



# MODULE 4: BE MORE RESILIENT

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK  
LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME



NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
OUR YOUTH. OUR FUTURE.

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Life doesn't get easier or more forgiving; we get stronger and more resilient.

Dr Steve Maraboli

## Module outcomes

By the end of this session, you will:

- Understand what resilience is;
- Know how to build your resilience to cope with difficulties;
- Understand how self-awareness and self-belief influences resilience
- Understand what stress and stressors are;
- Know how to cope with stress;
- Understand how positive thinking influences coping;
- Understand the importance of relationships as social support.

## 1. Introduction

Everyone of us has experienced difficult times in our lives. Think about a time when you had a fall out with a family member, or when you had financial difficulties. Difficult times are however not always linked to negative events or circumstances. Trying to start your own business, not having enough hours in the day to get everything done and trying to identify business partners can be equally difficult. All these positive and negative situations often lead us to fall victim to stress, especially when we are not aware of it and if we don't manage it well. Today's module will focus on how to deal with stressful situations so that we remain focused and healthy to perform to our best abilities. Coping effectively with stressors help us to be resilient, in other words, being able to recover from difficult situations.

## 2. What is resilience?

In the engineering world, *resilience* refers to the ability of an object, or structure, to spring back into shape after it was exposed to a severe pressure. Other terms associated with resilience are flexibility, and adaptability. In human terms, resilience refers to the ability of a person to recover from setbacks, adapt well to change, and keep going even when facing difficult circumstances. Although researchers have made strong links between resilience, genetic and biological factors, the good news is that we can also learn to be more resilient!



### Key Learning

#### Steps in building resilience

- Know yourself
- Believe in your own abilities
- Learn to manage your stress
- Think positively
- Build relationships

### 2.1 Know yourself

We as human beings are multi-dimensional: we have a body, thoughts, emotions, a spirit and live in relation to other people. We need to be aware of what is going on in these different dimensions of our lives. Difficult situations often cause stress and we can see the impact of stress on all these dimensions of our lives. If we do not see the impact of stress on these dimensions, it may cause harm. The sooner we realise that something is going on, the sooner we can deal with it.

Knowing yourself will also help you to identify your strengths and development areas. Let's say for example that you are an entrepreneur: if you know which characteristics are required

to be successful, which ones you possess, and which ones you need to develop, there is a good chance that you will be more resilient in your entrepreneurial journey.

## 2.2 Believe in yourself

When you know what your strengths are, and if you start trusting your strengths, you can start believing in yourself. If you trust yourself that you have the ability to solve problems and deal with difficulties, chances are good that you will be able to do so. You will also be aware of your weaknesses. You can develop your weaknesses, or you can even ask for help from others if you realise that you have a weakness in a specific area. Let's do a quick exercise to give you an idea of how self-awareness can build your self-belief.

### ACTIVITY 1

## Task



**Start making a list of the following things and continue with it at home and when you doubt your own abilities, read what you have written here:**

1. List 10 things that you love about yourself

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2. List 10 skills that you have

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3. List 3 times where you have coped with difficult situations

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4. List 5 people who have previously helped you

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Now, take another colour pen and circle the keywords that stand out most. Do you see any patterns among these keywords, for example, if you love the fact that you always go out of your way to assist other people, and you have good interpersonal skills, and you can easily ask other people for help when you need it, clearly there is a “people” or “good interpersonal relationships” theme. If you tell yourself in so many different ways that this is your strength, then surely you should believe yourself and be proud of yourself! Think how useful this strength will be when you start up your own business!

## 2.3 Manage your stress

### ACTIVITY 2

#### Small Group



Read the following short story and discuss with the rest of the group:

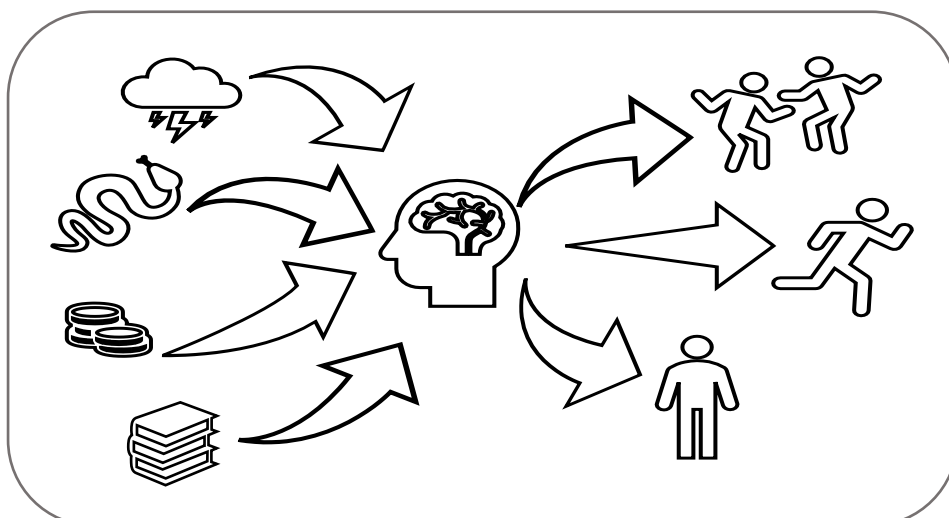
Mpho and Lebogang are colleagues in the same office. It is close to the end of the year and the office will soon be closing for the festive season. Mpho can't wait for Christmas. She looks forward to a joyful event. She talks about the decorations that she will start putting up and makes a list of everyone who she will be inviting to spend the day with her and her family. Lebogang does not share her excitement. She sees the family get-together as a burden. She is unenthusiastic and frustrated. After a while she screams at Mpho to "just shut up" and storms out of the room. Mpho is not sure what just happened and why Lebogang is so upset!!

