A GROWTH WORKBOOK FOR UNICEF STAFF

BUILDING RESILIENCY

overwork
apathy

numbness
fatigue

anxiety

despair

tiredness
fear

exhaustion
trauma

hopelessness
insecurity
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INTRODUCTION

There are many situational and individual factors that put the psychological well-being of humanitarian staff at risk and there are a number of ways to minimise those risks. Such issues are largely dealt with elsewhere, for example, in your ‘Stress in our Workplace’ booklet. Unlike that booklet, the guidelines in this workbook are designed to assist you in developing your capacity to be resilient to the difficult situations that you face and the ensuing personal thoughts, feelings and behaviours that may accompany such challenges. For some people, the things you will see through the work you are doing will provide an opportunity for you to develop and grow as a person.

Knowing your vulnerability is important to promote your strengths. Your empathy for others is probably a large part of the reason you have chosen to work for UNICEF and in some ways that empathy, or ability to really understand the lives of others, can make you vulnerable to the risks associated with exposure to stressful and sometimes traumatic experiences. However, the people who work for humanitarian agencies are a predominantly resilient group who derive benefits from working to improve the lives of people in the communities they work with, creating a story of personal meaning about the work role and enjoying the satisfaction that comes with this unique experience.

This workbook is yours and when you have completed it, there will be no other like it. It is to be used as your own personal guide to building resilience and perhaps personal growth within the context that you are in right now; it is for your unique story. On the cover is a picture of a bridge. The bridge is a metaphor for you. Just like you, bridges are built to withstand daily stressors. They come in lots of different shapes and sizes – some grand and others humble. But all of their structures and supports are crafted to deal with traffic of some sort. Some light loads and some heavy loads. Sometimes
they need maintenance, sometimes a lane may need to be closed for a while, but most of the time they function very well. You are encouraged to build your own bridge as you complete this workbook; learn and remember what your supports are, the pillars and girders that make you resilient to the traffic that crosses your life each day. You will be invited to answer questions throughout the workbook. The answers you give form the structure of your bridge. Follow the instructions to draw your bridge as you go.
Knowing your vulnerability is important to promote your strengths.
A positive skill in developing and maintaining resilience is being self-aware.
RESILIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH

The term resilience refers to the capacity of a person, organism or object to ‘bounce back’ or recover after a stressful encounter. People are naturally resilient. That said, being resilient in circumstances that challenge your concept of the world and your place in the world, involves work. It helps to understand yourself in order to develop strategies that work best for you.

Psychological growth refers to positive changes that may occur for some people following the struggle to incorporate a traumatic event into their lives. It is not an automatic by-product of surviving a traumatic experience but can result from work undertaken to find a sense of meaning in the experience, changing thoughts about the event, renewing perspectives about life, about your sense of self and your relationships.

Resilience and growth do not mean that you do not experience distress but rather, that distress is a precursor to developing into a stronger, more adaptable human being. In your role as a UNICEF Staff Member, this also means that you are stronger for the people you aim to help as well as for yourself.

The skills that are required to be resilient and even to grow in the face of serious adversity are within you and can be learned. The guidelines and exercises presented in this workbook aim to help you do just that. We start with what you know about you.
How well do you know yourself in the face of challenge?

Throughout life we are confronted with challenging situations. Some of those we cope with fairly easily and others can take a considerable amount of effort. Situations that challenge our coping strategies and resources may also afford us the opportunity to grow into stronger people. Research with many different groups of people from disaster responders to counsellors, has demonstrated the value of reflection. That is, reflecting on ourselves and working out how we operate in certain circumstances or to put it another way, how we think, feel and behaviourally respond to different types of events.

As you go through the exercises of reflection in the following pages, remember that there is no right or wrong way for everyone to react or respond in a given situation. This is about you. You may choose to write your answers in the spaces provided or perhaps draw your response if a picture comes to mind.

Think of a difficult situation or event in your life - one that has required you to draw on your strength, resources and strategies in order to successfully overcome the difficulties associated with it. Imagine that you are describing the event to someone that you can confide in.

How would you tell your story? What would you say in order to tell them what happened for you? Please tell your story.

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Emotions and Feelings

What emotions or feelings did you have at this time?

Remember that we must give ourselves permission to be vulnerable. Our vulnerability is also our strength. You feel these emotions because you are a caring human being. Sometimes it may be easy to forget that you must care for yourself because you see people in times of great crisis and people who are less fortunate than you think of yourself being. But you will not be able to help them if you ignore yourself.

