

# Building Resilience

*Erin Hennessy, LMFT, ATR, CCA Staff Counselor*

---

## What is Resilience?

There are many definitions of the word “resilience,” but they all describe our ability to adapt and cope when faced with difficult events or situations. Psychologists define resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress” (*American Psychological Association, 2012.*) Some view resilience as the ability to “rebound” or “bounce back” after a disappointment or failure. Others define it as the capacity to handle difficulties in ways that foster strength and growth.



No matter which definition you prefer, resilience is something you can develop and nurture to help you face life’s challenges, both in art school and beyond.

# Ways to Build Resilience

By altering our thought patterns, habits, and perspective, we can improve our ability to respond and adapt in challenging circumstances. Here are some suggestions that may help you increase resilience in your day-to-day life.

## Develop Resilient Thinking

Practice thought awareness, or noticing how you think about events. Martin Seligman, a psychologist who has written extensively on the topic of resilience, recommends examining the way you **describe** minor setbacks in life.

- Is the negative event **permanent** or temporary?
  - *Try* “My professor didn’t give me positive feedback on this project.”
  - *Instead of* “Professors never give me positive feedback.”
- Is the negative event **pervasive** in all areas of your life, or impacting one area?
  - *Try* “I’m struggling to learn this new skill.”
  - *Instead of* “I can’t do anything right.”
- Are you **personalizing** the negative event or failure, attributing it to a fundamental trait rather than a set of circumstances at a particular time?
  - *Try* “I didn’t seek the support I needed for this project.”
  - *Instead of* “I’m not good at this kind of project.”

## Maintain Perspective

If a particular situation seems overwhelming in the moment, do your best to think long-term and see the “bigger picture.” The negative event or situation will still exist, but you have choices about how you respond and move forward.

## Stay Flexible

Things don’t always go the way we hope. Even with thoughtful planning and great organizational skills, factors outside of our control can throw our plans off track. Flexibility is key in helping us to deal with unexpected changes or challenges. Whenever possible, focus your energy on things that are within your control, such as how you adapt to the unexpected change.



## Learn from Mistakes

College is a learning experience, in the classroom, studio, and everywhere else. Do your best to reframe mistakes and failures as learning opportunities. It may even be helpful to write your “lessons” in a list or journal so you can see how much knowledge you’ve gained along the way.

Learning from your mistakes is part of having a **growth mindset**, a belief that even our most basic talents and abilities can be developed with hard work. If you’re interested in learning more about growth mindset, you can find a short video [here](#).

## Take Care of the Whole Self

Your mind and body are connected. Healthy eating, exercise, and good sleep habits all impact our ability to manage stress. If you’re feeling less resilient than usual, take a moment to evaluate your health habits and self-care routines.

## Use your Support System

Talking to a trusted friend, family member, mentor, or counselor can help you gain perspective and reframe a challenging situation. Make time in your schedule to connect with people who are important to you. Let them know what you need, whether it’s practical advice or just some time to vent.

You may be interested in developing your social network at CCA. CCA offers many opportunities for students to meet and make connections outside of the classroom or studio. Check out the [Office of Student Life](#) for more information on activities or groups that may interest you.



## When to Seek Additional Support

Being resilient **doesn't** mean facing everything alone. If a challenge or stressor is negatively impacting your day-to-day functioning, or if you feel like you could benefit from speaking with a professional, there are options available.

**Professional counseling** can help you develop skills, as well as provide you with a confidential space to talk about life’s challenges. CCA counselors are here for you, and

can also provide referrals to outside services and providers as needed. To access CCA Counseling Services, click [here](#).

**CCA's Mental Health Crisis Hotline is available 24/7 for urgent, non-emergency mental health concerns. You can reach the crisis hotline at (510) 594-5099.**

**If you believe that you are experiencing a mental health emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.**

## **References**

Information included in this article was obtained from the following sources:

[Bruin Resilience](#)

[Five Science-Backed Strategies to Build Resilience](#)

[Building your resilience](#)

[Developing Resilience - Bounce Back from Setbacks with MindTools.com](#)