

Psychological Resilience for Parents

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I. What is it all about? What is meant by mental resilience and where to look for it?

Parent's case/ an inspiring story

When my second daughter was born, I was pretty sure that I already knew how demanding parenting is. It turned out I was wrong. My younger daughter seemed to be a lot more challenging than the older one. She cried a lot, and it took a lot of effort to put her to sleep. She often woke up many times a night crying. She also had bouts of crying with apnea. Even when she was older it did not get any easier. My second motherhood overwhelmed me with difficulties that I did not expect. My daughter turned out to be HNB (High Need Baby; you can read more about HNB here: <https://www.positive-parenting-ally.com/high-need-baby.html> or <https://www.askdrsears.com/topics/health-concerns/fussy-baby/high-need-baby/12-features-high-need-baby/>).

The whole family had to start learning the way she was and we still do it every day. We learn how to act in order to support her development and how to limit her hysteria attacks, which are extremely difficult for the environment, and sometimes dangerous for her.

There were times when I had a huge tangle of emotions inside me. There were times when I was helpless and cried together with my baby. Back then, it was difficult for me to support my child and accompany her at the moments of her hysterical cries. My strong emotions made me tense, I experienced her crying, I blamed myself, I felt desperate, I developed various theories ... in turn, my nervousness intensified her emotions and difficult behavior.

It took quite a long time and we were all very exhausted by the situation. My relationship with my husband and older daughter also deteriorated. I felt exhausted and burned out. I looked for help on parenting forums and meetings with other mothers. During one of these meetings, someone mentioned qigong practice. It was completely new to me, but I decided to give it a try. The beginnings were not easy. The hardest thing for me was to find time just for myself to be able to exercise in peace.

It took a while, but I finally found my inner peace. Over time, I added other practices



to qigong, such as positive psychology or the practice of taking care of myself according to the theory of attachment. After a few months of daily exercises, it becomes easier for me to turn on the calm, kind, and gentle mode. I feel more at ease inside, I am less nervous when we fail to leave the house again, because it was too hard for my daughter to put on her pants this time. I say "it's ok, we'll manage" when another unforeseen difficulty occurs, and I really think so. I am able to deal with my own emotions more successfully and I have noticed that my daughter has also become calmer.

My younger daughter is a sensitive child and every change in the environment, people or the need to travel causes an increase of her tension, and it often ends up with a night wake-up call with bouts of hysteria. We try to limit stimuli that are too much for her, although it is not always possible to avoid them totally.

Recently, when my daughter is having hysterical attacks, I am with her, hold her, carry her, hug her, talk or keep quiet. I do similar things, but differently than I used to. I don't burn inside, I feel sad and anxious, but I'm not flooded with these emotions. When my child screams, tries to catch her breath, beats others in hysteria, etc. I accompany her with love, care and peace. I know it will pass by in a moment.

After such an attack, I am much less tired, it seems to me that I can find better words and behaviors both during and after. I stopped blaming myself, I stopped getting angry. I am with her, I accompany her, I accept her the way she is. I help her.

Aleksandra, Poland

The above story shows one of the situations that we parents have to face very often on a daily basis.

Inevitable changes when we become parents

When we become parents, we suddenly experience a sort of painful crash with a whole new reality. As a rule, we are not prepared for this total change, or our preparation does not correspond to reality. Suddenly, there are much more duties and responsibilities than before, and also much more than we expected. We are responsible not only for ourselves and our work, but also for a new young human (child), who often tests our patience and parental competences.

A small child completely changes our daily and weekly routine. It turns our well organized world upside down. We need to change priorities for a while and put our needs in the background to be able to take care of a toddler who is not able to take care of his basic needs by himself. This is the normal stage. However, it is important at this stage not to forget about yourself completely, focusing only on the baby.

As shown by a large number of psychological studies, the mental well-being of parents is important, because the way parents themselves deal with the stress of everyday life influences the psychological well-being of children to a large extent.

Has it ever happened to you that in the evening while putting your child to sleep you fell asleep as well?



When you are very tired, it is really difficult to properly take care of your baby. So, we will not be able to take good care of a child as long as we do not take care of ourselves. Because it is our resilience that is the basic resource we use in crisis situations.

What is Mental Resilience?

Resilience is based on a person's individual and social resources, including their knowledge, skills, coping strategies etc. as well as social support, to deal adaptively with difficult situations, chronic stress or the stress of everyday life. Resilience is the ability to bend but not to break, bounce back and perhaps even flourish in the face of adversity and achieve emotional or mental growth. The American Psychological Association (2014) defines resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress”.

