



University of  
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Rights Lab

# Resilience Workbook

A Resource for Survivors  
of Modern Slavery and  
Human Trafficking

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**Murals on the front cover and page 3, courtesy of Joel Bergner and  
community partners**



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# Introduction

Transitioning from one situation to another can be a stressful experience. Whether this is a change in our personal life or circumstances, or perhaps a move to new accommodation or a different city. Some of you might welcome this change and see it as a new start, whereas others may find it scary or overwhelming. You may go between feeling happy or feeling sad about this change in your life. We are all individuals and our own unique experiences shape what we find stressful and challenging. Some of us may have high thresholds for stress and can cope with extreme challenges, whereas for others the threshold may be lower. Where you are on this continuum is not important – it is not about seeing who can tolerate the most adversity. Rather, it is how you learn, grow and develop in relation to your experiences that is important for maintaining your own wellbeing and the capacity to care for others. You are a survivor of human trafficking and/or modern-day slavery; you have already come so far in your journey.

In this workbook, we want to introduce you to the concept of resilience. We aim to do this by:

- 1. Defining resilience.**
- 2. Exploring the seven Cs model of resilience.**
- 3. Providing you with some activities and resources to use in your personal and home life to support self-care and wellbeing.**

# What is resilience?

**Resilience** is the ability to bounce back from an adverse event and to continue living your life.

At some point during your lives, you will have all experienced challenging situations or difficult events in life. This could be related to your experience of trafficking/slavery or it could be related to anything else in life. Although, you may have initially found this difficult and painful, you will have adapted and coped with it. Through this learning process, you will have acquired new skills and knowledge to help you prepare should you experience something similar again. You might want to take a pause here and reflect about your experiences to date:

1. **What happened?**
2. **How did it make you feel?**
3. **What did you do to resolve the situation?**
  - i. **Did it work? If no, what changes did you make?**
4. **What have you learnt that could help you if you came across a similar situation in future?**

The concept of resilience emerged in the 1970s when psychologists and researchers asked the question; “what is the human trait that enables people to thrive in the aftermath of tragedy or adversity?” Focusing particularly on children who had survived abuse or extreme poverty, the answer to this question led to the term resilience.



# What is resilience?

Since then, resilience has been defined in multiple ways in many different contexts. Dyer and McGuinness (1996: 277) define it as *“a global term describing a process whereby people bounce back from adversity and go on with their lives.”* Similarly, Howe et al. (2012) suggest it to be an *ability to be successful and remain positive despite hardships and negative life events.* The Stockholm Resilience Centre identifies that it involves a complex interplay between the individual, community and wider social systems:

*“Resilience is the capacity of a system, be it an individual, a forest, a city or an economy to deal with change and continue to develop. It is about the capacity to use shocks and disturbances like a financial crisis or climate change to spur renewal.”*

Taking into account these definitions as well as the many others that are available, we can see that resilience has a number of core features:

1. It is a **complex** and **multi-faceted** concept.
2. It refers to an individuals' resources and abilities to **overcome challenges** without experiencing negative effects.
3. It is both an **innate trait** (some people appear to be naturally more resilient) and something to be **learnt and developed**.

# The 7 Cs Model of Resilience

The seven Cs model outlines the core building blocks that are required for resilience. Originally developed for working with children and young people, it provides a useful framework for thinking about which areas we need to develop further to promote resilience. Ken Ginesburg developed the model:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=3&v=iMWql6F\\_CyA&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=iMWql6F_CyA&feature=emb_title)

1. **Competence:** is the ability to be able to make decisions that effectively resolve a situation. An individual acquires competence through actual experience.
2. **Confidence:** true confidence – the solid belief in your own abilities – is rooted in competence. People gain confidence by demonstrating their competence in real situations.
3. **Connections:** having close ties to family, friends, work colleagues and the wider community gives individuals a sense of security and values, which help them to know they are not alone.
4. **Character:** this is a person's fundamental values and sense of right and wrong. This enables someone to make the best decisions and a positive contribution to society.

