

## **Module 1: The Five Core Elements of Resiliency**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this module is to introduce the five core elements of resiliency and the components of each element. You also will engage in discussions that encourage you to dig deeper into the components and how you can build resiliency in individuals.

### **Lessons**

1. The Five Core Elements of Resiliency
2. Components of the Five Core Elements

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Identify the five core elements of resiliency.
- Describe at least one component of each element of resiliency.

### **Worksheets**

No worksheets are required.

## **1. The Five Core Elements of Resiliency**

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There are many rewards associated with our practice. However, there is also the risk of secondary traumatic stress and burnout.

Secondary traumatic stress, or compassion fatigue, is the reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or "bearing the suffering of clients"... "the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced or suffered by a person" (Adams, Boscarino, and Figley 2006).

This work is not for the timid.

To remain effective, we have to address the negative impacts of our work in the field of child abuse. One of the ways we can do this is to minimize the effects of our work by building our own individual resiliency.

In order to build individual resiliency, we have to first understand what resiliency is. So in this module we'll look at the elements of resiliency, and how they are reflected in individuals. In the next module, we'll see how those elements are used as the foundation for the organizational resiliency model.

Resiliency has five core elements. These elements were first introduced in OVC's National Victim Assistance Academy (NVAA) Foundation-Level Training in 2006. In developing the resiliency module, consultants and longtime victim advocates Janice Harris Lord and Kevin O'Brien reviewed the research, theory, and practice wisdom. They found that people who are resilient had certain strengths in common, which they grouped into five core elements:

- Personal perspective and meaning.
- A sense of hope.
- Healthy coping.
- Strong relationships.
- Self-knowledge and insight.

We can all take steps to increase our resiliency by building capacity in these elements.

## **2. Components of the Five Core Elements**

Every element has three components, and each of these components helps us make meaning of our work.

### **Core Element 1: Personal Perspective and Meaning**

Personal perspective and meaning can be one of the most important sources of resiliency. Personal perspective and meaning is the way you see life and participate in it.

The three components of personal perspective and meaning are:

- Morality and integrity.
- Spirituality.
- Coherent life meaning.

Morality means knowing right from wrong, having low tolerance for outrageous behaviors, and having the courage to act to right a wrong. Morality is reflected through integrity. Integrity is about consistency – that one’s actions and beliefs are consistent with one’s moral code. It’s the opposite of hypocrisy where there is inconsistency between one’s stated moral code and one’s actions and beliefs. The stress of this work is often related to integrity – we see things and are even called upon to do things that are not consistent with our moral codes. For example, suppose a coworker asks you for confidential information about a victim. Your sense of integrity would prevent you from divulging that information.

Spirituality is a connection with the divine or sacred which helps form our values. Your spirituality comes into play, for example, if you find solace and understanding through your religion. If you can find inner peace through spirituality, your resiliency will be greatly enhanced.

Life meaning is about coming to a personal understanding of the “why” – both in terms of one’s life purpose and about the meaning of the world in general. Regardless of our individual life meaning, the point is to *have* one so that we can act with integrity and coherence by behaving in ways that are consistent with those beliefs.

If you have not explored your life meaning, reflect on why you work with children. Identifying a coherent life meaning gives personal perspective and meaning to your life.

### **Core Element 2: A Sense of Hope**

A sense of hope is the feeling that no matter how many obstacles you encounter in life, or how sad you might be, the future is always brighter. A sense of hope has three interrelated components:

- A sense of humor.
- The ability to have fun.
- Optimism.

Having a sense of humor is a component of a sense of hope – people who have a sense of humor are able to find humor in situations, express it in a healthy way, and have that balance that humor brings. A healthy sense of humor can help us reframe a problem as a challenge rather than as a catastrophe. Having a healthy sense of humor doesn't just refer to laughing or joking, it means looking at situations from different perspectives to see the positive side. A sense of humor can be especially helpful when things go wrong. Think back to the last really bad day you had and see if you can tell it as a humorous story.

The ability to have fun in the workplace is also critical to a sense of hope. Having fun helps us deal with stress and tension. We can change the atmosphere of our workplace if we know how to have fun. Having fun, playing games, and socializing can lift the worries about work and give you an opportunity to breathe. Resiliency can be difficult if there is no capacity for fun.