As numerous studies show, resilient parents pass on their immunity to their children (*Mac Taylor Z., Conger R.D. 2017; Sikorska I. et al. 2021*). At the same time, these parents themselves are much better at coping with the troubles of parenting, the same as resilient children more easily deal with everyday challenges, conflicts and taking care of themselves and their needs, both in childhood and later in adult life.

Contemporary psychological concepts of resilience draw attention to the fact that it is a personal feature that changes over

time: it is the result of human developmental processes and their current interaction with the world (*Bonanno & Diminich, 2013; Kim-Cohen & Turkewitz, 2012*). The current concepts also emphasize the importance of cultural factors (cultural patterns on how to deal with stress, difficult situations), social support and the availability of other resources to deal with difficult situations (*Sherrieb et al., 2010*).

According to the psychological research:

1. Resilience can be developed, learned, and increased.
2. Resilience is dependent on certain behavioral patterns (which still can get modified in time), from stress coping strategies and cultural patterns. In particular, perfectionism and excessive pressure as well as expectations for results reduce resilience, while gentleness and acceptance towards oneself in difficult situations may increase it.
3. Resilient people use social support more willingly and it is probably easier for parents to live in collectivist cultures because there is greater consent to social support than in individualistic cultures.

When reaching for this manual, answer the question whether it is worth finding time for it and changing your current lifestyle so that taking care of yourself becomes your everyday habit. Then you increase your resilience, you cope better with the stress of everyday life and larger difficult events, and yet you become more efficient as a parent.



II. How to support your child in building resilience

There is a calm child where there is a calm parent – is it myth or truth?

Many scientific concepts, many guides on upbringing emphasize the fact that when a parent has some inner peace, he will infect his child with it, too.

This is often stressed in psychological concepts based on the regulation of emotions such as Self-reg or the Attachment Theory. In the concepts of the NVC (Non-Violent Communication) type, attention is paid to the fact that the parent is able to recognize and take care of their emotions and needs, and to teach themselves and the child to recognize emotions, needs of the child, as well as various coping strategies.

At this point you can think that it would be much easier to do "something" with a child, bribe it with a favorite treat, enforce obedience with a prohibition or order. Why all this idle small talk that it is the parent who has to work on himself, on his peace, on learning about his own emotions and needs. Is it all really necessary? After all, since we have reached the stage where we are parents, we can more or less regulate our emotions and we know what to do and how to do it ...

Many of us have had a hard time surviving in a harsh reality in the past, and we had to cope as children. Our mothers did not wonder what their facial expressions were, whether they felt at peace or not. And we grew up to be decent people after all.

Secure attachment styles.

However, research also indicates that for a child to develop a secure attachment style and healthy relationships with others, they need a caregiver who is supportive for approximately 1/3 of the time (during infancy period); (Tronick EZ 1989).

John Bowlby, the founder of the Attachment Theory, noted that the quality of the first bond affects a person's entire life, the way of establishing relationships with others, the way of functioning in society, ways of regulating emotions, mental resilience, potential problems with behavior, addictions, etc. The research proved the pattern, and then the attachment style significantly influences the way of establishing intimate or friendly relationships, the ability to regulate emotions, thinking about oneself (self-esteem), the way of perceiving the world (as a safe or threatening place) and other people (as friendly or hostile). This theory is based on the assumption that the need for bonding is inborn, biological, and is driven by the

desire to survive and provide the individual with a sense of security. The attachment style depends on the relationship between the mother (or primary caregiver) and the child.

Studies have also been carried out which show that when a parent has inner peace and a belief that a given situation is normal and can cope with it, then it is actually easier for him to infect the child with peace. By building internal self-confidence and self-esteem, the parent passes these features on to his child, which in turn allows them to function more effectively among peers and better achieve his goals. And for the parents to be supportive, they must first build inner peace and take care of their resources. When the parent is calm and their non-verbal expression is calm, the child may also be able to calm down more easily.

Finding ways to deal with parenting challenges

Many parents, when they experience a problem with their child, focus on finding simple solutions to deal with their child's difficult behaviors. Sometimes this approach can be very effective, e.g. when a child has allergies, it is worth looking for allergens or when he has a problem with falling asleep, perhaps it will help to calm down before falling asleep. However, when the child is often angry, cries, etc. it can take a long time to find effective ways to support your child. And for that you need resources: time and parental patience. So, if you- dear parent- are able to stop and just observe your child without over-experiencing emotional stress, then there is a greater chance that, together with the child, you will find ways to support him or her and solve a difficult situation for both of you.

A child's challenging emotions and behaviors that are difficult for the parent are inscribed in the role of the parent. You can't get away from it. Just like you cannot escape from difficult life situations. Challenging emotions or behavior of a child can be a great opportunity to learn something new both by the child and the parent. This process is much easier when the parent approaches with acceptance of difficult situations, when they can at least to some extent separate themselves from the emotions of the child and their own, make a place between experiencing emotions and observing them in the child and in himself.

