

Getting Some R&R: The “Resilience and Reconnection” Group Intervention as a Positive Psychology Approach to Stress Management

Shelly P. Harrell, Ranya Alnatour, Joshua Buch, Lily Rowland,
Tamara Rumburg, Hank Skulstad, & Jessica Styles
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

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Stress, Resilience and Positive Psychology

- Stress is a risk factor for physical and mental health problems and compromises participation personal, relational, and collective wellness.
- Approaches to stress management have traditionally been skills-based
- Recent approaches have included attention to resilience with applications in the military (Peterson's work), with physical illness, and with interpersonal violence
- Resilience-oriented stress management is conceptualized as a positive psychology approach
 - Promoting positive adaptation in the context of stress and adversity



Overview of the R&R Group Intervention

- The R&R Group is conceptualized as a culturally-adaptive, resilience-oriented stress management approach
- The group is designed to strengthen resilience through enhancing personal expressions of resilience (guiding themes for daily living) through developing personally-relevant stress resilience and coping skills (The Coping and Resilience Toolkit (CART)).
- Participants are taught the organizing framework of “The Three Pillars of Resilience” as a fundamental stress management approach
 - What am I experiencing? (AWARENESS)
 - What/who will I connect with? (ALLIES)
 - What choices will I make? (ACTION)



The Integrated Intervention Model for Resilience- Oriented Stress Management

(see handout)

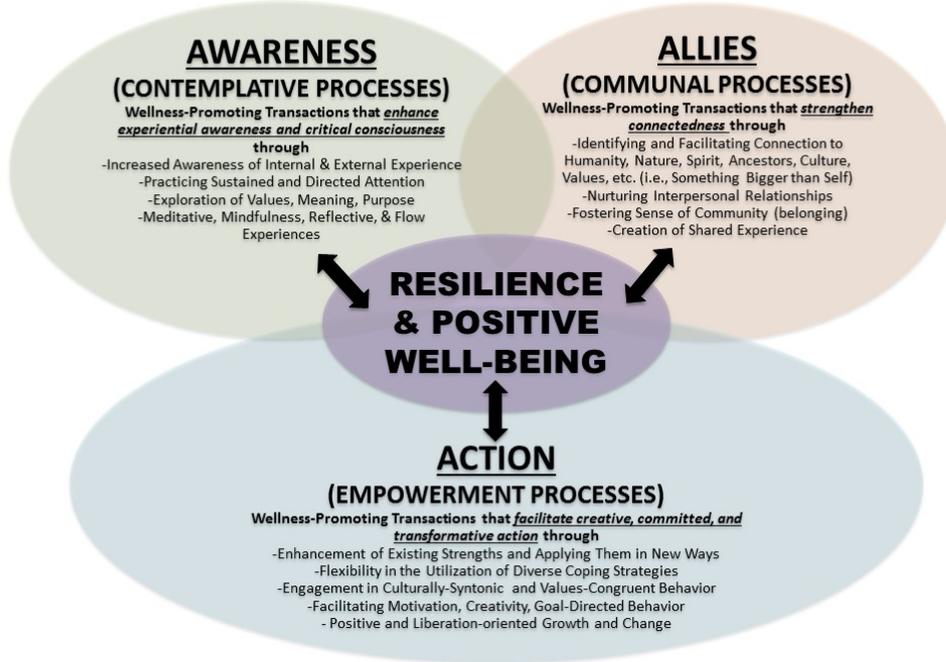


- **The “Core4” Stress Resilience Strategies**
 - The specific behaviors that build and strengthen the pillars (processes) of resilience
- **The Three Pillars of Resilience**
 - The processes that support resilient ways of being & living in the world
- **Qualities and Expressions of Resilience**
 - Culturally-syntonic ways of being in the world that promote well-being
- **Functions of Resilience for Well-Being**
 - How resilience affects stress and well-being
- **Positive Adaptation and Well-Being**
 - The target outcome of Resilience-Oriented Stress Management



Three Pillars of Resilience and Positive Well-Being

The Three Pillars of Resilience and Positive Well-Being (Harrell, 2016)



AWARENESS
= Contemplative Processes
("Consciousness"; Attention-Regulation)

ALLIES
= Communal Processes
("Connection"; Relationality;
Interconnectedness)

ACTION
= Empowerment Processes
("Transformation"; Choice; Change)



The “CORE4” Stress Resilience Strategies

- 1. Foundational Attention-Centering Techniques (the “FACTs”)**
(Breathing, Relaxation, Meditation, Visualization)
- 2. Reflection-Exploration Strategies**
(Journaling, Self-Monitoring, Dialogue/Verbal Processing, Reading/Learning)
- 3. Expressive-Creative Strategies**
(Music, Art, Writing Poetry/Lyrics/Stories, Dance)
- 4. Values Congruent Self-Care and Lifestyle Enhancement**
(Healthy Habits, Healthy Pleasures, Healthy Relationships)



**Diverse expressions of resilience:
Themes for contemplative, communal,
and empowerment practices in a
stress management group intervention**

Shelly P. Harrell, Ph.D.



