



Resilience & Wellbeing

A summary of Dr Lucy Hone's
presentation at PEPTALK's launch event

“One day I’m the resilience person training other people, the next day I wake up a grieving mum, my entire world smashed to smithereens.”

Lucy Hone



Resilience and wellbeing is something that Lucy Hone has cared about since her days as a journalist back in 2003. Later in 2008 when the global financial crisis hit Lucy found that whenever she listened to the radio or opened a weekly newspaper the word resilience seemed to pop out. The economy needed to be resilient, we needed to be resilient. Lucy thought, “Does anyone actually know what this word means?”

While researching to write an article on the subject for North & South, Lucy unearthed that the academic department in the world at that time that did know about resilience was The University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Soon after Lucy’s journey took her to Philadelphia to begin her studies.

Lucy’s kaupapa aims to take the best of science out of the ivory towers of academia and package it up in ways that are relevant and meaningful to everyday people.

After finishing her training and starting on her doctoral research, the devastating Christchurch earthquake hit. Lucy started talking to community groups sharing her resiliency knowledge to help and felt at the time this was her calling. Sadly she was wrong. In 2014 her own family was hit by tragedy, when heading away for a family weekend bike trip, the cat Lucy’s daughter was travelling in, along with Lucy’s close friend and her daughter, was hit at an intersection. All three of them were killed instantly.

‘I suddenly found myself flung to the other side of the equation. One day I’m the resilience person training other people, the next day I wake up a grieving mum, my entire world smashed to smithereens.’ Lucy shares.

With all of the training and research from her years of study, Lucy had a toolkit that she could draw on. Not through choice, but through her own sheer courage Lucy was able to use resilience tools coined ordinary magic; that she’s learnt in her training, to help her rise up and be a living example that this stuff does work when you are determined to do it.

“It’s not easy, it’s not fun, it’s not what you choose, but it is possible.” Lucy says of applying the ways of thinking and acting that can help us navigate even the worst of times.

Dr Hone’s message is that adversity doesn’t discriminate, and in times of Covid this is something we are now all very aware of. “Bad things happen to everyone and I think it’s really important that we understand how we can all look after our own mental health,” says Lucy.

More than half of the NZ population will meet the criteria for a mental disorder at some stage of their lives.

Our statistics for young people all the way through to adults, all genders, ethnicities and cultures show we have a really big issue. Lucy expressed that this is a challenge we all need to be engaged in. Knowledge is power.

“Understanding what we’re up against is a really good start. The more we understand the psychology of wellbeing, the better equipped we are to make the best choices.” Lucy also advises, “What works for each of us is different, so you need to build up the self-awareness of what works for you. What are the ways of thinking and acting that help you thrive every day and get through the tough times too?”

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Are you *flourishing* or just existing?

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What's in it for us?

If more people feel good and function well (the definition of wellbeing) then some of the positive outcomes that research shows we can expect to see are:

Increased wellbeing / flourishing is associated with:

- Increased ability to cope with stress
- Lower incidence of cancer
- Faster recovery from surgery
- Greater immunity from colds & flu
- More resilient to trauma
- Reduced incidence of heart attacks
- Greater job satisfaction
- Increased productivity
- Increased longevity
- More creative thinking
- Improved ability to make decisions
- Fewer marriage break ups

Source: Robinson, 2016

What's in it for our young people?

Studies show improved levels of wellbeing (in an education setting) are associated with:

- Fewer symptoms of depression
- Lower clinical levels of depression/anxiety
- Less hopelessness
- Lower levels of depression
- Less procrastination
- Less conduct problems
- Better academic results
- Greater levels of participation
- Stronger social & emotional skills
- Higher levels of optimism
- Greater levels of self control
- More academic engagement

Source: Robinson, 2016



"Of course we need to continue to identify, treat and look after those with mental illness, but the data clearly demonstrates that doing that alone isn't having an effect on the numbers of people suffering mental distress. We need a dual pronged approach to mental health, whereby we help those who are suffering but also focus resources on prevention. We need to go beyond the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff strategy. That's why we [NZIWR] mainly work in schools."



WELLBEING & RESILIENCE

"There is a massive appetite now and appreciation and understanding that we do need to arm our young people with skills other than reading, writing and traditional academic subjects, because no matter how good your knowledge is and how much you understand about pythagoras, they are no use to you if you can't get out of bed in the morning. We can do both. It's not impossible and in fact we don't have any choice, because we've seen the stats, we can't go on as we are."

A Dual Pronged Approach to Mental Health

Upstream, preventative, protective health is where it's at.

"If we can help everyone in the whole population understand wellbeing and resilience better and we can equip them with the ways of thinking and acting that enable them to really look after themselves, we'll be in a better position," Lucy encouraged.

Lucy and colleagues at The New Zealand Institute of Wellbeing and Resilience (NZIWR) are calling for a dual pronged approach to mental health: www.winiwr.co.nz



Definitions:

Dr Lucy Hone cares about definitions and she believes that it's important we speak the same language and understand what the language of wellbeing means.

What is Wellbeing & Resilience?

