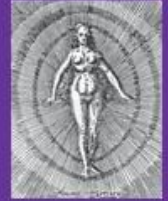


# CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



## Resilience by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.



**Like a tree blowing in the wind, those with deep roots can bend and snap back under strife and adversity. Others fall apart, and nothing can put them back together again.**

*Resilience* means an individual's ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health issues, or workplace and financial stressors. People who are resilient are better able to “bounce back” from difficult trials and tribulations. They don't seem to regard a crisis as a “lifestyle,” but rather as an event to be dealt with, then move forward. While some people are demoralized by crises and habitually flee from life's difficulties, others learn profound lessons from their troubles and accept the fact that in life things are not always going to go the way they want or expect.

Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary! People commonly demonstrate resilience. One example is the response of so many Americans to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, after which they went on to rebuild their lives and their communities. As psychologist Abraham Maslow pointed out, this *inner strength of the deep self* is one of the most positive aspects of the human personality. Being able to choose to serve the needs of the community above the needs of the ego especially helps us build our sense of resiliency.

However, being resilient and able to “bounce back” doesn't mean a person doesn't experience pain in the process. Distress, emotional pain, and sadness are commonly experienced by even the most resilient if they've suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. The point is, they don't stay stuck there or see their distressed state as a “forever” thing.

Years ago, as a new teacher of a fourth-grade class in a rough part of town, I was fascinated by those students who seemed able to focus on their studies in spite of the real-world problems in their lives—like Alex, an “at-risk” kid with no father, a sick mother, and an older brother already in prison. Alex was always in trouble with the law (usually for stealing food to help his family), but I was impressed with his drive to survive, his motivation, and his strength—his resiliency. Then there was Sylvester, a sixth grader laden with the responsibility of caring for his sister while the parents were at work. I discovered this when I made a home visit to investigate why he had so many absences at school. But Sylvester's desire to learn didn't stop at the school gates. He knew education was his way out of hunger pains. He continued his studying even while home caring for his sister.

Children like Alex and Sylvester saw themselves as victors, not victims. Too often such children fall through the cracks and some even land in prison, but their emotional resilience, intellect, and potential remains untapped. Somehow, they never internalized a message of hopelessness or helplessness while growing up. The message they internalized was the importance of “family” as a collective unit. The needs of the family outweigh the needs of the individual self, which led them to take actions, sometimes misguided, to put family first no matter what the price!

### ***Resilience: Inherited or Learned?***

What drives us to be who we are? What factors give one child the ego strength to work through difficult circumstances, adversity, and emotional pain—even thrive—while another child can't bounce back and ends up self-destructive, depressed, and sometimes suicidal?

While inherited, biological traits play a part, in my clinical experience I've come to see *early parent-child bonding* as perhaps the most critical factor in resilience. When there's a healthy parenting style at play, the strong parent/child bond provides the baby with his/her first model for intimate relationships and fosters a sense of security and positive self-esteem.

*Kissed by the dew drops*, to put it more poetically, a baby is awakened psychologically by seeing his/her reflection in the mother's eye. When the mother holds the baby, a secure *holding environment* gets created. The baby's smile is reflected by the mother who falls in love with baby and they form a bond—and this bond unconsciously confirms the baby's sense of self. The original “high” experienced from the bonding allows us to learn how to self-soothe under stress. Drug addicts search for this “high” in drugs, such as opioids (narcotic), which work in the brain to change how one's body feels and responds to pain. It doesn't last; it doesn't “hold” them—like the “holding” environment of a mother-baby bond.

When such a bond is “felt” we become stronger emotionally and mentally so that when difficult times come, we don't face them alone. This makes a significant difference in our ability to handle adversity. *We learn* resilience! We “know” we can truly depend on others; we know they have our backs.

Nature did not make us ignorant of our deeper selves. Sometimes a new reality forces itself to be recognized, and then things can shift. New patterns of intelligence and behavior arise, a deep transformation can then take place. In psychotherapy, resiliency and ego strength help a client create this shift, and move toward transformation and change. Resilience is not a biological trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed.

Is this your time to create change in your life?

*Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D. received her doctorate from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She practices in Encino working with individuals, couples, families, and groups. She can be reached at 818.501.4123.*