Qualities and Expressions of Resilience

- Strengths and valued ways-of-living that people draw upon in the context of stress and adversity
- The diverse ways that resilience is experienced and expressed
- 25 Resilience Themes have been identified
 - through the study of strengths, stress-related growth, overcoming adversity, and positive well-being in diverse cultural contexts
 - across diverse areas within the field including positive psychology, multicultural psychology, community/liberation psychology, and psychotherapy (particularly third-wave CBT and humanistic-existential perspectives)
- The Resilience Themes provide the organizing structure for group sessions
- Contemplative, Communal, and Empowerment Practices are implemented within the organizing themes



Resilience Themes for Group Sessions

Acceptance/Non-Avoidance

Affirmation/Self-Esteem

Authenticity/Congruence

Compassion/Love

Connection/Relatedness

Creativity/Expression

Empowerment

Release/Surrender/Letting Go

Patience/Perseverance

Flexibility

Flow

Forgiveness

Gratitude

Groundedness

Sharing/Giving

Liberation

Positivity

Transcendence/Spirituality

Presence/Attention/Focus

Receptivity/Openness

Reflection/Contemplation

Engagement/Courage

Hope/Faith/Optimism

Meaning/Purpose/Passion

Wholeness/Integration



Sample Theme Clusters

-The presentations that follow will integrate examples from three thematic clusters that we might use in the R&R Intervention

-Reflection/Meaning/Groundedness

-Positivity/Gratitude/Sharing

-Transcendence/Flow/Creativity



**Connecting, Centering, Experiencing,
and Empowering:
Four-phases of a Culturally-Adaptive,
Resilience-Oriented Group
Intervention**

Jessica Styles & Lily Rowland



Overview of the Structure and Content of R&R Groups

- Each group session is divided into four phases designed to “work the theme” in different ways through utilizing the resilience pillars of Awareness, Allies and Action
 - Phase I: Reconnecting
 - Phase II: Centering and Learning
 - Phase III: Experiencing and Sharing
 - Phase IV: Empowering and Committing



PHASE I: “Reconnecting”

- Transition from the outside world to the group
- Promote positive engagement and interaction
- Trigger positive emotion
- Activate communal resilience processes and strengthen the Allies Pillar



Examples from the “Reconnecting” Phase

- **Opening Ritual: Collective Intention-Setting**
 - Verbal commitments to the group that set intention for a safe, positive, and productive group experience
- **Check-In: *Stress and Resilience During the Past Week***
 - 1-minute writing and/or Partner Share



PHASE II: “Centering and Learning”

- **Awareness Pillar**
- **Collective Wisdom Quote Contemplation**
 - Centering Breaths
 - Guided meditation on a quote related to the week’s theme
 - Brief group share
- **Vignette-Centered Psychoeducation- providing conceptual and research information related to the weekly theme**



Example: Collective Wisdom Quote Contemplation

“Don’t go with the flow, be the flow.”

~Jay-Z



PHASE II: “Centering and Learning”

- Awareness Pillar
- Collective Wisdom Quote Contemplation
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- **Vignette-Centered Psychoeducation**
 - **Providing conceptual and research information related to the weekly theme**



PHASE III: “Experiencing and Sharing”

- **Body Synchrony/Symbolic Movement**
- **Culturally-Syntonic Experiential/Interactive Activity**
- **Giving Testimony & Bearing Witness**



PHASE IV: “Empowering & Committing”

- **Action Pillar**
- **Reflection on Insights and Learning**
- **Commitment: The Weekly “CAAARRE” Plan (Worksheet)**
 - **Commitments to Awareness, Allies and Action for Resilience, Reconnection and Empowerment**
- **Closing Collective Poem Activity**



Contemplative Practices for Resilience: Attention Regulation, Meditation and Mindfulness

Hank Skulstad and Joshua Buch



What are Contemplative Practices?

