

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

Don't Excuse Yourself from Healing

Traumatizing experiences can produce traumatic stress reactions in people, which in turn can lead to trauma-related disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Sometimes traumatic stress can sneak up on us when we experience chronic or collective traumatic stress as a group. It can also manifest as vicarious trauma, which can come when we empathically engage with the trauma of others.

Yet not everyone who has experienced trauma goes on to experience a trauma-related disorder. Research indicates that over half of all individuals who experience trauma will adapt and grow in the wake of their adversity. This is called **post-traumatic growth** (or PTG), and you can find resources on PTG archived at the [WellnessMN.org website](http://WellnessMN.org).

It is estimated that over 70 percent of people worldwide are exposed to at least one major trauma in their lifetime. Interestingly, researchers have found that less than 20 percent of people who have experienced trauma have PTSD. Psychologist and trauma researcher George Bonanno has proposed that resilience is the most common response to trauma.

If the most common response to trauma is the development of resilience, that would indicate that for most of us, developing resilience will not be enormously complex. Yet many people tend to excuse themselves from resilience. They do not pursue the path of becoming stronger, but instead tend to hang on to the traumatic stress.

How does that happen? Here are a few *habits of mind and action* that people may use to excuse themselves from recovery and build resilience.

They go it alone. Some choose to suffer alone when the best path is to recover with others.

They embrace negative coping. Drinking, over-eating, shelling up, hiding out, and lashing out are negative coping strategies that harm the person and those around them.

They avoid the good stuff. They may avoid healthy practices like sharing their trauma with co-workers, loved ones, and professionals. They may prevent healthy methods like therapy, nature-bathing, green spaces, meditation, mindfulness, spirituality, and exercise. They may avoid helping others and expressing gratitude for all their living every day.

They focus on the bad stuff. Replaying the trauma in their minds. Blaming self and others. Embracing the bitterness and rage, failing to forgive self and others. Finding their identity in their pain and losses.

They refuse to do the simple, healing things. Talking is processing, processing is healing, and healing is resilience. Some people refuse to process their pain and stress with appropriate people. In so doing, they stuff the traumatic stress, assuming it will disappear if ignored. It won't, but it will fester and grow foul. Some lockout and block out the good people who will bring them good things.