

BRIEF INTRODUCTION



# The R2 Resilience Program<sup>®</sup>

Standard Manual for Populations In Need of Human Services



RRC - Evaluation  
and Training Institute

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[r2.resilienceresearch.org](http://r2.resilienceresearch.org)

## What is Resilience?\*

Resilience is a dynamic process that describes how we interact with the world around us to become our best selves. When we think about resilience, we shift our focus from the things that cause mental illness and behavioural problems, and instead focus on how we survive and thrive when we have the resources we need for success, even when we experience exceptional hardship and stress.

Most commonly, however, resilience is thought of as an individual's ability to overcome adversity on their own. A better, and more current definition of resilience emphasizes instead both an individual's capacity to cope with stress (e.g., their attitude towards life, or personal talents) as well as their capacity to find and make use of the resources they need to build and maintain their well-being. Understood this way, families, service providers, employers, communities, schools, and governments all have a role to play in providing the supports people need. This relational understanding of well-being is the cornerstone for a more relational understanding of resilience which is sensitive to people's culture and the opportunities they have to live their best lives.

There are times, though, when it looks like people succeed all on their own. They appear "rugged", with the motivation, personality, or talents necessary for success. The idea of individual "ruggedness" does not, though, properly explain why some people do well while others struggle when exposed to the same misfortune.

It is helpful to think about resilience as the process of doing better than expected when we are both *rugged* and *resourced*. People who have the right mindset, the right talents, and the right social, economic, and institutional supports inevitably show more resilience. These two aspects of resilience work together. For example, having lots of resources (e.g., good quality health care, a supportive peer group, safe housing, education, family supports, and a vibrant community) helps us feel more optimistic, motivates us to stay healthy, and improves our self-esteem. Likewise, people who have a strong sense of personal meaning, self-esteem, and optimism are more likely to see opportunities when they arise and take advantage of them. They are also more likely to have larger social networks and be better at asking for what they need. Being rugged and resourced means that we have everything we need to cope during difficult times.

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\* The R2 Resilience Program is the result of collaboration between Dr. Michael Ungar and staff and colleagues affiliated with the Resilience Research Centre.



## The R2 Approach

There are two types of protective factors that contribute to resilience:

- The **rugged qualities** that reside within all of us.
- The **resources** that we need when facing adversity.

Rugged protective factors are changeable internal qualities, such as our level of motivation and perseverance, self-esteem and self-confidence, optimism and hope, and our ability to set goals and solve problems. Resources can include access to services and supports, meaningful relationships with others, safety and security, and opportunities to be part of the community. These two aspects of resilience are the foundation of the R2 Resilience Program<sup>®</sup>. The R2 model of resilience avoids blaming people who do not succeed for problems they may not be able to change. It reminds us that personal qualities are only half the reason we do well. Without an environment rich in resources, individual “grit” or “ruggedness” can only take us so far, especially if we have experienced systematic barriers to personal development such as racism, poverty and other forms of oppression, or personal challenges like a disability or an early experience of trauma. To address these challenges both strong personal qualities and supportive people and institutions make the difference between individual success and failure.

### Case Study of a Rugged Resilience Factor: Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

With the threat of homelessness looming, a client of a social services agency for persons with learning disabilities was frantic to find employment. Low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence, and many bad experiences in the past with job searches meant they struggled to know how or where to look for work. The individual reported persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, and guilt. In addition to enrolling the individual in a Skills and Employment Training Program for Persons with Disabilities, the individual’s social worker decided to use exercises from the R2 Resilience Program for Human Services to help address individual-level barriers to success and improve their client’s access to the supports they needed to find and keep employment. Practical activities were used to help the individual identify things they liked about themselves, learn from their mistakes, and avoid negative self-talk. The social worker also helped the individual find volunteer opportunities to develop, practice, and advance their skills in a safe environment while discovering the many supports available to them should they need even more help with their job search.



## Case Study of a Resourced Resilience Factor: Education and Training

A young parent who had dropped out of high school to raise their children was struggling to meet their family’s needs with their temporary part-time job. With a lack of financial security, the individual felt like an unproductive member of society and, as a result, had been reporting feelings of sadness and depression to their counselor. To help the individual cope with this difficult situation, their counselor used the R2 Resilience Program for Human Services to offer advice specifically focused on education and training. The counselor spoke about the importance of gaining new skills and certifications and continuing to develop work-related talents. In addition to the advice, the counselor asked the young parent to complete a variety of practical activities focused on goal-setting and future planning, while also coaching the young parent on how to find childcare, financial assistance, and a career coach at a local community college that specialized in providing accessible skills upgrading.

## Is it Better to be Rugged or Resourced?

Rugged Individual



Problems



When problems are few, we can rely on ourselves to solve our own problems

When we have few problems, rugged individuals can usually overcome most of life’s challenges by changing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours on their own.

Resourced individuals, however, have more tools to cope when they experience many problems in many different parts of their lives at the same time.

Resourced Individual



Problems



When problems are many and complex, we need lots of resources to cope effectively



## Resilience Factors in this Manual

A detailed review of the literature identified 26 rugged qualities of individuals who show resilience and another 26 resources which are known to be foundational in the lives of people who recover, adapt, or transform their surroundings and themselves when stressed. Through a series of consultations with leaders in human services, sixteen factors (eight rugged qualities and eight resources) were selected as the basis for this manual. The content was then used in trials with an organization working with families in crisis.