# The 7 Cs Model of Resilience

5. **Contribution:** people need to understand that the world is a better place because they are in it. Those who understand the importance of their unique personal contribution gain a sense of purpose that can motivate them.
6. **Coping:** those who learn to cope effectively with stress are better prepared to overcome challenges. Often the best protection against unsafe, worrisome behaviours may be a wide repertoire of positive, adaptive coping strategies.
7. **Control:** determining what we can and cannot control is an important part of resilience. We need to be able to let go of those things that we have no control over but at the same time realise what we can control and that we do have influence over the outcome of some events. If people are able to see the influence that they have, they are more likely to know that they have the ability to do what it takes to bounce back.



# The 7 Cs Model of Resilience

Before you move onto the next part of the workbook, you might want to **reflect** on how these core building blocks relate to you and how you are feeling at the current time. You might find it useful to complete the table below, to start thinking about your baseline and the areas you want to develop further:

7 Cs	What do I do/have in place that promotes this?	Do I need to develop this more? How would I do this?
Competence		
Confidence		
Connections		
Character		
Contributions		
Coping		
Control		

# Promoting Resilience and Self-Care: Activities and Resources

Now that you have started to think about resilience, we need to consider how to **promote it and enhance wellbeing.**

In this section of the workbook, we have compiled a list of activities and resources, which you might find useful to practice and to help with your own self-care and wellbeing. You may wish to try all them out and pick the ones that you personally find most helpful to use regularly.

**The idea is to find something that you will enjoy doing.**

We have grouped the activities into general self-care hints and tips; activities and resources for promoting wellbeing and resilience; grounding techniques to cope with distressing situations; and managing self-harm and suicidal feelings. The activities are not listed in order of importance, you may find them all equally beneficial or alternatively only some may work for you.

# General Self-Care Hints and Tips

- 1. It is incredibly important that you take some time for you.** Whether this is a quick five minutes during the day, or a dedicated hour each day. Remember to **be kind to yourself** and listen to what your body and mind are telling you.
- 2. It is crucial to have as much predictability in our routines during difficult periods in life.** Choosing a regular time to practice a technique can help with this. Try to plan your day / week as much as you can and take control over the things you are able to control, such as planning a 10-minute walk outside in the fresh air at the same time each day. You should add things that **you will look forward to** and set those on specific days. It could be something as simple as a relaxing bubble bath or cooking a favourite meal.
- 3. Remember to maintain connection with other people,** including your family, friends, and colleagues. You can do this via video calls too. Share your feelings with other people, accept them, and be compassionate towards yourself and towards others. **Make use of your support networks and take time to reflect.**
- 4. Difficult times in life do not last forever** and it is important we keep reminding ourselves of this. Each sensation, each emotion, each feeling will pass. It is important to create an internal sense of safety to manage what may feel like an unsafe external world right now.
- 5. Please reach out** to your support worker or the organisation currently supporting you. They may be able to refer you for further support.

# Activities and Resources for Promoting Resilience and Wellbeing

- 1. Breathing exercises:** gain control over your breathing and bring your body into a state of relaxation by practising the 4-7-8 technique. This means that you will breathe in for 4 seconds through your nose, hold your breath for 7 seconds, and slowly exhale for 8 seconds to release the breath through your mouth. Learn to breathe calmly and deeply, focusing on calming down your physiological system. (Step by step guide found here - <https://www.healthline.com/health/4-7-8-breathing#2>)
- 2. Check in with one person each day:** make use of those around you by checking in with someone every single day. You can call a friend, a family member, your partner and let them know how your day has been. If calling is difficult, then send someone a text message just to check-in and let him or her know how you are. This is especially important if you live on your own or you are away from your family.
- 3. Gratitude exercise:** write down three things to be grateful for at the end each day, something that went well that day, or made you feel good. They could be small things, such as the taste of your first coffee that morning, or the sound of bird song coming from the garden. They could also be things that are not a daily occurrence, such as receiving a phone call from a friend you have not spoken to in a long time or taking a call from your support worker. Take time to appreciate the things you may not ordinarily pay so much attention too.

