

At-a-glance: Supporting emotional resilience in the workplace

Benefits of emotional resilience

Emotional resilience is the ability to bounce back emotionally after experiencing distress.

Building a resilient organization requires having resilient employees. Supporting emotional resilience may be fruitful for several reasons: It helps employees develop skills that may reduce stress or burnout; it may help employees maintain healthy work/life balance; and it may help protect some employees from developing other health issues.¹ In addition, it may be especially useful for helping employees stay productive and collaborative during times of uncertainty and change.



Understanding the keys to resilience

The seven “keys” are best understood as the skills, traits and developed human capacities that support emotional resilience. They are not learned all at once, nor do they function independently of one another. As one capacity develops, the others tend to follow.

Flexibility—the ability to let go of rigid expectations

Adaptability—the ability to adjust to change

Self-esteem—having a healthy, positive sense of self

Self-efficacy—having faith in oneself (i.e., to learn, adapt)

Emotional regulation—the ability to experience or witness our emotions with some degree of detachment

Positive coping strategies—being inclined to favor thoughts and actions that support positive outcomes

Mindfulness—the ability to be fully present and more intimately aware of ourselves and our surroundings

Non-judgmental mind—the ability to resist automatic judgments, to be curious and accepting of our differences

Strong relationships—being connected to others in ways that are mutually supportive and dependable

Going deeper: The value of emotionally resilient employees

For many employees, work can be one of the most common sources of stress and anxiety. Aided by technology, the pace of work today may also contribute to a sense of overwhelm. Resilience training in the workplace may be used to address these issues and may have the following benefits:

Enhanced productivity

Resilience training may help teach employees how to better focus their attention on the “here and now” and on challenges that may be solved. The ability to compartmentalize, and to acknowledge what is outside of our control, are key components to staying productive during challenging times.

More adaptive response to stress

Response flexibility is at the heart of resilience training. It enables employees to step back, reflect and have useful responses to stressful stimuli rather than an emotional “reaction” —helping to create a more calm and positive work environment.

Smoother organizational change

Employees who adopt the keys to resilience may be better equipped to handle organizational change. They rely less on outside circumstances to determine their emotional well-being and focus on proactive ways to respond to uncertainty and change.

How to support emotional resilience in the workplace

Positive communications

Openly acknowledge challenges as well as how employees are rising to the challenge. Focus on specific ways the organization is responding to those challenges and maintain a positive future outlook. Give accolades to departments and individuals at all levels of the organization.

Leadership modeling

Executive leaders and managers are often center stage during challenging times. They can greatly influence the well-being of an organization through their own behaviors. By modeling the keys to emotional resilience, leaders may shape expectations and define the organization’s culture.

Skills training

Building emotional resilience within an organization may be supported by individual skill-building exercises and group training. Do your homework and select resources and programs that have proven results. Harness success stories and testimonials to demonstrate impact.

Social activities

Find ways to gather employees, during and after work hours, that provide opportunities for people to laugh, relax and chat about topics that are meaningful to them. Social gatherings, whether on-site or virtual, can help mitigate feelings of isolation and sustain new supportive relationships.

Learn more

Ask your UnitedHealthcare representative for additional programs and educational materials that support emotional health and well-being.

¹ Distressed Employees? Try Resilience Training; Harvard Business School, July 2019. <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/distressed-employees-try-resilience-training>