

Irresistibly resilient

Forget about pure grit and willpower – it's love, compassion and understanding that help us deal with adversity.

Words Kyra Xavia. Artwork Lisa Lodge

We all know how important it is to bounce back from hard knocks, overcome rejection and keep trying. Yet there's a common misunderstanding in our culture about resilience. The key to handling change, challenges and setbacks isn't due to grit and determination. Nor is it dependent upon willpower, endurance or some innate quality a lucky few were born with. Instead, resilience requires something surprisingly lovely. Better still, it's simple to achieve, no matter the circumstances.

Our resilience is greatly determined by two factors: self-compassion and how we recharge.

Self-compassion means being gentle, accepting and kind to oneself, just the way we would treat the person we love, respect and care for most. While this seems logical enough, self-compassion doesn't always come naturally. When events don't go our way, survival mechanisms can kick in. As a result, we're liable to react counter-productively.

Fortunately, this evolutionary foible is straightforward to overcome. It's important to address because of the many benefits that result.

Self-compassion enables autonomy, wisdom and insight. It helps us acknowledge our flaws and limitations and feel connected to humanity, while facilitating fulfilling, rewarding and respectful relationships. Self-compassionate people generally see the world more realistically and objectively, making them happier, content and more accepting. They're likely to be competent, motivated and empathetic too, with higher life satisfaction and less anxiety, depression, stress and shame.

As they recognise errors, admit their own shortcomings and learn from mistakes, they are also keen to make amends. Not only that, they tend not to

TIPS TO LOVE

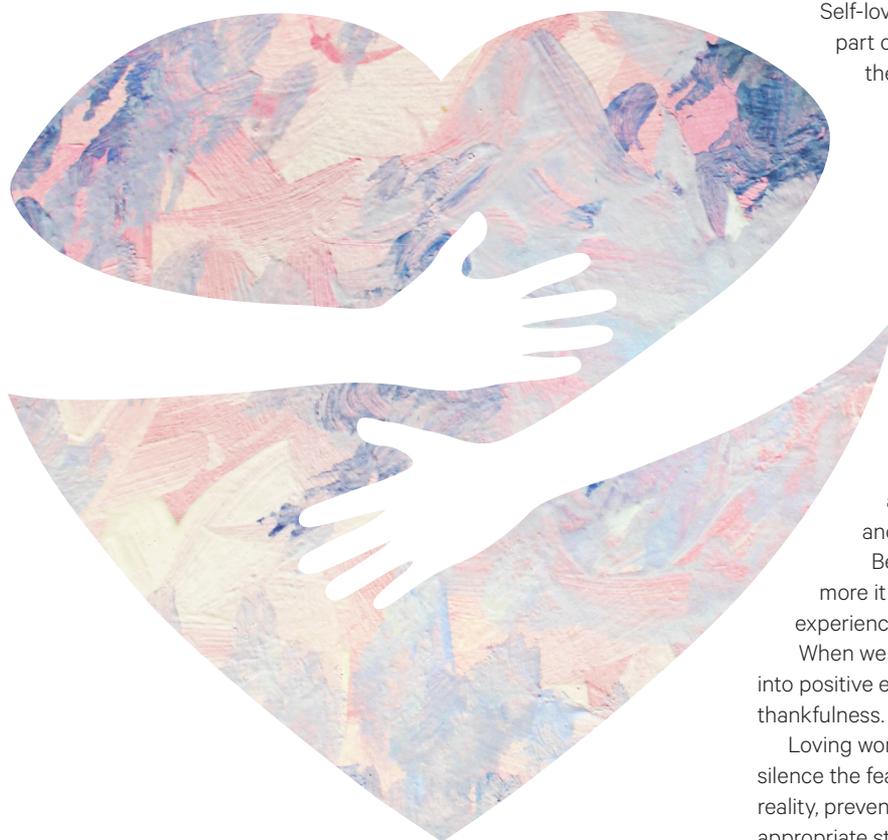
- *Replace the inner voice of the critic with that of a dearest friend.*
- *Fill your vocabulary with loving language.*
- *Rewrite your script and narrate your life as a success story of growth and gratitude.*
- *Draw on humour to diffuse difficult situations and soothe the sore spots.*
- *Prioritise downtime and give yourself permission to play, nap, daydream, or do absolutely nothing.*
- *Selectively prune your social circle so the roses can fully bloom.*
- *Practice, practice, practice self-love.*