# Activities and Resources for Promoting Resilience and Wellbeing

4. **Increase your understanding; be kind and compassionate:** know that everyone is managing the difficulties they face differently. People have different levels of stress. Some people find it difficult to cope with low levels of stress and others are able to manage higher levels of stress. There is no right or wrong way of being. It is important to be kind to yourself and to others. Please reach out to someone if you are struggling.
5. **Journaling:** plan some time to write down your thoughts and collect your reflections on the day itself. Researchers suggest that just 15 minutes of expressive writing each day for 4 consecutive days has a positive impact on our health and well-being. You do not need to write about traumatic events or about the things that happened to you during your trafficking or modern slavery experience.

You can use the following website for some tips and watch a YouTube video, which explains more:  
<https://www.suddencardiacarrestuk.org/expressive-writing/>

This link from the sudden cardiac arrest website (<https://www.suddencardiacarrestuk.org/expressive-writing/>) provides an example of the approach developed by Professor Pennebaker. You may choose to write about the difficulties of your current situation, whether you are waiting for your decision from the NRM, or for your asylum case to be concluded. The goal is to understand the emotional impact of events that may have taken place. This means thinking about the way something has made you feel, such as an argument with a friend or your Home Office interview. Write about anything which comes to mind and feels important for you.

# Activities and Resources for Promoting Resilience and Wellbeing

**6. Mindfulness and meditation:** these can help with self-regulation and practising them can have positive effects on your mental health and well-being (Keng, Smoski & Robins, 2011). Self-regulation is about managing your behaviours, your emotions, and your thoughts, and thinking about your long-term aims and goals. This is especially the case for difficult or disruptive emotions or impulses. You can find meditations that include positive thoughts or positive affirmations within them. You may like to try starting your day with these.

*There are many examples of mindfulness or meditation sessions online, we have selected a few to get you started:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVzTnS\\_IONU&t=33s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVzTnS_IONU&t=33s)

**7. Overcoming challenges:** write down one challenge you had in a particular day or week and how you overcame it. What was the challenge? How did you get through it? What did it teach you? What did you learn either about yourself or the situation from going through it? Reflect on your personal strengths and inner resources. You may wish to complete a survey on character strengths to help you identify more of them.

*You can use the following website to do this:*

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/>



# Activities and Resources for Promoting Resilience and Wellbeing

- 8. Practice acceptance and compassion:** embrace your thoughts and feelings, accept that they are a part of you right now, accept all the things that are out of your control now, whether this is waiting for your NRM, asylum decision, or something else. Be compassionate towards the tired, angry, worried, or stressed you. We are so much more than our present experiences, thoughts, or emotions.

*You may wish to try a few exercises to increase your self-compassion:*

<https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>

There are many exercises you can do to be more compassionate towards yourself. We have directly copied one example from Dr Kristin Neff's website for you here [<https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>].

## Exercise 1: How would you treat a friend?

Please take out a sheet of paper and answer the following questions:

- a. First, think about times when a close friend feels really bad about him or herself or is really struggling in some way. How would you respond to your friend in this situation (especially when you're at your best)? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you typically talk to your friends.

# Activities and Resources for Promoting Resilience and Wellbeing

- b) Now think about times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you talk to yourself.
- c) Did you notice a difference? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others so differently?
- d) Please write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you're suffering.

**Why not try treating yourself like a good friend and see what happens?**

**9. Progressive muscle relaxation:** this practise helps to reduce anxiety, tension, and stress in your body, providing an immediate sense of relaxation. This is done by slowly tensing each muscle, holding the tension for a couple of seconds, and then releasing to a relaxed state. You can do this activity sitting or lying down.

You can use the following website for guided step-by-step instructions:

<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/progressive-muscle-relaxation-script.pdf>

# Activities and Resources for Promoting Resilience and Wellbeing

**10. Physical exercise and movement:** try to make some time within each day to get yourself moving around, whether this is watching an exercise video on YouTube, listening to music and dancing in your front room, or going for a run outside. Movement helps to ground us, and we know that exercise releases endorphins, helping us to feel good!

**11. Yoga practice:** this can help to create a sense of safety within your body and calm feelings of anxiety by focusing on how your body feels. Yoga focuses on self-discovery and self-acceptance. There are different types of yoga practises, there is yoga for specific parts of the body, and there is yoga for particular feelings, such as stress and anxiety.

You can use the following link to get you started with yoga for self-care:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpW33Celubg>



# Grounding Techniques for Dealing with Distressing Situations

**Grounding techniques help to create space from distressing feelings in any situation.** You may have received some bad news which has increased your distress and you do not feel okay about it.