WELLBEING = feeling good & function well

Having more positive emotions than negative emotions, feeling that you're satisfied with your life... but we also know that wellbeing is more than just feeling good. It's also about how we show up in the world, how good are our social supports, how much is our culture valued, do we have a sense of meaning, purpose and direction, self control, can we regulate our emotions?



RESILIENCE = getting back to feeling good & functioning well

If wellbeing is about feeling good and functioning well, resilience is about getting back to feeling good and functioning well, or continuing to feel good and function well, come what may.

"Resilience is coping with adversity while also learning from it. Through Covid the importance of this really came to the core," Lucy shared.

Characteristics of resilience

In 2005 Denise Charney studied American Airman who had been held captive at Hanoi Hilton in Vietnam for 6-8 years. He studied the men who didn't come down with post traumatic stress disorder or any form of mental illness afterwards, to work out if there were some common characteristics that they all displayed. Here's what he discovered to be the common characteristics of resilience:

- Optimistic thinking
- Helping others helps cope with extreme stress
- Having a moral compass (beliefs that cannot be shattered)
- Faith/spirituality

The good news is resilience is wellbeing and resilience are learnable and buildable.

Relax! You don't need to possess all of these characteristics to be resilient.
Identify the ones that are your strengths and form your own blend of resilience stew.

"Be assured that resilience is not a fixed trait and it requires very ordinary magic" - Anne Marsden

"Resilience is a bit like a stew. There's lots of different ingredients that different people put together in different ways. You might have some of these ingredients in ample supply, but be a bit low on others and that's ok because you make your stew in your way." - Dr Karen Revich

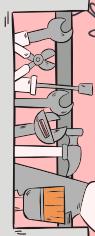
Resilience Helps Us To

 **Overcome** the obstacles of childhood poverty, abuse, neglect.

 **Adapt** to major life changes/ loss, divorce, death, injury, redundancy, physical illness.

 **Become less reactive**, allows us to learn more, take on new challenges.





NZIWR Real Time
Resilience

Toolkit

2. Choose where you focus your attention

"Don't dismiss negative emotions, but work on the balance," advises Lucy. "Don't let negativity overwhelm you, notice the good."

Research shows that when people are demonstrating resilience they're really good at focusing their attention on the things that they can control and somehow accepting and letting go of the stuff that they can't control.

Gratitude also comes into this. Feeling and expressing gratitude is about focusing on what is good. Lucy suggests finding the language that works for you. Try these alternative ways of practicing gratitude:

When things go wrong ask - **What's still good in my world? & Who's still good in my world?**

Hunt the good stuff - US soldiers use this for their form of gratitude practice.
The 3 Ws - What Went Well - Make a list each night of what went well that day.

Wins of the week - We always feel we haven't done enough. Your inbuilt negativity bias will have you turning into the things you haven't done and all the ways you have been inadequate. Write down or text someone all of the things that you did do.

3. Is this helping me

Ask yourself - **Is what I'm doing, the way I am thinking or acting, helping me in my quest to get through this?**

This is such a powerful question and one that Lucy used often in the weeks and months following the tragic loss of her daughter and friends.

7. Understand that struggle is part of life

Everyone struggles, everyone suffers stuff. It or not, everyone around you is scared of things, and they're often having a tough time too. It's pretty normal to find things tough.

Dr. Kristen Neff's recipe for self compassion - when everything is turning to custard say to yourself:

- It's alright, this is a moment of suffering.
- Suffering is normal, everyone struggles at times. I'm normal. I'm not alone.
- How can I be kind to myself right now?

Learn more - self-compassion.org

4. Don't catastrophize

Catastrophizing is when you jump to conclusions or your thinking runs away on you. Notice when you start to think about something and then a few seconds later the world has ended in your head.

BEST WAYS TO STOP CATASTROPHIZING

- Say in the now.
- Stick to the facts - what do you know to be true?
- Dispute your thinking like a friend would if you did actually dare to say the illogical-balmy-monsense that you're thinking out loud.
- Best/worst/most likely - think about the best scenario, the worst scenario, and the most likely. Usually the actual outcome is something in the middle.
- Distracting yourself is a really good option.
- Box breathing - really effective. It's always there and always available to you.
- Breath in for the count of 4, hold for the count of 4, breath out for 4, hold for 4... and repeat...

My Wins of the Week

We always feel we haven't done enough or tend to focus on what we haven't done. Turn out your negativity bias by writing down all of the things that you did do/didn't accomplish/did complete or get started on this week.

Resilience Tools

EXERCISE:

Highlight the tools that are your strengths or that you'd like to build. What's your unique blend of resilience stew?

- Optimistic thinking
- Helping others helps cope
- Strong supportive relationships
- Having a moral compass (beliefs that cannot be shattered)
- Faith/spirituality
- Humour
- Having a mission or a strong sense of meaning in life

Do try this at home

A core competency of resilience is self efficacy - the belief that you can get through this based on past experience.

Have conversations at home about when family members have demonstrated each of the resilience tools listed above, and how did that help?

When you draw your kids attention to the times they have navigated tough times before, you are building their belief that they can cope.

In tough moments practice self compassion.

REPEAT:

- It's alright, this is a moment of suffering.
- Suffering is normal, everyone struggles at times. I'm normal. I'm not alone.
- How can I be kind to myself right now?