**Why do you think the exact same event (December holidays) is causing such different reactions in the two colleagues?**

From this example, it is clear that people react differently to stressful situations. What is stress then and why do people experience the same situation differently?

#### 2.3.1 What is stress?

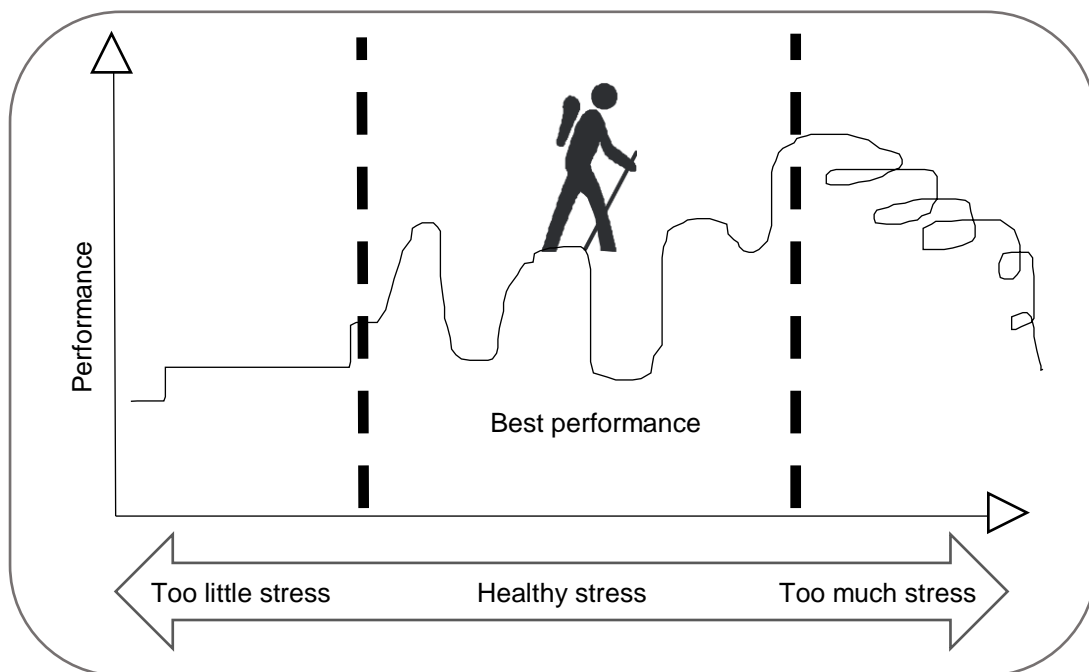
Stress is your body's natural reaction to an event, person, or object that you perceive as a threat or danger. When we feel threatened, our bodies automatically do one of the following: fight, flee, or freeze, as indicated in the picture below:



The objects, people, events, or anything else that triggers the stress reaction, is called a **stressor**. **Internal stressors** are those things that come from ourselves, for example negative self-talk, mind traps, personality, and lack of sleep. We usually have more control over these stressors. **External stressors** are often not easy to control; therefore, we need to manage them and learn to cope with the stress that they cause. Examples of external stressors are noise, heat, conflict, poor communication, snakes, transport, lack of funds, and change.

Although your body's natural reaction is run, freeze, or fight, you cannot always do this in all situations! But still, our bodies get ready to react in such a way. That is why we experience physical, emotional, mood, and behavioural changes. These changes are signs of stress.

We usually see stress as negative, but often it has a positive effect. Think of the emotional strain caused by positive events, such as winning a race, or being a new parent. You can also think of any high performing athlete. Being stressed at the beginning of a race will help them to perform at their best. Throughout the race, the athlete must maintain a certain level of stress. Too much continuous stress, however, is unhealthy and it will reduce the athlete's performance. Long-term, unhealthy stress may lead to burnout. Resilient people deal effectively with stress and are less susceptible to burnout.