Why is it worth taking care of yourself and how to do it

Why is it worth taking care of yourself and how to do it - you can read more about it in each chapter of this guide. It presents research and real life stories and shows the results of the enclosed exercises done in order to regenerate both your body and mind.

In short, it is worth taking care of your well-being, your resources, your mood and strength, because thanks to this:



- you become more gentle and more understanding for yourself, children, others and the world as the whole, which in turn has a positive effect on your mental and physical health.
- your inner peace makes your child calmer, and the more advanced in self-regulation you become, the easier it is to face everyday challenges.

Unfortunately, it is not that simple in practice and it may happen that we fall into the trap of parental burnout.

III. Parental burnout - what it is and how to deal with it?

Not having time for yourself and the consequences of not taking care of yourself.

Parenting can be wonderful. However, it also can be stressful, and when parents lack the resources needed to handle stressors related to parenting, they may develop parental burnout. This condition is characterized by an overwhelming exhaustion related to one's parental role, an emotional distancing from one's children and a sense of parental ineffectiveness.

According to research on parental burnout, some of the risk factors are parents' excessive expectations of themselves and of what parenthood should look like. As a result, parents often try more and more, they tense up more and more, and instead of positive, expected effects (e.g. a polite child or a tidy house, etc.) they get increasing tension in themselves and other household members, and do not achieve the planned results.

The average parent tries to reconcile caring for children with professional work, housekeeping and taking care of their own and all family members' health. Research shows that all this takes an average of 70-90% of our time.



In the middle of these various responsibilities, the parents often have no time left for themselves. Different forms of regeneration, hobbies and even social relationships important to the parent get minimized or totally eliminated. In the short term, such a strategy gives the parent more time to carry out tasks resulting from different social roles but in the long term it can lead to a number of negative consequences:

- Growing levels of stress and tension, fatigue, frustration, etc. As a result, the parent becomes tired, irritable, less effective and more emotionally unstable (sometimes it shows but some parents may hide it inside).
- In the long run parents who do not care about their well-being are exposed to depression, psychosomatic diseases and mood disorders.
- Long-term stress level and lack of regeneration can lead to parental burnout, as well as contribute to job burnout, which can lead to avoidance-escape behavior, e.g. into alcohol, suicidal thoughts or even violence against children.

Consequences of parental burnout

Research work suggests that parental burnout can be very harmful:

- Parental burnout can lead to thoughts of suicide and escape (Mikolajczak et al., 2019), which are much more common in parental burnout than in the case of job burnout or even depression (Mikolajczak et al., 2020). This finding is not surprising, knowing that you cannot give up your parental role or be fired from work by your children.
- Parental burnout is also associated with psychological escape behaviors, such as alcohol use (Mikolajczak et al., 2018).
- At the biological level parental burnout most likely is connected with some somatic and sleep disorders often reported by burned-out parents (Brianda et al., 2020; Sarrionandia -Pena, 2019)
- Parental burnout increases the likelihood of violence towards children (Martorell and Bugental, 2006; Moons et al., 2010).
- Parental burnout has serious consequences for children as it makes previously good parents (Chen et al., 2019) disrespectful and even aggressive towards their offsprings (Mikolajczak et al., 2018).

All of these effects are causal because when parental burnout is treated with targeted psychological intervention, suicidal thoughts and escape need as well as parental violence and negligence decrease in proportion to the decrease in parental burnout (Brianda et al., 2020).

Parental burnout - an illustrating story

Now let's imagine a situation that would help us to understand a parent suffering from parental burnout.

Isabelle Roskam gives the example of Krystyna (a story is slightly changed in here), who is a mother of three children and she arranged her life in such a way as to support them as much as possible during their adolescence. She realized how important it is for each child to receive all the warmth and support they need. Children were regularly transported by her to and from school. Krystyna used to take them to extra lessons, cook meals for them, do the laundry and devote much time to help them study.

However, the situation changed last year when her oldest child had an accident and needed rehabilitation three times a week, for which she had to be transported. Additionally, Krystyna's youngest child had just started primary school and he did not do very well. The scope of the woman's responsibilities related to home and work grew at an alarming rate, and her husband was unable to help as he came home very late and often traveled abroad on business.

With time, Krystyna had less and less time to look after the children in the way she wanted. She had to reconcile work, home, rehabilitation and time for study, as well as meeting the emotional needs of her children. She became more and more irritated and tired with the whole situation and the children more and more often said that she had changed, which made Krystyna think of herself that she was a bad parent. Eventually, she noticed that she had stopped enjoying the children's successes or that she no longer felt sorry for something unpleasant that happened to a child and she did all her duties kind of mechanically.

