this.'
- > Is it negative? 'No I can't.'
- > If it is negative, is it realistic?
- > If it is negative, can it be reframed?

Remember every day provides a new opportunity to re-charge and look after yourself.

Give yourself a break. Taking time away from the farm can be a source of stress and potential conflict among family members. Even during busy times consider taking a break of up to four days to re-charge, and increase your effectiveness when back at work. During 'down time' you should take a break for a minimum of four days.

Tip: If you can't look after yourself, you can't look after your family, your mates or the business.

2. Positive self-talk and listening to your inner voice

When challenged, what is your self-talk? What do you hear yourself saying when you are facing a tough situation? If you have negative self talk, does it influence your actions and how people interact with you?

Your self-talk reflects how you feel and think about yourself. During difficult times it can be hard to remember all the skills it takes to run a farm business. Rather than focusing on the negatives, consider the vast array of attributes and skills you have that contribute to your business and family life, including advanced negotiation, practical problem-solving, high work ethic, technology skills, etc.

Change your self-talk so it is positive. Try and describe the situation in another way. Reframing your self-talk won't make the problem or challenge go away, but it may move you away from the flight-fight-freeze responses into problem-solving behaviour.

3. Planning

It can be difficult to adapt in the face of adversity or significant sources of stress, so it is important to plan and have mechanisms in place to apply in difficult times.

Begin by understanding what 'pushes your buttons' and might threaten your resilience. Knowing what reaction you have when your 'buttons are pushed' enables you to make a plan to counter any adverse reactions, and adopt a different strategy or reaction.

Create a plan, find out what works for you, and build on it continually.

Time management is also important to help create a stable and certain environment so you can better handle any surprises. Simple time management will help you get in control, and create a sense of certainty. Having a plan, even a simple to-do list, will remind yourself of the steps you are taking and the progress being made.

4. Focus on the things you can control

Be clear as to your 'why' and have a plan to achieve it. Those who are clear as to this 'why' will be clearer in their aspirations and intentions, which can make it easier to accept the good with the bad. Those who are uncertain as to their 'why' will struggle to endure the more challenging times and will become unclear as to where to put their energies.

Become adept at knowing what you can control as opposed to wasting energy on the things you can't. Be realistic. Ask yourself, 'What can be done about this, or at least part of this?' It might be overwhelming but consider if there are parts that can be addressed to get some positive return.

Sometimes it can be difficult to know the difference between things that can be controlled and those that can't. Don't ignore the things you can't control, acknowledge them, and then focus energy and time on the things you can control.

5. Connecting with community

It is essential to stay involved with family, work and the community for

many positive reasons, such as being able to contribute, to be valued and critically to maintain perspective. The more people you interact with, the greater the likelihood that you will meet people who have experienced, survived and grown through similar experiences.

Look for ways to connect with the community through work, volunteering, sporting clubs, charity clubs, and get your friends involved in the activities as well. There is scope for positive engagement through the virtual community. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, etc, are valuable tools to stay connected and engaged both locally and further afield.

Some individuals have the ability to build people up or drag them down. Positive people attract positive people, and all the benefits that come with that. Negative people attract negative people, and everything that goes with that. Make the choice to be positive, surround yourself with positive people and reap the benefits.

Spotting the early warning signs

People go through changes that can put emotions and feelings out of balance. If they remain so for an extended period of time they can cause significant impairment affecting our ability to function, and can become a clinical condition.

It is important to be able to recognise the signs and symptoms that indicate your resilience is slipping. They can be different for each individual.