### 2.3.2 How stressed are you?

This exercise will help you to become more aware of your own stress and get you thinking about the stress management strategies you are already using.

#### ACTIVITY 3

## Task



Think about what is currently going on in your life and answer the following questions:

1. On a scale of one to ten, rate your current stress level \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = no stress at all; 5 = moderately stressed; 10 close to nervous breakdown)
2. Where would you like your stress level to be? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What are the major stressors in your life?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What do you see as the major challenges to resolving your stress?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How do you currently manage and reduce stress?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2.3.3 Managing your stress


There are many things you can do to help you manage your stress better. We will just focus on three broad areas: changing your lifestyle, changing the way you think, and changing your behaviour.

- **Changing your lifestyle**

The foundation for a stress-reduced lifestyle is a good **diet**, enough **sleep**, and **exercise**. There is a saying that says: “you are what you eat” – in other words, if you do not eat healthy food, chances are good that you will not be healthy. Food is like the fuel of a car. Without the right fuel, the car will not be able to reach its destination! Enough **sleep** is also essential to build a healthy body that can cope with stressors. Try the following tips to help you get a good night’s sleep:

- Use your bed just for sleeping – not for reading, watching TV, or working.
- Make your bedroom a comfortable place, with curtains to keep light out, and no noise.
- Try to go to bed and get up around the same time each day.
- Have a routine before you go to bed. A cup of tea, a few stretches, and a few moments of meditation.

**Exercise** sounds like hard work! But the benefits of the hard work make all the effort worthwhile! Below are some ideas to motivate yourself to exercise regularly:




**Key Learning**

**How to motivate yourself to exercise**

- Pin a **picture** / inspiring **quotation** on your bathroom mirror and fridge
- Put **exercise clothes** out for next day
- **Pep talk** and **visualise** yourself enjoying it
- Find a **fitness friend** or **dog** to get fit together
- Find a **good coach**
- Deal with **resistance** and set a date to start again

Diet, sleep, and exercise are things that you must focus on daily in order to create a healthy lifestyle. It may take some time before you see results. In the box below you will find more shortcuts to get rid of stress. These steps are especially useful if you are in a situation where you don't have a lot of time to reduce your stress, for example, before a job interview or during an important exam.



**Key Learning**

**How to quickly get rid of stress**

**Step 1 Take time out.** Take a 5-minute break, nap, or walk. Move away from the problem; look at the situation from a distance.

**Step 2** Sit quietly and **breathe deeply** and slowly.

**Step 3** Identify the **pressure(s)** in your life.

**Step 4** Think **objectively**, as if you are looking at it as an outsider. Describe the situation and your reaction.


**Step 5** Can your actions change the situation? What will happen if you did something differently?

- **Change your thinking**

“If you don’t like something, change it; if you can’t change it, change the way you think about it” – these are the wise words of M. Engelbreit telling us exactly what is needed to help us cope with stress. One way of changing your thinking is by using a technique called reframing. **Reframing** helps to create a different way of looking at a situation, person, or relationship. Changing your thinking does not change the external reality, but helps you view things in a different light and less stressfully. The essential idea behind reframing is that a person's point of view depends on the frame it is viewed in. When you move the frame, the meaning changes and thinking and behaviour usually also change. Now apply this technique to the next examples:

#### ACTIVITY 4

**Small Group**



**Think about the following situations and how you would react. Discuss with the rest of the group:**

1) You applied for a job two months ago. You have not received any feedback yet.

- ....What do you tell yourself?
- ....How does that make you feel?
- ....How can you reframe the situation to feel different?

2) You had an appointment and you asked someone to pick you up at home. The person does not arrive.

- ....What do you tell yourself?
- ....How does that make you feel?
- ....How can you reframe the situation to feel different?

You can also use the **ABC-model** to help you change how you think about a situation that you experience as stressful. When you become aware of your own thinking, you will often realise that you have negative thinking or beliefs about things that happen in your life and that can of course cause a lot of stress. For example, when you lost your job, you will probably feel very stressed. Your thinking may be something like “Why am I so stupid? I will never be successful!” If you change the negative thoughts to more positive ones, for example, “This is a disappointment, but fortunately I have a lot of other skills that employers are looking for”, chances are good that you may be less stressed and perhaps even a bit excited. You can learn more about the ABC-technique in the “Who am I?”-module of this Life Skills Programme.

- **Change your behaviour**


Sometimes a simple change in behaviour can help us to cope better with stressful situations. Acting in an assertive way and managing your time or being more organised are important skills.