When thinking about the event you described, did your emotions change as time went on? Write down if they changed or stayed the same and if they did change, how they did.
To cope doesn’t mean that you don’t feel sadness or anger, frustration or happiness but we all need to find ways to manage our emotions. Some people use humour, some express themselves to others, some write down their emotions or draw them in a picture and some people forget about them and allow them to come back from time to time.

Thinking back to the difficult situation or event, what strategies did you use to manage the emotions you were feeling so that you could reduce the impact of these emotions on your daily life?

These ways you found to deal with the emotions you were feeling are part of the structure that makes you resilient. They are like pillars under your bridge.

On page 33 of this workbook, draw these ways you found to deal with your emotions as part of the structure of your bridge. They may be a pillar or a stone; it depends what kind of bridge you feel best represents you. Some people find it easiest to draw a bridge that they feel reflects the kind of person they are and then to label the parts of their bridge as they move through these exercises of self-reflection. Some people prefer to draw the bridge from the bottom up as they go through the exercises. Choose whichever method is best for you.

A positive skill in developing and maintaining resilience is being self-aware.
Thoughts and Meaning

When you experienced the event you described, there were certain thoughts that went through your mind. What thoughts do you remember having at the time?

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How did those thoughts develop over time?

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Many difficult circumstances we can not change. We can however choose how we think about or make sense of the challenge. How we think about it then has a carry on effect by inviting us to change how we act and how we feel about it. How we think about things can lead us to feel a lot of stress, anger, shame, grief, blame or frustration or it can lead us to more positive feelings like a sense of accomplishment, justice, fairness, respect or pride. It’s our choice.
Thoughts often include looking for a sense of meaning in a situation, looking for alternate perspectives, reminding yourself of your strengths and thinking positive thoughts about your ability to deal with a situation. Think about previous experiences when times were challenging. What strengths did you discover in yourself to deal with those previous events?

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If you look back now, in what ways could you think differently about the situation you were in? Give yourself permission to write whatever comes to mind.

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Despite the challenges you have faced before, and the ones that you are facing at the moment, there are some simple thought processes that can help you to be resilient. For example, nurture yourself by focusing on the joy and pleasure in the day. Think of something positive that you can find in your day today and write it down.
As an exercise to continue, writing down something everyday that has brought you pleasure helps remind us of the good things life has to offer. It may be something you did, something someone else did, a place you saw, a new experience or it may be a smile on a child’s face.

These thoughts that you have worked for you in the past, form part of your bridge’s structure. Add them to the picture of your bridge on page 33.

Reactions and Our Behaviour

A third part of dealing with difficulty involves our behaviour and the way that we react. Sometimes these behaviours help and other times they do not improve the situation. If we engage in behaviours that are damaging to ourselves (such as over eating or abusing alcohol), or to other people (such as taking out our anger on those close to us), they can even make the situation worse. What behaviours did you engage in when you were in the difficult situation?
Who would have noticed your behaviour and what would they say about it?

Which behaviours worked well for you?

These behaviours that worked well for you also comprise the structure of your bridge. Draw them into the picture you are creating on page 33 of your workbook.
Stressful events are inherent in life and are essential in making life interesting and worthwhile.
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

You are not alone. You are one of 10,000 UNICEF staff around the globe. **Reach out.** Maybe you can reach out through the internet to others in similar situations, maybe you can reach out to colleagues in the field, maybe to people you have met in the local community, maybe to others who share your own faith.

We all have **relationships** that we rely on to support us in life. Who are those people in your life? For example, do you rely on particular family members or particular friends? Write the names of those people you rely on below.

Wherever we are, we can build new relationships. Are there any colleagues or people in your community that you feel you would like to get to know better? If so, who are they?
How you can help each other? How can you be helpful to your colleagues?

You are in a community that is full of connections. Connections to people are the most important factors in resilience. So apart from the connections you have listed above, what other connections can you make here? Even in the remotest of places, it can be possible to find places to connect with others with similar interests.

By now your bridge on page 33 will be taking shape. You have drawn some supports under your bridge that you have recalled are inside you and that you use in times of challenge. The connections you have to others also underpin your bridge and keep the bridge together. They may be struts that join the pillars or supports that you have. Draw these connections on your bridge.
Every step, no matter how small, is a step on the right road.
Caring for yourself gives you more energy to face daily demands.
SELF CARE

Looking after your mind is very important and so is caring for your physical well-being. These strategies of self-care might help you to develop a more positive meaning to challenges by giving you a better frame of mind and to be more able to communicate with friends. Caring for yourself helps you to be better able to cope with stressors and gives you more energy to face daily demands.

