

Resilience: The Power Within

People who have been diagnosed with a mental illness are people, not their diagnosis or symptoms, but people. People with good days and bad days. There are many people with mental illness who don't try to hide their illness, but simply, yet profoundly, live with it and get the most out of life every day, managing the disorder while building full, successful lives.

“Yet society and even treatment too often objectify people with mental illness. We see the illness rather than the wholeness, the problems rather than the possibilities, and the disability rather than the ability. Worse than that, what we see becomes what people get in terms of treatment and expectations.

“When this happens, we are most likely to ignore one of the most powerful individualized resources available to people with mental illness, *resilience*. Resilience is the powerful capacity to live with a sense of possibility and purpose that keeps us keeping on.

“Research tells us that some people innately have more resilience than others, but also that far more of us can learn and practice our own personalized paths of resilience. There is even growing evidence that resilience is brain chemistry in action, triggers and receptors linked to how we see ourselves, how we treat ourselves, what we say, what we do and what others say and do with respect to us.

“A great friend of mine has lived through periods of clinical depression. With treatment, including medication, she is in recovery but understands that her recovery is a process rather than a state of being. Part of her process has been learning to practice resilience. In her case, it's a simple mantra: ‘Just do something, anything.’ On the darkest of days, it may not be much of anything, but for her it's always an empowering assertion of action and hope.

“We all have our own personal portals to resilience. Maybe it's work or art, conversation or exercise, a familiar object or a favorite place, faith in a higher power or simply faith in oneself. These are powerfully therapeutic personal strategies and brain messages that work, not least of all because learned, guided and practiced resilience is something we can give ourselves. It's not always about being happy, but it is always about being.

“At NAMI, we know that resilience is recovery for people living with mental illness.”

Adapted from an article by

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