Resilience & Well-Being for Graduate Students

Megan Kennedy, Director, UW Resilience Lab
February 18, 2021
The UW Resilience Lab is promoting well-being at the UW through education, research partnerships, and our core programs and initiatives.
An 87-page guidebook that combines research, teaching practices, and personal testimony to help instructors support the whole student and promote resilience and compassion.
TEACHING FOR EQUITY AND ACCESS
Creating an atmosphere of belonging and addressing power, privilege, and oppression in the classroom (e.g., co-creating shared norms and expectations for class discussions).

NURTURING CONNECTION
Tending to the social connectedness students experience with others and supporting students as they build stronger connections and awareness within themselves (e.g., encouraging peer interaction through study groups).

FOUNDATIONS OF STUDENT WELL-BEING

BUILDING RESILIENCE COPING SKILLS
Teaching and modeling everyday practices to develop the four cornerstones of resilience: mindfulness, growth mindset, gratitude, and self-compassion (e.g., opening class with a few minutes of reflective journal writing).

CONNECTING TO THE ENVIRONMENT
Establishing an intentional and meaningful relationship between students and the places where they learn and grow (e.g., creating opportunities for students to learn outside).
Be REAL is a six-week program that equips participants with cognitive behavioral skills to cope with challenging situations, mindfulness skills to strengthen self-awareness, and practices that encourage compassion for themselves and others.

Each weekly session is 90 minutes and includes group discussions, partner activities, and guided contemplative practices.
What is your definition of resilience?
The ability to become strong, healthy or successful again after something bad happens. The ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, bent, etc. An ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

Merriam Webster definition
Resilience is learnable.

What we think, do, and pay attention to changes the structure and function of our brains.

*What fires together, wires together.*
AUTOMATIC STRESS RESPONSE

HYPERAROUSLED (Fight / Flight)

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

HYPO-AROUSLED (Freeze)
How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance

HYPERAROUSAL
Anxious, Angry, Out of Control, Overwhelmed
Your body wants to fight or run away.
It’s not something you choose – these reactions just take over.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
When you are in your Window of Tolerance, you feel like you can deal with whatever’s happening in your life. You might feel stress or pressure, but it doesn’t bother you too much. This is the ideal place to be.

HYPOAROUSAL
Spacy, Zoned Out, Numb, Frozen
Your body wants to shut down.
It’s not something you choose – these reactions just take over.

When stress and trauma shrink your window of tolerance, it doesn’t take much to throw you off balance.

Working with a practitioner can help expand your window of tolerance so that you are more able to cope with challenges.
GETTING KICKED OUT OF THE WINDOW OF STRESS TOLERANCE

Hyperarousal (Fight/Flight)
• Desire to fight or run away
• Say or do something we regret
• Interpersonal conflict

Hypoarousal (Freeze)
• Avoidance, procrastination, difficulty focusing, zoned out
• Isolation, excessive sleeping
• Numbness, body feels completely frozen
1-MINUTE FREEWRITE

Think of an example where you were kicked out of your window of tolerance. Did you go into fight, flight, or freeze mode? What thoughts, feelings, or sensations did you experience? What did you do?
PRACTICES FOR EXPANDING OR RETURNING
TO THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

> +2 Breathing

> Movement

> Progressive Muscle Relaxation
PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION
THE 3 P’S

PAUSE  Breathing/grounding

PRESENT  Tune into thoughts/emotions

PROCEED  What is needed to be effective?
DISCUSSION PROMPT

Share your observations of the concepts/practices introduced in today’s workshop.
In the chat box, please share a word or phrase that describes your experience of - or one takeaway from - this workshop.

Thank you for being here.
THANK YOU

uwreslab@uw.edu

@uwresiliencelab
@uwresilience
@uwresilience
wellbeing.uw.edu/unit/resilience-lab

Connect with us through:
Student advisory community
Resilience & compassion seed grants