In this section we talk about various ways of looking after yourself including food, sleep, relaxation, exercise, recreation activities and taking time out. The things you can do to look after yourself fit together like pieces of a puzzle.

What are some of the ways you look after your self and which are the ones you use everyday, once a week, once a month, and every-now-and-then?

Food

Our bodies need food to fuel how we think and how we act. It’s important then to fuel our bodies with the right kinds of fuel so that we can be at our best and most productive in terms of what we do and think. We also need water to survive. Dehydration is dangerous and can happen before we notice our thirst. Before we feel thirsty we might have already lost 2 to 3 percent of our body fluid. Try and drink clean water regularly through the day to reduce dehydration.
Sleep

Sleep is essential to allow our bodies a chance to rest and recharge. Regular sleep helps us stay alert and function at our best. We all know what it’s like when we don’t get enough sleep – you are slower to respond to situations and people, you may get more irritable, feel like things are more difficult to achieve than usual, your emotions are more difficult to control, you may get frustrated more easily and so on. Are you getting enough sleep? Is it something you can change? How might you go about creating change?

Making Changes

In order to think about making a change it is easiest if you break the change process down into steps. Ask your self some questions, such as what is the specific change you want to make, the important reasons you want to make a change, the particular steps you need to take. Sometimes it is very helpful to think of who in your life might help you to achieve those change goals. If you want to change your sleep or food habits, write down a list ways to can go about doing this. If you have more changes you would like to make, you can use the notes pages at the end of the workbook to plan how you will achieve these changes.
Move Your Body

Getting exercise helps us relieve, control stress and restore our body. When we exercise, our bodies release chemicals that make us feel good, and this feeling can last for at least an hour. Exercising and moving your body regularly can improve your sleep and concentration, help you to get sick less often and to handle tough situations better. Exercise can also be a great way to make connections. Maybe you can play a game of football, go for a walk with someone, dance!

What ways to do you move your body each day to get some exercise?
Relaxation and Meditation

There are lots of different ways we might relax. Some people do this through meditation, focusing on an image or moving rhythmically. Others visualise a peaceful situation or scene or concentrate on breathing deeply at an even pace. Some people use prayer. This section describes a few simple techniques that can restore your energy and make you resilient to the challenges of life.

Deep Breathing

1. Find a comfortable place and position to sit or lie down
2. Relax shoulders and arms
3. Rotate your head gently from side to side to loosen those muscles
4. Close your eyes
5. Take a deep breath in slowly to the count of 5
6. Hold the breath for the count of 5
7. Exhale for the count of 5 and then repeat
8. Focus on your breathing – and only your breathing.

If you practice this for a few minutes each day you will feel more relaxed. It is also a good strategy to remember when things are looking as though they may be going to get difficult.

Deep Muscle Relaxation

Lie flat on a comfortable surface in a quiet area:

1. Focus on your legs, starting with your toes and feet. Contract the muscles, hold the contraction for two seconds and then relax the muscle. As you relax the muscle visualise tension leaving your legs, picture it leaving your legs. Then move to your lower legs – calf muscles, then upper legs – thighs, then buttocks. Feel the muscles in your legs relax.
2. Focus on your trunk. Contract the muscles, hold the contraction for two seconds and then relax the muscle. As you relax the muscle visualise tension leaving your trunk, picture it leaving your trunk. Starting with your abdomen, then move to your upper chest.

3. Focus on your arms, starting with your shoulders. Contract the muscles, hold the contraction for two seconds and then relax the muscle. As you relax the muscle visualise tension leaving your arms, picture it leaving your arms. Then move to your upper arms, then lower arms, then hands and fingers. Feel the muscles in your arms relax.

4. Focus on your face. Contract the muscles, hold the contraction for two seconds and then relax the muscle. As you relax the muscle visualise tension leaving your face. Feel your facial muscles relax.

5. Focus on the whole of your body. Visualise the tension leaving the whole of your body, picture it leaving, feel your body become more and more relaxed.

**Visualisation**

1. Go to a quiet location, sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Be aware of your breathing. Take five deep breaths and with each breath, as you exhale say ‘relax’ (or have your own word, maybe ‘peace’ or ‘comfort’)
3. Now that your body feels more and more relaxed, picture a restful and relaxing scene. Try to imagine how it sounds, how the air smells, how it feels on your skin.

It is all very well being shown how to do these things but it is another thing to commit to trying them. For a long time we have known that these strategies strengthen peoples capacities to be resilient to stress and can be a vehicle to growth following extreme crisis and trauma.
When will you try the new suggestions and which one do you think you will try first?