Optimism is expecting good things will happen, rather than bad – while being realistic. Your personal optimism can influence your working environment. Take a moment to assess whether you're a "glass half empty" or a "glass half full" kind of person. For example, think about your workload. Are you seeing it as a pile of case folders? Or are you seeing all the children you'll be helping?

### **Core Element 3: Healthy Coping**

Healthy coping is knowing what to do to take care of yourself to deal with the stresses of your work and personal life. The components of healthy coping are:

- Commitment to the truth.
- Empathic attunement.
- Intentional practice.

Commitment to the truth means facing the truth, acknowledging that the work affects us at a very basic level. Commitment to the truth means a willingness to seek the ways we deceive ourselves from seeing the impact this work has on our personal mastery and professional well-being. This work will affect anyone. Be honest when you are feeling down, and cope with it by reflecting on the situation or discussing it with someone you trust.

Empathic attunement is a precondition to developing a working alliance between a caseworker and the family. It is the ability to accurately understand another's affective, cognitive, behavioral, and interactive experience. Empathic attunement is particularly important when you may not agree with or approve of a victim's actions. Empathy allows you to look at the situation from their perspective.

Intentional practice on a personal level means collaborating, participating, taking risks, and being creative in building resiliency. For example, knowing that physical exercise with a group is important to you, you decide to join a baseball team as a form of intentional practice. Participating as part of a team outside the office provides a structured form in which to build resiliency that is both mentally and physically healthy.

#### **Core Element 4: Strong Relationships**

Strong relationships can be described as your ability to connect with others and build mutual care and support.

The components of strong relationships are:

- Attachment to others.
- Seeking support.
- Giving support.

Attachment to others is based on the understanding that belonging is a basic human need. Forming bonds with family, friends, and coworkers is essential for building resiliency in individuals. And although it can be difficult, we need to try to form new relationships frequently by reaching out to others.

Seeking support means recognizing when you need help and asking for it from those who can provide the type of assistance you need. All of us need help sometime, although we hesitate to ask – like asking for a ride somewhere, or sharing a problem. We feel we are imposing. But asking will very often strengthen a relationship.

Giving support means a willingness to provide others with what they need to accomplish a task or work through an issue. It also means *recognizing* when someone may need help, even if they haven't asked for it. Giving support might mean providing information or training, acting as a mentor, or offering emotional help. If a co-worker seems to be very stressed, for example, offer to listen. Listening not only builds your resiliency, it strengthens the other person's as well.

As we'll see in the next module, your ability to form strong relationships is often dependent on organizational culture.

#### **Core Element 5: Self-Knowledge and Insight.**

Self-knowledge and insight refers to having a strong self-image, and being in control of your own life. This element has three interrelated components:

- Self-esteem.
- Sense of control.
- Independence.

Enhancing any one of these may have a positive effect on the other two.

Self-esteem is knowing who you are and what you stand for, and liking it. When you think about your own sense of self-esteem, consider your strengths and values, and whether you convey them to others. Also, do you like and respect yourself? If you do, your self-esteem will be evident, and others will be more likely to see you as someone who is likeable and worthy of their respect. Always be conscious of your admirable qualities and skills. If necessary, write them down to remind yourself! Good self-esteem is fundamental to resiliency in individuals.

Sense of control is recognizing that you have the ability to influence many outcomes in your life. Having a strong sense of control means you are:

- Inner-directed – the motivation to do something comes from inside, not to please others.
- Able to deal with problems.
- Able to recognize what is in and out of your control.

In the child abuse field, it's easy to become angry and frustrated. You have to remind yourself that although you cannot save every child, you *can* affect the lives of many. And if you become angry and frustrated, release your anger outside the office, through a sport or another engaging activity.

Independence is the ability to act freely, and the *confidence* to act. Independence means relying less on others to make decisions for you. Think about how independent you really are – do you usually make your own choices, or do you rely on others to do this for you? Demonstrate independence by making choices you might have preferred to let someone else make, even if it's as simple as where to go for lunch.

In the video *Personal Reflections on Resiliency*, you'll hear the various perspectives and personal stories of resiliency from people who work in the field of child abuse. They talk about how resiliency helps them overcome obstacles, and helps them cope with adversity and stress.

Reflecting on what you have learned today, how would you assess your current capacity for resiliency? Very resilient...resilient...somewhat resilient...or not very resilient?

As an individual, you need a great deal of resiliency to work in this field. As a manager, you also need to ensure that your *organization* is doing what it can to build resiliency in staff and volunteers. We'll explore that in the next module.