How do you identify a parent who is suffering from burnout?

First, Krystyna struggles with "a sense of ineffectiveness" as a parent. She no longer considers herself a good mother. Krystyna also shows clear signs of emotional exhaustion, she often feels tired and irritated. Moreover, she no longer enjoys being a parent.

And finally, emotional distancing - such a parent begins to block their emotions towards their children. For example, when children succeed or fail, the parent's emotions are cold and not appropriate to the situation. In the case of Krystyna it manifests itself in the fact that she helps her children in a mechanical way - she prepares meals, does the laundry, takes them to school but is not able to respond to their emotional needs, such as listening to what problems or dilemmas they are currently experiencing.

In 2018-2020, an international research consortium led by professors Moira Mikolajczak and Isabelle Roskam studied this phenomenon in 42 countries around the world. The

questionnaires, mostly online, were completed by 17,409 parents, with a majority of mothers (12,364) over fathers (5,045). (Roskam Isabelle et al. 2021)

The researchers extracted four dimensions of parental burnout: exhaustion in one's parental role, contrast with previous parental self- efficacy, feelings of being fed up with one's parental role and emotional distancing from one's children.

Parental burnout was diagnosed with 23 questions that dealt with four main symptoms:

1. exhaustion in one's parental role (e.g. "being a parent is completely exhausting me"); "Sense of failure/ ineffectiveness",
2. the belief that the previous image of yourself as a parent is no longer valid (e.g. "I am not the parent I used to be");
3. losing the pleasure of being a parent (e.g. "I don't enjoy being with my children anymore");
4. emotional distancing from children (e.g. "I am no longer able to show my children love").

Factors increasing and decreasing parental burnout

Given that burnout is a stress-related disorder, we define risk factors as factors that significantly increase parental stress (source: Mikolajczak, M., & Roskam, I. (2018)).

Examples of such stress increasing factors are:

- parental perfectionism,
- low emotional intelligence,
- bad parenting practices,
- too many daily chores and parental responsibilities,
- no support from the co- parent,
- lack of external support (family support, nurseries, etc.).

In contrast, resources / protection factors can be defined as factors that contribute to a significant reduction in parental stress. Examples of such parental stress relieving factors are:



- self-compassion,
- high emotional intelligence,
- good parenting practices,
- parent's free time for themselves,
- external support etc.

Cultural individualism and pressure on parents in different countries.

Research from 2021 (Roskam 2021) suggests that culture has a strong influence on parental burnout and that parents in individualistic countries appear to be particularly vulnerable. This result was maintained even when the influence of other variables such as the socioeconomic situation, the amount of work, etc. was reduced. The research coincides with the observation of sociologists that parental norms in Euro-American countries (i.e. the most individualistic ones) have become more and more demanding over the last 50 years (Geinger et al., 2014; Nelson, 2010), which results in an intensification of parental activities (Glausiusz, 2016 ; Nelson, 2010) and increasing psychological pressure on parents (Rizzo et al., 2013).

In other words: the more pressure the parents feel to better raise their child and the more socially lonely they are in it the more likely it is to face social criticism rather than receiving practical support and understanding.

The much lower scale of parental burnout in collectivist countries (even when socioeconomic inequalities and other factors are controlled) suggests that strengthening the social network of mutual help and solidarity around families could help reduce the spread of parental burnout in individualistic countries. This is in line with recent findings in Poland (quite an individualistic country) showing that the availability of social support is a very strong protective factor against parental burnout (Szczygiel et al., 2020).



IV. Effective methods of taking care of yourself

Ways to take better care of yourself

As you can guess, there are a lot of methods. There are also many of their spokesmen and promoters. They praise them pointing to many benefits. It would probably be a good idea to include different methods in your schedule, because then you get a synergy effect. However, the day is too short to implement all ambitious activities, even the healthiest ones.

It is impossible to do everything and try all the techniques and methods, take care of every aspect.

Therefore, as part of this guide, we encourage you to learn short descriptions of various methods and test it yourself, and then implement what seems the most helpful and effective to you in your daily life. Just use what you think may be the best and most appropriate. For some it may be exercise, for others it may be meditation or work on changing beliefs. Everyone can benefit from social support.

The most common methods of taking care for mental well-being among parents according to the research conducted by the Consortium of the "Psychological Resilience to Parents" Project in February 2021 are:

- finding time for your hobbies and doing things you enjoy, contact with nature, exercise, sports, etc.;
- looking for methods of working on beliefs, relaxing the mind, etc.;
- social contacts, social and emotional support from family and relatives.

Make big changes with small steps. How to get started and where to find time?

If you are a parent, you are probably busy, involved in numerous duties, often overwhelmed with a flood of your children's needs and emotions.



