

Resilience to Face an Emotional Storm

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A storm erupts and tosses the ship of life about till it is forced to change direction and switch all systems to emergency mode. The ship of life suffers damage, some reparable some disabling. It is normal to be depressed after being struck by natural calamity, but some are able to lift that mountain of depression from their shoulders and set it aside so they can pay attention to life. There are inspiring examples, perhaps in your family of people who seem to emerge wiser, taller in personality stature, gracefully poised in the face of devastating possibilities.

Yet others who appeared tall and stable in fair weather crumble and crash like a huge rigid tree that refused to bend with the storm and ended up being uprooted. The resilient sapling faced the same storm had every leaf torn from it, but stood its ground. When the storm abated the ground had been nourished by the thunderous lightning and rain. The sapling soaked up the nutrients and thrived like never before, wiser and happier.

In neurological terms the orbito-frontal cortex acts as a lifeboat that carries us past the flash floods of misery. It is a strap of brain tissue that connects the thinking analytical mind (Pre-frontal cortex) with the spontaneous and perceptive emotional center (Amygdala). The OFC is a very capable raft. It tethers the emotional brain to its thinking counterpart thus exerts a calming influence, making it pause long enough to see reason, thus making the individual capable of delaying gratification, of regulating reaction with inputs about what is most appropriate for the situation by weighing the pros and cons and arriving at a balanced judgment.

Learning from the sapling we need to develop resilience that will be our life-boat in the bad times. Life boats are not built when the storm is raging. They are built in calm sunny weather. Brain tissue does not develop overnight. OFC development begins at the age of two and carries on well into adulthood. Children quietly observe how their significant adults handle their emotions and learn. They notice whether adults react or respond by reading non-verbal cues. They see just how long it takes for adults to lose their cool, display irritation and impatience. They observe how long adults remain in altered mood states, how they manage their anger and joy. This learning is experiential and is boosted by multi-sensorial inputs. Nurturing of the child with loving care, attunement and provision of secure comfortable environments enhance brain development as the chemical milieu within the happy appreciated child is rife with hormones that are conducive to growth and maintenance of neurons.

Much of life's lessons are learned outside the classroom. Experiences during travel and camping teach children adaptability, while craft work and experiments uncover their innovativeness allowing them to break molds and think out-of-the-box. These experiences impart self-knowledge and confidence of 'I can' encouraging development of self-esteem creating positive internal environment. Educators anticipate problems a person may face in life and try to prepare him to face these challenges. Children go through earthquake drills, fire drills, air-raid drills but how many are taught about acceptance of disease, disability and death?

A king once tried to shield his crown prince from the realities of disease, suffering and death and kept him insulated in a world of luxury and enjoyment within the palace walls. The day prince Siddharta came face to face with the sad side of life he realized how lop-sided his development had been. He went on to become the Buddha who preached a life of balance between extremes. Balance and acceptance of reality are integral to personal discipline and

protect a person from mental disturbance. Insulation from reality deprives a person from developing coping abilities.

Factors that Enhance Coping Ability

INTERNAL

Self Confidence

Skills (practice)

Knowledge

EXTERNAL

Resources

Dependable Team

Dependable Relationships

Perception of Stress reduces coping ability.

Factors that Increase Stress Perception

INTERNAL

Ego Imbalance

Emotional Turmoil

Difficulty in Maintaining Relationships

Negative attitude towards Failure

Negative attitude towards Criticism

Illness

EXTERNAL

Serious financial trouble

Job crisis

Lawsuit / divorce

Isolation / love-lessness

Illness of family members

War / political instability

Harassment

Awareness about the internal factors is likely to encourage people to seek basic understanding about Ego, Emotions, Empathy and Relationship. If we find negative attitudes affecting the way in which we view failure or criticism and feed-back, we can seek guidance and alter these attitudes. At the root of these factors lies Emotional Intelligence, *the ability to sense and understand one's own emotions, to express and regulate them appropriately and to use them in the process of decision-making. It includes the capacity to understand and feel for others, and so set up and maintain quality of relationships.* Instruction about Emotional Intelligence is sadly missing from formal education curricula at present. Readers are urged to obtain guidance from books and Consultants for comprehensive understanding applicable to everyday life. To deal with external factors we can do only one thing that is – Build Resilience and resilience is built with Emotional Intelligence.

EMERGENCY KIT

Here is a checklist of assets that serve to carry us safely through hard times:

Healthy body and mind

Genuine Friends and associates

Loving Relationships

Sense of humour

Creativity

Personal Discipline

Connectedness with Reality

Positive Attitude

Serenity

Reinhold Niebuhr, an American Theologian gave us a short prayer:

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can change, And wisdom to know the difference."

If we can internalize and live in the spirit of this prayer, even if we do not believe in God or are disappointed with God, then we can attain equanimity. Serenity in acceptance helps us to rise above the calamitous happenings swirling around us and maintain sanity as long as the brain is untouched by organic disease.

About the Author:

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