West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

Staying Positive in Negative Times

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Educational Objectives

1. Develop skills to sustain resilience in the face of adversity.
2. Identify ways to develop positive energy when needed to face negative circumstances in order to empower ourselves and others.
3. Develop lifelong habits that nurture personal well-being.

Everyone goes through negative situations, whether it's dealing with difficult people or problematic circumstances. Turning on the television or computer brings daily reports of personal hardships, violence, war, and natural disasters. With all the negative news surrounding us and our own adversity, it's hard to be positive and nurture our personal well-being. Since emotions are heavily influenced by our environment, it is often difficult to find the positive energy needed to move forward.

This lesson will explore ways individuals can develop skills to become resilient in the face of adversity, as well as develop nurturing habits to create positive energy.

Group activity (5 to 10 minutes):
Life can be very challenging; however, reading about individuals who have overcome life's obstacles can be inspiring. Use quotes provided in the lesson guide to inspire your group. Choose at least five quotes from the list on the back page and ask volunteers to read them aloud. Ask the group to share their thoughts on the quotes or share short stories about famous people who have overcome life obstacles. Examples may include Helen Keller, Beethoven, Oprah Winfrey, or Christopher Reeves.

Positive energy for tough times

Researchers from Educational Leadership "Developing School Leaders," interviewed nationally-recognized school administrators to determine what essential skills they used to become resilient in difficult times. To be resilient is to emerge from the adversity stronger than before. Resilient people recover and learn from adversity by developing lifelong skills to handle future storms.

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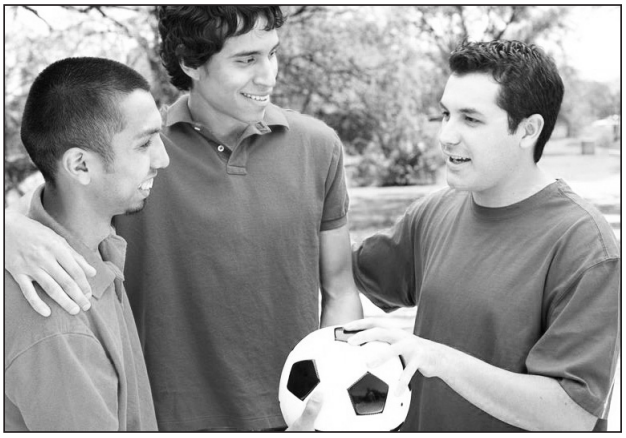
The first skill school administrators identified was the ability to create positive energy. Positive energy begins with positive thoughts. Positive energy involves using approprite activities and skills to move forward. It also allows us to be more productive in our daily lives, which then produces greater self-confidence.

When adversity strikes, we sometimes find ourselves frantic or paralyzed. Often, there is a lack of energy or tendencies to indulge in self-pity or denial. Challenges are inevitable, but fortunately we have control over how we view the obstacles. It is important to recognize the obstacle as a reality but also to focus on the skills needed to get through the challenge.

In the face of despair

While positive thinking works for most people in despair, it is not that simple. Here are additional tools to assist you.

- **Don't fly solo:** To maintain your own positive energy, it is important to develop a strong support team. These are resilient people who provide a caring environment. We are most inspired by those who have been in the trenches, have overcome, moved forward, and are stronger from the experience. Fortunately, technology has provided greater opportunities to connect with positive supporters in troubling times. Remember positive energy comes through positive connected relationships.



- **Revisit your values:** Resilient people gain strength and vitality by clearly defining their personal values and sticking to them, rather than reacting to problems. Make a list of your core values and post them in a visible place. When faced with adversity, immediately revisit this list before reacting to the challenge. Ask yourself if your solution to the problem directly relates to your core values.

Group activity (5 minutes):
Provide group members with small index cards, so they can begin to create their list of core values.

> Tough times never last, but tough people do.
>
> – *Robert H. Schuller*

Create an oasis

Finding a special place where you feel energized, relaxed, and in control allows you to feel positive and confident enough to move forward. It could be a physical place or a brief mind-escape. Your oasis is a great place to store positive tools, such as encouraging books, music, and videos. You may consider creating more than one oasis. For example, filling your car with music and books on tape.

Clutter can also be a barrier in forward movement and creativity. If your office is an emotional battlefield, coming home to a cluttered home will not give you needed peace. Take time to begin the process of getting rid of physical clutter, as well as emotional clutter.

Nurture your physical self

Our physical well-being provides us with strength to enjoy our lives and effectively deal with life's challenges. Eating nutritious foods gives us the energy needed to handle stress; however, overindulging in sugar, caffeine, and junk food can zap energy, as well as make daily activities difficult. Staying hydrated with plenty of water aids our body's brain, organs, and systems in functioning normally.

Our bodies are designed to move, and physical activity is a great way to gain energy and escape from difficult challenges. Find a physical activity that you truly enjoy and lifts your spirits. Don't be pulled into the latest exercise fad – instead chose one that you can easily incorporate into your daily life. Just one to two minutes of brisk activity is beneficial and energizing to the mind and body. For example, park further from the door and walk, run in place for a few seconds, or dance to an upbeat song playing on the radio. Work to increase the amount of exercise you get daily by small increments to keep it safe for you physically.

> A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances but rather a person with a certain set of attitudes.
>
> *– Hugh Downs*

Group Activity:
Have members share ways to safely increase their physical activity level.

Positive gratitude

Being aware and appreciating the positives in our lives lifts your mood instantly. Each day no matter the circumstances, there are things

to be grateful for. Look for them and become aware of the little things that you take for granted. Start a gratitude journal with daily listings of things, people, and situations you are thankful for. Keep this journal within easy reach, so you can add to it throughout the day or week.

Filter the negative

Constantly filling your environment with positive resources and people reduces stress and provides positive energy; however, we can't lock out the world, but we can develop lifelong strategies to filter the impact. Be alert to people who love to complain, gossip, or have a negative outlook on life. Avoid these folks when possible. If that is not possible, resist the temptation to get pulled into their engagements. If you find yourself trying to argue, defend, or explain your position, the conservation will likely continue to spin out of control. Accept that you may not change the mind of the difficult person, and it is most likely that their behavior has nothing to do with you. Remain calm, breathe deep, and remember, you are in charge of your feelings and reactions.

Expand your mind

Researchers state that people who enjoy hobbies have better physical health, as well as a more positive outlook on life. Schedule time each week to enjoy a hobby. Ask a few group members to volunteer to complete this sentence: "Something I have always wanted to learn is _____." As a follow-up to this lesson, at the next meeting ask the group if they have made any progress on their answer.

The choice is yours

Life can be difficult, and it's normal to feel distress at times in our lives. Overcoming tough times makes us stronger for the next challenges. By moving forward and holding tight to core values, we build confidence and become an inspiration for our family and friends.

References

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct09/vol67/num02/Staying-Positive-in-Negative-Times.aspx

http://www.how-to-self.com/positive-attitude-negative-people/

http://www.liveyourlifewell.org/go/live-your-life-well/positive

Quotes for group activity

"Happiness depends upon ourselves."
– Aristotle

"Every thought we think is creating our future."
– Louise L Hay

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."
– Nelson Mandela

"Life is ten percent what happens to you and ninety percent how you respond to it."
– Lou Holtz

"Positive thinking will let you do everything better than negative thinking will."
– Zig Ziglar

"It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog."
– Mark Twain

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."
– Albert Einstein

"There is a great future in front of you, you can leave your past behind."
– Joel Osteen

"Only in the world of mathematics do two negatives multiply into a positive."
– Abby Morel

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