Perhaps when you hear that the solution to your parental challenges is simply taking care of yourself, you may feel opposition. You already have so much on your mind! And here's another thing to do!

I do not have time for it! - you may think.

Here we will tell you how to find this time for yourself.

Where to get started? What to focus on at the beginning?

1. Set your priorities.

Setting priorities often means a complete reevaluation of your life so far.

For example, if you are unable to squeeze taking care of yourself into your current schedule, it means that you have to throw something out, give up something. What is really important to you at this point? Look at the to-do list and try to ask yourself this question: *Is it really important to me? Is it good for me? Do I really need this?*

Then put your answers on a scale of 1-10. Then ask yourself if you can do the activity less frequently and yet still keep the desired effect.

Example:

I look at the activities on my daily schedule and analyze them one by one.

Activity no 1: ironing. Ask yourself: "How important is it to me?" - Answer: 2 on a scale of 10. How often do I need to do this? - weekly.

Activity no 2: cleaning the floor: Ask yourself: "How important is it to me?" Answer: 4 on a scale of 10. "How often do I have to do it for the effect to be satisfactory?" Answer - every 3 days, etc.

In this way, you will eliminate activities that are less important to you, or reduce their frequency.

Also, remember that your priorities will change over time. Therefore, it is worth repeating such a reevaluation from time to time, eg. every month or two or depending on the change in your life situation, e.g. birth of a second child, moving the house, change of job, etc.

2. Step by step method

How to eat a huge cake? Best piece by piece - then we won't get sick then. How to make huge changes? Preferably step by step. Start with this smallest step and take the next one each day.

Example 1.

If you don't have enough time to exercise, start setting the alarm clock earlier. On the first day, 5 minutes, then 10 minutes, etc. First, you will have time to do a short meditation, then scan the body until you reach a free hour for selected breathing or physical exercises, which will make you find inner peace and well-being.

Example 2.

However, if you cannot get up earlier, try to find at least 5 minutes during the day for the practice. Choose one that is easiest and most enjoyable for you. Then it will be easier for you to start implementing a new practice. Maybe these will be exercises at the desk, maybe breathing techniques, maybe a few qigong exercises and maybe in the evening you will take a gratitude session?

3. Just let it go! Be gentle with yourself

If you want something too much, it often fails. Precisely because you exert the greatest pressure on yourself and sabotage your own efforts. Take it easy, smile and stop trying so hard. Be good enough, not perfect. The child's clothes do not always have to be ironed, and it will also be fine if you order dinner once in time instead of standing in the kitchen for 2 hours. Forget about a perfectly cleaned apartment if it costs you late nights. As surprising as it may sound, perfectionism breeds frustration and harms more than helps you to take care of yourself. And there is some research to prove it.

Inspirational story - how one of the moms managed to find free time for herself.

Here is an inspiring story of one of the mothers who did not believe that she would be able to find time for additional exercises. So, how did she manage to do it?

Beata, 32, mother of a 5-year-old:



"I used to be in a constant hurry with everything. But surprisingly I was still running out of time. Finally, even though I felt completely exhausted at the end of the day, I often could not fall asleep.

On the run since early morning. Quick shower, quick coffee, quick breakfast or no breakfast at all, take the child to kindergarten quickly so as not to be late, quickly to work, then after work a run to pick up the child, a quick shopping, a quick dinner after returning home, then just to wash up quickly, quickly to put on the laundry, to play with the child for a while, if I managed to find some time for it.... A quick supper and a quick bath.... Only then putting my little baby to sleep was not so quick at all. I had to read her books for a long time before putting her to sleep so that she would be able to calm down and finally fall asleep.

And it was getting worse and worse with my own sleep. In the evening, my body did not want to stop after a day of racing. Millions of thoughts were drifting through my head: what else I should do, what I must not forget. The hours on my watch passed by and I was still awake.

I often fell asleep just before dawn and after a while I was woken up by the sound of the alarm clock. And on the run again. A quick shower, a quick coffee ... and so on.... "

Does it sound familiar to you?

And you're probably wondering where you can find the time to take care of yourself in all this.

Well, you are right here... Beata has found her way when it was getting really bad.

Beata: "Always tired, sleepy, frustrated.... I couldn't cope with my emotions and as a result I shouted at my child. Eventually, I fell ill badly and that was the moment when I really had to stop. To say: enough! There was no other option. Then, I heard about.... mindfulness and I started a course.

During the first meeting, I was talking about all my difficulties ... and I heard in response:

"But you can still breathe, can't you?"

Hmmm...hard to say no, although at that moment I wasn't even sure if I could breathe at all.

The beginnings were tough, but I felt that it was exactly what I needed. Just to stop and calm down.

The hardest part was finding any time for exercise, which must be done regularly, preferably on a daily basis.

