

A close-up photograph of a person's hands, with fingers interlaced to form a heart shape. The person is wearing a light-colored, sleeveless top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

## WELLNESS

### Practicing Resilience for our Mental Health and Self Care

By Claire Lindsay

A significant portion of my practice involves working with parents and children involved with Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. In addition to being an attorney for my clients, I am their social worker, therapist, and cheerleader.

My clients are living on the cusp of total overwhelming destitution. They are trying to keep jobs, quit using drugs, and get out of violent relationships -- all while working on housing, transportation, and communication stability. I try to provide them with moral support and an upbeat mentality to help them basically do a "180" in their lives so they can be reunited with their kids.

Some parents are able to rise above their issues to learn and grow, and to become more stable people for their children. Others, not so much. In my experience, the parents that are unable to move past their situations and the decisions that brought Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) into their families' lives are never able to make changes to their lives. The ongoing pandemic has made this more difficult for many of them, and many don't have the skills to cope with this added layer of stress.

However, resilience -- being able to pick yourself up and keep on going with your head held high can be learned and practiced.

Each year, I try to find a word that identifies my personal goal for the new year. For 2021, my word is "resilience." I chose it because we need resilience in the wake of hardships that 2020 threw at us: isolation from friends and family, schooling our children, using social media tips to find toilet paper, and cancelled travel plans. We endured these hardships while still working and trying to keep our professional lives "business as usual."

Resilience allows us to learn and grow from difficult and painful experiences, and it helps us make life manageable, balanced, and more stable. Here is how I'm working on my resilience this year, and they may be helpful suggestions for you.

1. **Cultivate a belief in your ability.** We have made it through 100% of our bad days, and we are able to make it through more. Be aware of what you have accomplished so far, and write those accomplishments down to remind yourself when you have doubts.

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2. **Stay connected with your tribe via Zoom.** Over the past few months, I have relied on connections with friends to keep going. We've sent each other funny memes to keep our spirits up. Zoom has come in handy for this purpose. In truth, I have a "love/hate relationship" with Zoom due to court appearances. I love being able to make a court appearance from home, wearing a professional top and jacket – and yoga pants. But I hate not being able to tell clients to be quiet or to stop smoking or eating while they are testifying so that it is not on the record. On the personal front, though, Zoom is great for having a happy hour or lunch with friends to catch up. And many companies have begun to provide cultivated experiences that can be shared remotely. The variety of opportunities for staying connected is pretty great!
3. **Ask for help, and help others when you can.** No man (or woman) is an island, and we need others' help. Offer help when you can, and ask for help when you're struggling. I'm one of those "always expect the worst but hope for the best" people. So I know who my go-to people are if I need a last-minute school pick-up for my kids, if I have conflicting court appearances, or if I'm sick and need help. Knowing who I can ask for help in certain situations really reduces my mental load.
4. **Meditate, and take a little "me" time.** Some days I settle for being able to go to the bathroom without my 2- and 8-year-olds finding me the second I turn on the bathroom light. Other days, I've watched a few Netflix shows, attended virtual yoga classes, or worked on creative projects. I know quite a few people who love the Calm app to help guide their meditations. Find something that sparks joy in you, and that is completely separate from work. In other words, don't turn into Jack Nicholson's character in *The Shining*, repeating "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" while going insane.
5. **Take care of you.** Make sure you hydrate, eat some veggies, and do something active every day.

So far, this year has been brighter than 2020. Here's hoping that this continues. And, in case no one has told you this today, "You're doing awesome!"

*\* Claire Lindsay is the owner of Claire E. Lindsay, PLLC in the Woodlands. She focuses on (a) estate planning, (b) family law, and (c) probate and guardianship law. Claire is active in her community. She is co-troop leader for her oldest daughter's Girl Scout troop, and she is on the board of her youngest daughter's pre-school. Claire can be reached at [Claire@ClaireLindsayLaw.com](mailto:Claire@ClaireLindsayLaw.com).*