dwell on mistakes and they're aware of the pointlessness of ruminating over failure and envying others. Perhaps most importantly though, they can silence the inner critic – that negative, judgemental voice in the background that left unchecked can harshly narrate and poorly govern our life.

Misconceptions about resilience often begin early and commonly involve distorted notions about force, pushing and denying ourselves. In reality, it depends on how adept we are with gentleness, acceptance and giving ourselves what we need. An optimally resilient individual is well-rested, nourished and balanced – and able to self-soothe. Self-soothing involves sitting with discomfort knowing we can cope and that we're okay.

A big part of self-soothing is the way we talk to ourselves, and herein lies a gem. Each of us has immense influence to direct our experiences into those of growth and gratitude. Whenever we think a loving thought, utter an encouraging comment or give a compassionate response, we invite in resilience – and it all has a profoundly positive effect on our biology.

Being loving towards ourselves stimulates the



*"A gentle
word, a kind look,
a good-natured smile
can work wonders
and accomplish
miracles."*

William Hazlitt

release of the neurotransmitter oxytocin, which makes us feel bonded, safe and secure. This state keeps our mind clear and present, which enables deft decision-making. Quite simply, when we master our responses to situations (self-regulation) in a helpful way, we enrich our lives.

Self-love also strengthens neural pathways to the creative part of our brain that provides solutions and answers. Just the gesture of placing our hand over our heart, slowing the breath and recalling a time when we felt deeply loved can calm us down and favourably influence changes in our brain. In turn, this promotes adaptability and allows us to develop improved coping techniques.

Self-compassion is also energising as it frees us up and motivates us to do better. We gain in understanding and develop trust in our capabilities. We become intrepid explorers, imaginative artists and brilliant innovators. Obstacles and failures turn into opportunities, and every scenario is a chance to reinforce how well we are doing. This is how we thrive against adversity – and learn how truly resilient, resourceful and lovable we are.

Besides, the more we demonstrate tenderness, the more it becomes second nature and the easier it is to experience consistent happiness.

When we access our creative side, we're inclined to also tap into positive emotions such as curiosity, joy, peace, resolve and thankfulness.

Loving words and thoughts have another benefit: they can silence the fear-based inner critic, that saboteur who distorts reality, prevents rational thinking and stops us from taking appropriate steps.

The need for loving-kindness also applies to how we recharge. True recovery involves properly switching off because our brain requires respite just as much as our body. What's more, the quality of the pause in between performance is just as important as the activity itself, which is why sleep is crucial. Some of our deepest healing occurs in bed, at night, in the dark. Sleep is the almighty elixir which provides the enchanted material we need to repair, rejuvenate and revitalise.

Because our wellbeing hinges upon homeostasis, the body's capacity to continually restore itself and maintain equilibrium, when we strategically stop during the day, refresh ourselves and mindfully set aside time for enjoyment, we assist that vital process.

Never underestimate the power of belonging, the support of groups and the advantages of being part of a close-knit community. Surround yourself with people you admire, relate to and aspire to be like, who make you feel good. Commit to regular get-togethers, help each other and celebrate milestones no matter how small and seemingly insignificant.

Remember to seize every chance you can to hug – it's a mutually beneficial and pleasurable way to trigger the release of oxytocin, and we all need more of that.

Finally, try *Ho'oponopono*, a Hawaiian healing practice of forgiveness that involves repeating a short mantra. The word translates to put in order, rectify, and manage. **g**