I decided to get up half an hour earlier in the morning and devote this time to mindfulness exercises and body scanning.

With time, I felt that the new activity was paying off. I was getting calmer. I've learned to slow down. I wasn't running everywhere like crazy anymore. I wasn't irritated by the people waiting in the line in front of me, nor by my daughter slowly putting on her socks in the morning. After all she was the best teacher of patience to me.



Over time, she also began to do mindfulness exercises with me and she enjoyed them as well.

Our daily routine was enriched with a small addition that changed so much. I stopped having troubles with falling asleep, and so did my daughter. Sleepless nights were over. And I started living my life to the fullest. And surprisingly, all I needed to change was to set the alarm clock 30 minutes earlier in the morning. "

Beata used the technique of small steps. Thanks to this, she was able to gradually implement a new habit that improved her well-being, health and relationship with her daughter.

If you don't know where to start, take one small step first. And do another one every day.

After a month, you will be able to implement the new habit and see the changes.

You can also keep a diary that records your daily steps. After time you will be able to see how your possibilities increase.

In this handbook, we want to show you more stories that will inspire you and allow you to look at your situation from a slightly different perspective.

Mindfulness or meditation will not be an ideal solution for everyone, so we want to present to you various approaches that allow you to take care of your well-being, mental hygiene and thus build your resilience. We will also advise you in the cognitive part of psychology on how to talk to a child in order to build positive beliefs in him, which are the basis of mental resilience.

Read the descriptions of the different methods. Scientific sources as well as inspirational stories are given to prove that these methods really work. We also advise who a given method may be most useful for.

Choose what will suit you best at this stage of your life.

We believe that you are an expert on yourself and on your child. You make the best decisions about yourself and raising your children.



V. Presentation of the methodologies contained in the guide and exercises.

Different paths to achieving inner peace

For several decades, modern psychology has begun to study and use techniques related to observing one's internal states and approaching oneself with gentleness, kindness and compassion, as well as accepting oneself and one's internal states. The research shows that the attitude of acceptance and the ability to observe internal states is a very effective method of building inner peace and mental resilience.

These methodologies help to find your own way to a peaceful and safe place, to a core of consciousness that is always as calm as the ocean floor during a storm. Through regular practice of mindfulness, meditation, yoga, tai chi, gratitude, etc. you build a neural pathway and then a highway to that part of yourself that is calm, strong and mentally resilient.

The more you practice, achieve or reach this part of yourself through different practices, the wider your neural pathways are, the easier it will be for you to achieve this state also in difficult times. Neuroscience confirms that change is possible at any age. No matter what moment in your life you are at the moment, how old you are, how many children or responsibilities you have, you can always start a change.

Current trends in psychotherapy and various branches of therapy, coaching and ways of helping people in crises, supporting them in building immunity mainly use the techniques of mindfulness, meditation, elements of psychology, but there are also methods of releasing tension through working with the body. These methods allow you to find inner peace and rebuild a sense of security by building relationships with yourself (see the chapter on the attachment theory) or removing tension by working with the body (see chapters on yoga and qigong).

Different techniques are good for different people

There are many techniques, but each of us is different and each of us will get help by different forms of working on ourselves, other forms of relaxation and finding inner peace:

Some people would find the peace:



- in sitting meditation,
- during breathing techniques,
- during contact with nature or art,
- focusing on the body through body scanning (e.g. mindfulness of the body, yoga nidra),
- in physical exercises combined with mental exercises (such as yoga, qigong),
- in observation of their own thoughts and emotions, e.g. by taking notes, writing a diary (which is proposed, among others, by cognitive psychology and positive psychology),
- by helping others, community activities, a sense of being in a good relationship with someone or seeking support from others (bond theory),
- in prayer, connecting with a Higher Being.

9 methodologies presented in this guide.

In this guide, we'll go over 9 different approaches in detail. We encourage you to get acquainted with all of them and choose the techniques that are the best fit for you.

In the section on **Neuroscience** we will present some small practices on our own thoughts and posture, soothing and most of all coping with self-criticism. They are very easy and helpful to establish a better relationship with ourselves.

In the section on **Positive Psychology**, you will learn about exercises that will help you adopt a more hopeful attitude, recognize your own character strengths, show kindness to yourself and others, and cultivate feelings of gratitude. You will also learn the science based reasoning behind this approach.

In the part on **Attachment Theory**, you will learn the assumptions of psychology on building a safe relationship between a child and a caregiver. You will also learn that you, as an adult, can also develop such a relationship with yourself. The presented exercises will help you learn how to create secure bonds with others.

In the **Self-Regulation** chapter, you will learn more about stress signals, sources of stress, and how to build up your internal capacities. On the other hand this exercise will show you the way to build self-awareness about the factors that may stress you up. You will also learn about your stress reactions and ways to relax and recover.