First, we should distinguish between assertive, non-assertive, and aggressive behaviour. **Assertive** people stand up for their rights, needs, desires, and beliefs. They express their views openly and honestly, without violating the rights of other people. The goal is: *'I win, and you win too'*. **Non-assertive** people struggle to express their feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, and they violate their own human rights. Others may perceive them as weak or lacking in self-esteem. It leads to *'You win, I lose'*. **Aggressive** people stand up for their own rights, desires, feelings, and beliefs, but they violate the rights of other people. Their message is *'I win, you lose'*.

How assertive are you? Let's look at your level of assertiveness in the task box below:

#### ACTIVITY 5

Task



Tick the statements that are true for you:

- When people pay me a compliment, I find it embarrassing.
- Other people take advantage of me.
- I prefer not to speak out in meetings.
- Instead of voicing an opinion, I would rather remain quiet.
- To disagree with someone older than me is not for me.
- I feel marginalised.
- I find it hard to tell other people that they are wrong.

Each ✓ represents an example of non-assertiveness.  
More ticks indicate that you need to assert yourself stronger and more often.

Did you know? You have the right to be assertive! Assertiveness rights are broadly accepted rights which everyone has. When you know your rights, and when you stand up for yourself, chances are good that you will reduce your stress. But remember – assertiveness does not mean that you have to be aggressive! The way in which you

convey your rights are extremely important, otherwise people will not take you serious. You have to convey your rights in a non-aggressive, self-confident way, and be open to listen to the other person's viewpoint.



## Key Learning

### Assertiveness rights. I have the right to....

- 1) express my feelings
- 2) express opinions or beliefs
- 3) say 'Yes/No' for myself
- 4) change my mind
- 5) say 'I don't understand'
- 6) be myself, not acting for the benefit of others
- 7) decline responsibility for other people's problems
- 8) make reasonable requests of others
- 9) set my own priorities

## 2.4 Build trusting relationships

A problem shared is a problem halved. Social support is there to share a problem and that reduces the negative consequences of stress and helps us to live happier lives. Social support means that you have friends, other people, or groups of people (such as a church) you can turn to during difficult times. Trusting relationships form the basis for social support. You don't need many friends and family to benefit from social support, if there is trust between you and the person. Often people expect others to reach out to them when things are not going well, but to get the most out of your relationships, you must put in some effort. If you are there for others, they will be more likely to be there for you. Fortunately, technology such as WhatsApp makes it much easier to be able to connect with others.

Sometimes it is hard to share with others – so you need to find alternative ways to share your thoughts and feelings. Writing a diary or notes about the difficult situation that you experience may help you to release stress. Writing your thoughts and feelings down also help you to look more objectively at your problems and it will enable you to come up with better solutions.

### 3. My action plan

#### Personal Reflection



Please take a moment to reflect on the value of this life skills module that you have completed now. Also think how you are going to apply what you have learnt to develop yourself as best as you can.

1. What was interesting and new to you in this module?

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2. What was the most valuable insight that you had today?

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3. How can you use what you discovered today?

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4. What will you do differently from now on as a result of what you learned today?

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5. What is the first step you will take?

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6. What are some of the obstacles you may encounter?

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7. What will be the best way to deal with them?

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8. How will you know that you have successfully applied your new knowledge and skills?

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**GOOD LUCK WITH THIS!**

#### 4. Recommended resources

Aid, C. (2014). Resilience: Anticipate, organise, adapt. YouTube video, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyX6UULJEic>

APA. (n.d.). Manage stress: Strengthen your support network. Online resource, available at <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/emotional-support>

Bookboon. (2018). Managing stress. Online resource, available at <https://bookboon.com/en/stress-management-ebooks-zip>

Glasgow CHP. (n.d.). Resilience toolkit. Online resource, available at <https://www.seemescotland.org/resilience-toolkit>

National Geographic. (n.d.). Stress, portrait of a killer. Video online resource, available at <https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/stress-portrait-of-a-killer/>

Shindler, D. (2015). 5 Free resources for personal resilience. Online resource, available at <https://www.learningtoleap.co.uk/personal-resilience/>

Skills for care. (2019). Building your own resilience, health and wellbeing. Online resource, available at <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Leadership-management/managing-people/resilience/Building-resilience.aspx>



In the middle of every difficulty  
lies opportunity!

Albert Einstein

## Did you know?

We have many more modules that were specifically designed to help you develop those skills that are essential to function effectively in life and in the workplace. Ask your facilitator about the following modules:

1. Who am I?
2. Building my brand
3. Managing time
4. Be more resilient
5. Creative problem solving and decision making
6. Building interpersonal relationships
7. Effective communication
8. Dealing with conflict
9. Understanding the world of work
10. Personal development plan

For e-Learning and other resources, visit  
[www.nyda.gov.za](http://www.nyda.gov.za)

You cannot teach a man anything.  
You can only help him discover it  
within himself.

Galileo