(Source: contemplativemind.org)

- Contemplative practices are practical, radical, and transformative, developing capacities for deep concentration and quieting the mind in the midst of the action and distraction that fills everyday life.
- This state of calm centeredness is an aid to exploration of meaning, purpose and values.
- Contemplative Practices cultivate a critical, first-person focus, sometimes with direct experience as the object, while at other times concentrating on complex ideas or situations.
- Incorporated into daily life, they act as a reminder to connect to what we find most meaningful.
- Contemplative practices can help develop greater empathy and communication skills, improve focus and attention, reduce stress and enhance creativity, supporting a loving and compassionate approach to life.



Why Integrate Contemplative Processes in Positive Psychology Interventions?

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES <<----->> **POSITIVE EMOTION** ----->> **RESILIENCE**

- Engagement in contemplative practice facilitates increased positive emotion (Fredrickson, 2008)
- Positive emotion enables greater flexibility and openness. (Fredrickson, 2003)



Intentions of contemplative practices and examples

- Stillness practices
 - Mindfulness meditation
 - Centering Prayer
- Generative practices
 - Loving-kindness meditation
 - Visualization
 - Lectio Divina
- Creative practices
 - Music and singing
 - Journaling
- Ritualistic/Life-cycle practices
 - Cultural/Spiritual Ceremonies
 - Establishing Sacred Space
 - Retreats
- Relational Practices
 - Council Circle
 - Deep Listening
 - Storytelling



The R&R Approach to Contemplative Practices

- Contemplative Practices can be thought of as encompassing a variety of strategies for deepening and expanding experiential and critical awareness by ***bearing witness to one's own experience***, both internally and in the world.
- In R&R, contemplative practices are a culturally-diverse group of meditative and consciousness practices that involve experiencing and directing somatic, mental, and spiritual energies.



Contemplative Practices used in R&R Groups

- Foundational Attention-Centering Techniques (FACTS)
 - Practicing Presence (Mindfulness)
 - Relaxation Strategies (Breathing, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Guided Imagery)
 - Collective Wisdom Contemplation (Passage Meditation)
- Body Synchrony/Embodiment
- Journaling
- Values Clarification
- R&R Playlist (music)



ReCENTERing Closing Meditation

- **CENTER** yourself and your attention by taking a deep breath, **closing** your eyes and opening your heart
- Breathe out a big **EXHALE** into the present here-and-now moment, grateful for its gifts and opportunities
- **NOTICE** your internal experience, what you are feeling, by observing (without evaluating) what is going on, where your energy is physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.
- **TRUST** in what brought you to this group, trust in the health- and growth- seeking part of yourself
 - Today our resilience **theme** was **Reflection-Meaning-Groundedness**, so focus on these words, intentionally bringing them to your consciousness
- **EXPAND** your awareness of what these words mean to you, allowing yourself to be more **empowered** by any awareness, knowledge, and skills you may have gained from group today
- As you prepare to **RETURN** to your daily life, **release** what does not serve your highest purpose and values, re-entering your world centered in your highest self and in the energy of **being grounded in what is most meaningful to you.**



Applications of Resilience- Oriented Stress Management for Children & Adolescents

Ranya Alnatour & Tamara Rumburg



Stress, Resilience, & Coping: Children & Adolescents

- Stress results from adverse events or circumstances
 - In children, emotional and behavioral cues of stress look different
 - Mood swings, irritability, withdrawing from previously enjoyable activities, acting out, changes in sleep patterns, bedwetting, crying, appetite changes
 - Physical effects include stomachaches and headaches
 - Adolescents may avoid parents, abandon friendships, express hostility to family

(APA,
2017)



Stress, Resilience, & Coping: Children & Adolescents

- Resilience is a protective process and facilitates coping with stress
 - Can reduce the intensity of stress and allow one to recover more quickly
 - Helps one build and subsequently utilize resources both internally and externally to manage future stressors
 - Transforms stressful experiences so that one can learn and grow from them
- There are many ways to cope with stress and promote resilience that are effective for children



How to Cultivate Resilience in Children & Adolescents

- Provide supportive adult-child relationships
- Scaffold learning in order to build:
 - Sense of self-efficacy & control
- Strengthen:
 - Adaptive skills
 - Self-regulatory capacities
- Use faith & cultural traditions:
 - Encourage hope and stability

(Center on the Developing Child, 2015)



Applying the R&R Model to Children & Adolescents

AWARENESS- integration of developmentally appropriate mindfulness exercises

ALLIES- research suggests that this pillar is particularly important for children and youth

ACTION- building confidence through gaining skills



Allies Pillar for Children

- Communal processes: Connection, Relationality, Interconnectedness
- Wellness-promoting activities that give children a sense of community and strengthen connectedness to others
- Targeting each of the three different functions of stress resilience
 - Asking for help from parents and friends when in distress
 - (i.e. asking for a hug)
 - Joining school clubs or sports teams to build a peer network
 - Building strengths such as compassion for others