In the part on **Cognitive Psychology**, you will learn the assumptions of working on your own beliefs: how to recognize key beliefs and verify whether they are constructive and how to work on changing them. Many examples will also show you how to build positive beliefs in your child.

In the part on **Mindfulness** and **Meditation**, you will learn the techniques of:

- focusing on something like breathing, gratitude, movement etc., this improves your concentration and teaches you not to cling on to drifting thoughts or emotions.
- cultivating a sense of awareness- these techniques can lead you to impartially observe what is happening inside you, separating the moment of observation from the moment of reaction.

In mindfulness techniques such as meditation, breathing techniques, we learn to observe emotions without succumbing to them. We perceive internal and external events with curiosity without judging, without entering into a stress response. We learn to accept reality as it is and there is no desire to change. We are in „being”, not acting. Contemporary psychological research shows that the state of "non- acting" is beneficial for building resilience and mental and emotional stability. When you achieve this state, it will be easier for you to find peace in yourself and to think about the appropriate behavior in a given situation.

In the article on **Self-Regulation**, you will learn what you can achieve thanks to this "pause" (as Stuart Shenker, the author of Self-reg, calls it). In fact, many different methodologies use the meditation and mindfulness approach.

Yoga and Qigong are practicing meditation whilst in motion. These are scientifically verified disciplines, which are also backed by thousands of years of practice. What is important during these exercises is simply mindfulness and calmness not athletic performance. Yoga is more demanding, it can be a physical exercise, and is mainly practiced on a mat, while Qigong can be a very gentle practice of simple movements. In both approaches, precise movement, concentration and breathing are important. As a result, various positive effects are obtained both in terms of physical fitness and in terms of physical and mental health.

VI. 5 areas of regulation.

Traditional medicines emphasize care for various aspects of life. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine: mind and emotions, diet, exercises and sleep have the greatest impact on the physical and mental health of a person (Deadman; 2016).



Our Western culture and medicine have been returning to a holistic view of physical and mental health for some time, although there are still many remains of the Cartesian separation of human body and soul.

In our opinion it is also worth looking at the issue of resilience in such a holistic manner: it is worth drawing from various sources and developing various areas that will help us develop resilience.

Our suggestion for you also includes various approaches and ways to build inner peace. They are based on 5 spheres of regulation in the field of:

- 1) body and senses,
- 2) emotions,
- 3) mind and beliefs,
- 4) communities,
- 5) the universe.

1. Body and senses

More and more studies confirm: if you relax your body, your mind and emotions will get calmer as a result. If your body is unbalanced due to hunger, thirst, cold, disease and tension, your mind and emotions will be restless, too.

Particularly, some forms of physical exercise that include the elements of working with the mind, support building resilience. In Yoga, Qigong, and Tai Chi the emphasis is on calming the mind and emotions, and regulating breathing during various exercises.

The rhythm of your breath can change the state of your autonomic nervous system and help you move from a sense of danger and insecurity to a sense of safety. In this state it is easier for you to rest and rebuild your resources.

If you are more stimulated (angry, excited, worried) then exercise may be recommended to burn off the excess arousal. When you feel depressed then other forms of calmness can help you move to a state of security, where you will recover more easily.

Mindfulness meditation methods focus on connecting with the body and senses. This is a very important aspect to learn to observe your body, feel the tensions in it, feel the different shades of your emotions. These acts of observing and accepting what is happening in your body, will help you better manage your stress and other unsettling emotions and/or

sensations. When you observe your body carefully, you will find it easier to spot the factors that are stressing you out (see the chapter on self-regulation).

Likewise, it is important to learn to observe your child as well as teach your child to observe themselves. In the case of young children, their body and senses can be a huge source of stress that they are not able to manage themselves: a hungry or overheated child gets angry easily. It may also happen that you or your child may feel some stimuli excessively: noise, sounds of different tones, a certain type of light, temperature changes, etc. When our nervous system is in the stage of mobilization, we can perceive various stimuli from the outside and also those from the inside much more intensively.

Elements of working with the body can be found in the chapters on yoga, mindfulness, meditation and qigong.

2. Emotions

There is an undeniable connection between our emotions and our health and well-being. Emotions and stress tend to accumulate in our body through various types of tension, which in turn can trigger further emotions and diseases of the body. So what can you do? You can learn to notice your emotions and your child's emotions, name them and work through them.

There are many ways to work with emotions by:

- techniques of working with the body to remove the tension that arises through emotions or to befriend the emotions we feel in the body;
- techniques of working with the mind (Mindfulness type techniques): noticing emotions and accepting them, searching for the needs behind them;
- techniques of evoking positive emotions such as gratitude, joy, love etc.;
- techniques of expressing constructively your emotions and communicating them to yourself and the world.

