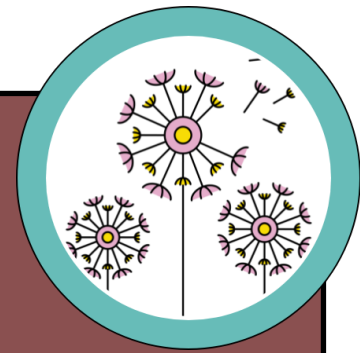


## Gratitude & Resilience



When life is hard, it's much more challenging to notice the good. But research has found that gratitude, especially during hard times, actually helps create resilience and improves one's ability to cope with difficulty. Gratitude does not mean denying the real challenges or negative elements we face; it means consciously choosing to notice the positive things in our lives that exist alongside these challenges. Our brains are constantly on the alert for negative threats in our environment, so we must consciously look for the positive events and notice our blessings as a way to overcome our instinct towards negativity. If practiced regularly, over time, gratitude can turn from a behavior into a trait — something that is done naturally.

Here are a few examples of the power of gratitude during hard times:

1. Veterans who developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were found to have lower gratitude levels than those who did not.
2. Breast cancer patients who wrote a gratitude diary every day for two weeks were able to function more effectively, felt more supported, and were better able to use effective coping strategies than those who did not.
3. Police officers post-Hurricane Katrina who were more grateful experienced lower levels of depression.
4. Students who went through a school shooting who were more grateful were more likely to experience post-traumatic growth, which is the experience of positive transformation after adverse events.

By using gratitude as a tool, you can get through suffering and reframe your current challenges, which can increase resilience and help you cope more effectively. Research has found that gratitude and other positive emotions can not only help you feel good in the moment, they can lead to increased resilience and well-being over time.

Throughout this Days of Gratitude project, we have presented multiple opportunities and suggestions of ways to practice gratitude. One of the most effective ways to deepen your gratitude is to write a letter of gratitude to an important person in your life who you've never taken the time to thank, and then visit that person to present them with the letter. Studies have shown that such a gratitude visit can increase happiness and decrease depression (in the person who wrote the letter) for as long as three months after the visit, and that this exercise has a longer lasting effect than any other positive psychology intervention.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>From: Gratitude Works! By Robert Emmons, page 53–54, describing the research by Martin Seligman's positive psychology laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania.

## A Gratitude Visit: A Step-by-Step Guide



1. Select one important person who has made a major difference in your life and to whom you have never fully expressed your thanks. Choose someone who is still alive.
2. Write a testimonial just long enough to cover one page. Take your time composing it, several weeks if required.
3. Invite that person to your home or go visit that person's home (or, if not possible to do in person, arrange for a video call). Do not tell the person the purpose of the visit in advance.
4. Bring a laminated (or otherwise carefully designed) version of your testimonial with you as a gift. Read your testimonial aloud slowly, with expression and eye contact.
5. Let the other person react unhurriedly. Reminisce together about the concrete events that make this person so important to you.