Peer Support

- Possible benefits include:
 - increased self-esteem and confidence
 - improved problem solving skills
 - increased sense of empowerment
 - improved access to work and education
 - more friends, better relationships, more confidence in social settings
 - greater feelings of being accepted, understood, and liked
 - reduced self-stigmatization
 - greater hopefulness about their own potential
 - more positive feelings about the future



Action Pillar for Children

- Empowerment processes: Transformation, Choice, Change
- Wellness-promoting activities that give children a voice and allow for the development of autonomy & transformative change
 - Building upon a child's skills & strengths
 - Flexible use of coping strategies
(i.e. giving words to feelings, asking for help)
 - Facilitate motivation & creativity through expressive arts
 - Goal-directed behavior at school & home



Group Interventions

- Connected to themes of Flow & Creativity
- Aims:
 - Confidence & self-esteem building
 - Encouraging creativity
 - Enhancing self-expression
- Example Activity for Children/Adolescents:
 - “Postcards in Motion”



“Postcards in Motion”

- Activity combines:
 - Guided imagery
 - Writing
 - Art
 - Performance
- Promotes:
 - Sense of competency/accomplishment
 - Enhanced self-esteem

(Kaduson & Schaefer,
2001)



“Postcards in Motion”

- Step 1: Guided Imagery
 - “Remember a place you felt safe”
- Step 2: Explore
 - Colors, shapes, sights, sounds, smells of safe place
- Step 3: “Write a postcard from your safe place”
- Step 4: Draw an image
- Step 5: Four words about safe place
 - architectural element, small detail, main element, mood or feeling
- Step 6: Four body gestures
- Step 7: Order gestures (can work with partner)
- Step 8: Movement sequence (postcard read aloud)

(Kaduson & Schaefer,
2001)



Stress Resilience

- For children, building up these three functions of stress resilience is key to coping with stress
- This could involve utilizing parental attention or playing with toys to reduce immediate distress, strengthening peer relationships, joining clubs or sports teams, using coping skills such as naming feelings, and enhancing self-esteem through positive self-talk.



Cultural and Contextual Adaptation Considerations for a Resilience-Oriented Group Intervention

Shelly P. Harrell, Ph.D.



Culture is...

- The *multiple organizing systems of meaning and living in the world that*
 - consist of **patterns of being, believing, bonding, belonging, behaving, and becoming** which provide the foundational frames for developing worldviews, interpreting reality, and acting in the world
 - for a group of people who share common ancestry, social location, group identity, or defining experiential contexts; but for whom, as individuals or intersectional subgroups, elements of a particular cultural system may be embraced, internalized, and expressed differentially.
 - emerge and transform through cumulative and adaptation-oriented person-environment transactions over time
 - are maintained and transmitted through collective memory, narrative, and socialization processes



Culture is...

- ***Embedded*** in environmental contexts,
- ***Internalized*** as patterns of meaning and identity,
- ***Expressed*** through actions and relationships, and
- ***Interactive*** with multiple cultural expressions that reflect various dimensions of human diversity (intersectionality).



The Foundational Role of Culture

- The inclusion of culture in the analysis of human experience, behavior, and transformation facilitates the identification of constructs, methods, and strategies that may enhance the effectiveness of applied work in diverse cultural contexts.
- The R&R approach requires ongoing and intentional culture and context consideration and is part of pre-session Facilitator preparation for every session



Approaches to Cultural Adaptation

Surface-Level:

Topography/Language/Materials

Example: Name of session theme, Choice of Quotes, experiential activities (e.g., Soul Train Line)

Deep-Level: Values/Worldview

Example: Phenomenal Women Rising application; Christian meditation vs. Mindfulness



Culture, Context, and Liberation in Contemplative Practice

“Culture”

There are diverse contemplative practices in many cultural and religious traditions and the resonance and effectiveness of any meditative or contemplative approach is a function of its congruence with language, rhythms, values, beliefs, and cultural worldview

“Context”

Contemplative practices such as meditation, like all human behavior, occurs in multiple ecological contexts and these must be understood to maximize the potential effectiveness of any particular meditative or contemplative practice

“Liberation”

The meaningful core of all contemplative practices is freedom in the context of the challenges and boundaries of the human condition such that the effectiveness of the practice is enhanced when it remains connected to this ultimate purpose of liberation from both internal and external oppression



Thank You!

Contact Info:

Shelly.Harrell@pepperdine.edu

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