### Rugged Qualities:

- 1) ↔ **Decision-Making** – the ability to consider different options, evaluate those options, and pick a course of action to follow. Good decision-making skills help people adapt to changing circumstances and control their reactions.
- 2) ↗ **Goal-Setting** – to carry out actions with a purpose in mind. Setting goals that match our motivations gives us a sense of purpose.
- 3) 🙏 **Meaning-Making and Spirituality** – to make our life purposeful. Meaning-making is defined as recognizing the significance or purpose of our lives, while spirituality refers to finding meaning in someone or something that is beyond ourselves.
- 4) 🏔️ **Motivation and Perseverance** – the ability to continue behaving in ways that benefit us during difficult times. Motivation and perseverance mean getting back up after failing and continuing to try in the face of challenges.
- 5) + **Optimism and Hope** – the ability to focus on the positive and know that good things can happen. Optimists have faith that they can tackle their problems and that they are in control.
- 6) 🧩 **Problem-solving** – the ability to consider many different potential solutions to a problem and choose the best one. Problem-solving is a necessary component of conflict resolution and constructively coping with adversity.
- 7) ☒ **Self-efficacy** – our belief in our ability to succeed in the face of challenges. With high self-efficacy, we know that we can solve our problems given enough time and resources.
- 8) 🧑 **Self-esteem and Self-confidence** – the ability to see ourselves as people who are worthy and capable. Self-efficacy and self-confidence are both qualities that we hold when we value and like ourselves, especially when faced with tasks that must get done.



## Resources:

- 1) **A Supportive Peer Group** – beginning and maintaining relationships with supportive peers. Peers, whether neighbors, friends or colleagues at work, offer companionship and a sense of connection, as well as social support during challenges.
- 2) **Access to Mental and Physical Health Care** – the extent to which people can get adequate services in a timely manner. Access to quality mental and physical health care improves our wellbeing, which makes us better able to manage stressful life events.
- 3) **Education and Training** – developing new knowledge or skills. Education and training can offer us opportunities to find likeminded people and contribute to our community.
- 4) **Housing, Supports, and Connectivity** – safe, supportive homes and neighbourhoods provide us with some of the resources we need to avoid mental and physical health problems. The more control we feel we have over our homes and the more connected we feel to the community, the more secure we feel as well.
- 5) **Physical Safety and Public Security** – feeling safe and secure depends on both how others treat us as well as how we see the world, what we value, and how we behave. Physical safety and public security are important for our sense of wellbeing.
- 6) **Opportunities to Use One's Talents** – knowing our strengths allows us to understand the things we excel at and use our skills to contribute to the wellbeing of others. Talents are things we can do well, with a high likelihood that we will succeed.
- 7) **Relationships with Others in One's Community** – having positive relationships with others helps us feel like we belong in our community and increases our self-efficacy. Our social capital is the network of relationships that we build over time that is available when we need help dealing with a crisis.
- 8) **Transportation** – the private or public movement of people or things from one place to another. When we have access to efficient and reliable transportation, it's easier for us to access the resources we need to live a happy and healthy life.



## How to Use the Manual

This manual contains a series of modules, one for each of the sixteen resilience factors relevant for populations in need of human services. It is important, when trying to build resilience, that both rugged qualities and resources are emphasized. Rugged factors alone are not enough to protect an individual from adversity. Resources are needed to build rugged factors and provide support during times of adversity.

The sixteen modules in this manual can be used in any order. Some factors may be more relevant to certain populations. For example, relationships with others in one's community may be more important for immigrant populations while parents with young children may need help with transportation. The order of the modules can be rearranged to suit existing human services initiatives and programs. While all sixteen factors are important, it is not essential that all sixteen modules be completed. For the program to work, however, we strongly recommend that those in need of human services receive instruction and are offered activities that focus on an equal number of rugged qualities and resources.

The modules provided in this manual are for staff in human services agencies. They contain instructions and background information not always of interest to those in need. The activities included in each module, however, are for the people using human services. They can be used exactly as described here or modified to fit different circumstances or contexts. For example, activities might have to be broken up over multiple days for an individual with a learning challenge or someone with competing demands on their time like an adult who has responsibility for an elderly parent with dementia. Activities may also be taken as starting points and used as inspiration to create new ones to suit specific individuals in need. Staff in human services who are working directly with those in need will be in the best position to decide which activities are right for which clients and what additional activities should be introduced.

Finally, it is important to understand that resilience takes time and is not a linear process. While this manual is intended to help staff in human services enhance resilience among populations in need, building resilience is a life-long pursuit. Those in need can be expected to begin to incorporate the language of resilience into their vocabulary and thinking, to identify the rugged qualities they possess, and to acknowledge the resources they already have (or can find) which are meaningful to them.



## How to Use the Modules

At the start of each module, you will find the key learning objectives for that resilience factor. Each module contains a brief overview of the resilience factor, how to develop it, and how it relates to resilience. This will be followed by a scientific summary, which pulls together research on each factor and resilience. The R2 Resilience Program® is an evidence-based approach, which means we created the modules based on the evidence and best practices available in the literature. This background information may be useful for staff in human services to understand the value and complexity of the subject. It may also be useful to those in need so they can understand why they are learning about a particular factor.

Each module also includes a standardized measure from the research literature, which can get populations in need of human services thinking about resilience in a personal way. Each measure also provides a baseline for assessing that resilience factor. Staff in human services may choose to administer the measures at both the beginning and end of the program to assess change in the individuals' level of resilience. For some modules, a series of sensitizing questions have been included that may be used as discussion starters.

Finally, case studies are also provided as a practical guide to implement these resilience factors in human service settings along with activities clients can use to put each factor into practice.