Parents who are not in contact with emotions themselves, do not accept their emotions, consider them as a source of evil, and displace them would not be able to pass good models in the field of emotional management to the child.

Therefore, the best thing you can do not only for yourself but also for your child is to work with your emotions, listen to your emotions in your head and body, understand and express these emotions appropriately.



We invite you to travel deeply into yourself with the help of various techniques. Elements of working with emotions can be found in the chapter on mindfulness, meditation, qigong, and self-regulation. Which technique is the most suitable for you? Which is the most suitable for your child? Test it and choose for yourself.

3. Mind and beliefs

Beliefs are what you deeply believe in, what you identify with, and the elements your self-esteem is based on. You perceive the world around you through the prism of your own beliefs, prejudices and attitudes. All your actions reflect what you think about yourself and others, what in your opinion is possible and what is not, how you think the world and other people work. If you want to change something in your life, it is worth starting by changing your inner beliefs. When you want to advance, first look at your ideas about what you are capable of, what is available to you and what is within your capabilities (future, not necessarily present).

Our way of narrating, in which we explain the world and beliefs to ourselves, has a huge impact on mental and social functioning.

For thousands of years, monks from different parts of the world and different religions have used meditation as a way to control their thoughts and emotions. Psychology, in turn, emphasizes that our beliefs, automatic thoughts may affect us and can become major sources of stressors. As a matter of fact, some dysfunctional beliefs and habits can be the "main" source of mental health problems.

Working with destructive beliefs is one of the essential components of cognitive and positive psychology.

4. Community

As it results from research on self-regulation, attachment theory and other branches of social psychology, contact and relationship with other people is very important (if not the most crucial factor) for the mental and physical well-being of a person.

The very interesting study, The Harvard Study of Adult Development, is probably the longest study of adult human life that has ever been conducted. For 75 years, the life of 724 men was followed - year after year, collecting information on their work, health, and sense of happiness as well as conversations with their parents, spouses and families were conducted. Robert Waldinger - the fourth project leader - in his presentation shares three important conclusions from the research about what helps to live a full, healthy and long life. The most



important conclusion from the research is: good relationships affect the feeling of happiness, physical and mental health, and the condition of memory.

According to the most recent study on parental burnout conducted in 42 countries on over 18,000 participants, one of the most important factors influencing parental burnout is individualistic culture, while being open to social support prevents burnout and has a positive impact on coping with the stresses of everyday life or bigger ones (source: Roskam, I., et al (2021)).

So how can you, as a parent, protect yourself and your children from burnout? By creating a network of relationships around you that will support you and (which is also important) make you support others.

In this guide, you can learn more by reading about Attachment Theory and Self-Regulation.

5. The universe

Human beings and their closest ecosystem is surrounded by the universe. It may not always affect us directly, but indirectly it has a huge impact on our functioning. When a person feels that they are part of something greater (nature, religion, community) and feels connected to it, it gives them a sense of meaning and a sense of security.

There are many studies proving that contact with nature is positive for humans. Review of studies “Nature and Health” (Health Council of the Netherlands (2004) confirms that:

- contact with nature has a positive effect on mood, mental function and concentration and self-discipline.
- people who live closer to nature cope better with stressful events.
- living close to nature results in less aggression, better mental and physical health.
- merely having plants at work or at home seems to lower blood pressure and improve welfare.

Music, dance and art are methods of celebrating important moments that have been used by mankind for years, woven into play and rejoicing.

A comprehensive review of the research on the influence of music from 2013 (Chanda M.L. et al (2013) shows that music supports mental and physical health, reduces anxiety and stress levels.

From the eastern traditions, many techniques have been implemented such as: meditation of goodness, compassion, contemplation of nature, because it gives the feeling of being part of something bigger.



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In our handbook, exercises related to this can be found in the chapter on mindfulness, self-regulation and meditation.



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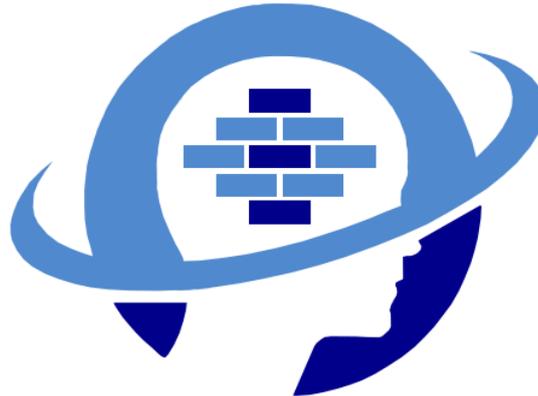
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