Sometimes the amount of traffic you have to carry can cause cracks to appear in your bridge. When these times come it is important to attend to them. If you don’t deal with them well, the cracks may become bigger and cause a real problem. There a lots of ways to can care for yourself, by for example, taking time out. Depending on where you are, you may go fishing, or read a book, share something with someone, get some extra rest, take a walk, make some music or perhaps do some gardening.

The ways you look after yourself add to your resilience.

What ways do you look after yourself? I care for myself by.......
Draw these strategies you already use on your bridge as they give you strength. When you engage in more of the ways described, perhaps you can add them to your bridge. 

Every step, no matter how small, is a step on the right road.

Acceptance

For you own health, it is important to keep a realistic view of the context you are in. That is, you need to know what you can and can’t change. You may feel very strong emotions at times. Certainly some things are difficult to see and to experience. You may feel sadness, anger, frustration. When faced with challenging situations it is also normal to feel stretched. At these times we might temporarily forget about how capable and strong we really are. You can look to your bridge to remember, but there may be things below that you haven’t included in your bridge that may be of help.

Reminders

Remind yourself that you are strong
Remember the positive aspects of your role as a UNICEF staff member; for example you are using skills that can achieve very meaningful outcomes
Remember all of the things that have worked for you in the past and all of the tasks that have gone well
You may feel fortunate to have had certain opportunities and advantages in your life
There is satisfaction that comes from knowing that you are working for others. Despite the difficulties this role can throw your way, this can be a worthwhile and infinitely rewarding part of your life.

Perhaps there are other things not listed that you have used. Try reminding yourself of these things the next time you feel stretched.
Never forget that you are a survivor
There are lots of questions you can ask yourself that may act as prompts for you to remember the positive aspects of your role. If you need reminding, ask yourself these questions...

How did you get into working for UNICEF?

What motivated you?
What motivates you now? What are you core values (sense of meaning) for doing this work?

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Have your motivations changed, what feelings have changed, what thoughts, experiences have changed?

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Why are these better?

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What can you improve for yourself?

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Look for opportunities for self discovery. Think throughout the day about something you learn about yourself. How can you grow from that knowledge?

I learned.....

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I can use this knowledge to....

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Never forget that you are a **survivor**
- Identify yourself as strong
- Thoughts of vulnerability are part of your strength
- Think about something that you feel good about at the moment
- Resilience involves positive self-talk & connections with others
Throughout this workbook you have been encouraged to engage in self-reflection. This process of identifying your emotions, thoughts and behaviours is important to understand yourself in the context of facing challenges. You have also been encouraged to identify people in your life that you can rely on as supports when you are finding things difficult to deal with. These people may be in the community around you or in the virtual community: people you contact through email or chat rooms. These two strategies for knowing yourself and creating connections are very important factors in resilience. Another is the process you have completed. For example, when you reflect on an emotion and write it down, it’s no longer hiding within you. A challenging emotion, like sadness, is easier to deal with when you write it, or draw it on paper.

At the end of each day take a few minutes to write down what happened in your day, how you felt and thought about it, who helped you in the day or perhaps someone you helped. Always try to find a positive aspect of each day and add that to your journal. Don’t forget your bridge. If you have drawn it as you went through this workbook, it will be full of the structures of resilience. Sometimes you may want to remind yourself of that. You may want to add to it as life goes on; making it ever stronger.

A thought:

*All the things you have seen and done have created the resilient person you are today. Every experience you have from now on simply adds to the wonderfully colourful picture that your life is.*
USEFUL WEBSITES

Stress Management information on the UNICEF intranet:
http://www.intranet.unicef.org/dhr/DHRSite.nsf/Site%20Pages/Page0104
This contains FAQs, information on preparing yourself and your family for
mission, links to UNICEF policies and guidance on work-life balance,
as well as links to other useful publications and websites.

Aid Workers:
http://www.aidworkers.net/?q=about
This is a website designed to allow aid workers to share resources and
stories. It promotes sharing of advice and information regarding general
issues on humanitarian work. The information includes blogs from workers,
resource pages, and opportunities to share experiences and tips.

Headington Institute:
www.headington-institute.org
This website provides many useful resources related to promoting growth
as well as stress management. Resources include questions to facilitate
links to stories of other humanitarian workers, self-examination exercises
and 24-Installment on tips for self-care.

www.unicef.org
Provides detail on recent activities and helpful information on other staff
members (profiles).

There are links on the UNICEF web site to the following. They are both social
bookmarking sites that allow the user to share helpful, interesting websites
with others.

http://ma.gnolia.com/tutorial/SocialBookmarking
http://del.icious/about
MY BRIDGE
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