Symptoms of reducing resilience

Emotions

- > Sadness
- > Anxiety
- > Guilt
- > Anger
- > Overwhelmed
- > Irritable
- > Mood swings
- > Lack of emotions
- > Helplessness
- > Hopelessness
- > Lacking confidence
- > Indecisive

Thoughts

- > Frequent self-criticism
- > Self-blame
- > Pessimism
- > Impaired memory and concentration
- > Indecisiveness and confusion
- > Tendency to believe others see you in a negative light
- > Thoughts of death and suicide

Behaviours

- > Withdrawal from others
- > Worrying
- > Neglecting responsibilities
- > Loss of interest in personal appearance
- > Loss of motivation
- > Not doing usual enjoyable activities
- > Unable to concentrate
- > Crying spells

Physical symptoms

- > Chronic fatigue
- > Lack of energy
- > Sleeping too much or too little
- > Overeating, loss or change of appetite
- > Constipation
- > Weight loss or gain
- > Irregular menstrual cycle
- > Loss of sexual desire
- > Unexplained aches and pains

Source: Lessons Learnt Consulting.



If you are worried about someone you CARE for, remember these points

Tip: As a guide, if someone experiences symptoms for more than two weeks in a row with no explainable reason and it is affecting their ability to function, then they should seek professional help.

Depression is a mood disorder that is characterised by an unusually persistent sad mood that does not go away, a loss of enjoyment and interest in once pleasurable activities, a lack of energy and tiredness.

It is helpful for people to understand what depression is and what it isn't. It is not something to be ashamed of or to feel guilty about. It is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness, or a lack of discipline or personal strength. It is not just a mood that someone can 'snap out of'. More importantly depression is not permanent and the chances for recovery are very good.

Some risk factors for depression include:

- > loneliness
- > lack of social support
- > recent stressful life experiences
- > family history of depression
- > marital or relationship problems
- > financial strain
- > early childhood trauma or abuse
- > alcohol or drug misuse
- > unemployment/underemployment
- > chronic pain and other health problems.

Why are farmers more vulnerable?

- > intense periods of work
- > lack of sleep
- > isolation
- > lower exercise levels
- > services not readily available
- > self-sufficiency and independent attitude
- > 'just get on with it' attitude
- > the stigma around mental illness and a reluctance to seek help.

To build a resilient lifestyle, get used to doing the following:

- > Get comfortable with feelings. Have the courage to ask the question 'How are you going?' and follow up with the 'I am concerned for you' and 'I am here for you if you need'.
- > Care for your mates, colleagues and families. Keep connected in the community and talk yourself and your mates up.
- > Give your self a break, take some time out and get away. Get good quality sleep.
- > Don't suffer from the 'I wish I had a ...' syndrome.

Maintaining resilience is an ongoing exercise. Having a plan and looking at it once is not enough. It needs to be part of your life.

Remember, a resilient mindset, and dealing with everyday life issues in a calm and balanced manner consists of:

- > Accepting yourself and others for who you are, and accepting responsibility for looking after yourself.
- > Listening to your inner voice and having positive self-talk.
- > Understanding 'what pushes your buttons' and how you do and should respond. It's our reactions that cause the stress!
- > Empathy and viewing life through the eyes of others.
- > Communicating effectively.
- > Robust decision making mechanisms.
- > Dealing with mistakes.
- > Dealing well with success and know what you're good at.
- > Being reinforced in the environment that you are in.
- > Following through and maintain a resilient life.

Watch the kids

Children hear and interpret far more than most of us realise. In times of adversity or stress, communicate clearly with your children and reassure them. Be conscious of the conversations you have with others when your children are around.

Useful resources

Lifeline: 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Beyondblue: 1300 224 636
www.beyondblue.org.au

Black Dog Institute
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Headspace: 1800 650 890
www.headspace.org.au

Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health
www.crrmh.com.au

National Centre for Farmer Health
www.farmerhealth.org.au

Rural Financial Counselling Service: 1800 686 175
www.rfcs.gov.au

More information

Gippsland General Practitioners

www.humanservicesdirectory.vic.gov.au/Se arch.aspx

In keyword tab, select "Doctor" and enter town/postcode. Then select Site Search.

A current list of GP Services in this area will be generated.

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Acknowledgement

This publication is an adapted reproduction of the *Building Emotional Resilience* fact sheet produced by the Grains Research and Development Corporation

Published by Dairy Australia Limited.

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