Grounding techniques work by **refocusing attention** onto something else, either through changing your cognitive or sensory awareness, mental distraction or movement-based grounding. They help you to re-orientate to the here and now and **to shift from the emotional brain to the thinking brain.**

Here are some examples of exercises you can do yourself:

## 1. **Developing sensory awareness**

- a) Trace your hand on a piece of paper
- b) Label each finger 1 of 5 senses
- c) Take each sense and identify something special and safe representing that sense
- d) For example, the Thumb represents sight and I might be looking at butterflies
- e) Keep one hand on the table/in front of yourself and use this exercise to re-orientate when needed

## 2. **Developing Cognitive Awareness:** Reorient yourself in time and place by asking yourself these questions

- a) Where are you now?
- b) What day is it?
- c) What is the date?
- d) What month are we in?
- e) What year are we in?
- f) What season are we in?

# Grounding Techniques for Dealing with Distressing Situations

## 3. Mental Distraction

- a) Count backwards in 7s from 100
- b) Name 10 different animals
- c) Name 10 yellow things
- d) Name one animal or country for each letter of the alphabet
- e) Say the alphabet backwards

## 4. Movement-based grounded

- a) Breathe deeply and slowly and count the breaths
- b) Grab onto the chair tightly and press your feet firmly on the ground
- c) Rub your palms and clap your hands (noticing the sensations in them)
- d) Stretch out your arms or legs / clench and unclench your fists
- e) Stomp your feet, walk around, notice each footstep and say “right” and “left” out aloud

# Managing self-harm or suicidal feelings

If you get to the stage of feeling like you want to harm yourself and are having difficulty controlling these impulses, please reach out for support and do not keep these feelings to yourself.

**If you feel you are in immediate danger and unable to get to your GP, please ring 999.**

If you would like to talk through these feelings, there are a number of helplines you can ring for emotional support in a crisis.

These include:

- **Samaritans** on 116 123 (any time, day or night, for free).
- **Papyrus** on 01925 572 444 (if you are aged 35 or under, you can call Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm).



# Managing self-harm or suicidal feelings

If you feel able to work through these feelings yourself, you can try practising grounding techniques. They help to create space from distressing feelings in any situation. For example, you may have received some bad news which has increased your distress and you do not feel okay about it. Grounding techniques work by refocusing attention onto something else. There is a technique which may be particularly useful that comes from dialectical behaviour therapy (Linehan, 2014), called TIPP skills. This will help you to regulate your emotions and to manage better in difficult situations. Please note that this sections on TIPP skills has come directly from the following website: <https://www.sunrisertc.com/distress-tolerance-skills/#tipp>

- **Temperature**

When we're upset, our bodies often feel hot. To counter this, splash your face with cold water, hold an ice cube, or let the air conditioning blow on your face. Changing your body temperature will help you cool down – both physically and emotionally.

- **Intense Exercise**

Do intense exercise to match your intense emotion. You're not a marathon runner? That's okay, you don't need to be. Sprint down to the end of the street or do jumping jacks until you've tired yourself out. Increasing oxygen flow helps decrease stress levels. Plus, it's hard to stay dangerously upset when you're exhausted.

# Managing self-harm or suicidal feelings

- **Paced Breathing**

Even something as simple as controlling your breath can have a profound impact on reducing emotional pain.

There are many different types of breathing exercises. If you have a favourite, breathe it out. If you don't, try a technique called "box breathing". Each breath interval will be 4 seconds long. Take in air 4 seconds, hold it in 4 seconds, breathe out 4, and hold 4. And then start again. Continue to focus on this breathing pattern until you feel more calm. Steady breathing reduces your body's fight or flight response.

- **Paired Muscle Relaxation**

When you tighten a voluntary muscle, relax it, and allow it to rest, the muscle will become more relaxed than before it was tightened. Relaxed muscles require less oxygen, so your breathing and heart rate will slow down. Try this technique by focusing on a group of muscles, such as muscles in your arms. Tighten the muscles as much as you can for 5 seconds. Then let go of the tension. Let the muscles relax, and you'll begin to relax, as well.



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