

Praise for
Roadmap to Resilience:
A Guide for Military, Trauma Victims and their Families

Writing a book that reviews the most relevant research on a topic is easy. Writing a book that is practical is hard. Dr. Meichenbaum has brilliantly done the latter in *Roadmap to Resilience*. Drawing upon 40 years of clinical practice and research, Dr. Meichenbaum has distilled the most salient aspects of resilience and growth into an easy to understand and highly useful format. Focusing on six key “fitness” areas (physical, interpersonal, emotional, thinking (cognitive), behavioral and spiritual) for improving resilience, Dr. Meichenbaum shows individuals, groups, and organizations how to assess, maintain, and strengthen this incredible buffer against trauma and hardship. This book should be in the backpack of every soldier, in the hand of every leader, and on the desk of every clinician.

—Bret A. Moore, PsyD, ABPP, Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychiatry,
University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio;
Former Army psychologist and veteran of Iraq; Co-Author of
Wheels Down: Adjusting to Life After Deployment and co-editor of
Treating PTSD in Military Personnel

This is a really amazing piece of work. I am impressed that this book incorporates so many empirically-based approaches to trauma and resilience. Dr. Meichenbaum is a master of this field, both in terms of knowing the concepts and research, and making them accessible to military service members and their families. Although the sheer wealth of information and possibilities in this book may seem overwhelming, it is set up in a fashion that the trauma survivor can pick out those items to try that they feel ready for, and do their own experiments with developing resilience. This is not a PTSD self-help treatment manual, but anyone who is struggling with the aftermath of trauma can find ways to promote healthier living, and even those with severe PTSD are likely to find many ways to understand and change their reactions to their situation that will help them thrive. Furthermore, I would recommend this book to all clinicians who work with trauma survivors in order to help them see the various approaches they can take in treatment, and consider homework assignments they can suggest to their clients.

—Richard Tedeschi, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology,
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Roadmap to Resilience is a must read for any trauma victim and for any service member and their family members. Dr. Meichenbaum has hit a “home run” with this Guidebook making it an invaluable reference for building resilience and assisting recovery from combat and any form of trauma-based injuries. *Roadmap to Resilience* is the trauma victims and warriors “go to” Handbook for psychological health and readjustment.

The reader is walked through reasonable, easy to follow Action Plans in understanding the physical, psychological and behavioral complexities of trauma. It is logically organized as the chapters build upon one another with excellent easy to relate to examples. *Roadmap to Resilience* includes numerous Quotable Quotes and “How to” examples that can be developed into a playbook for trauma victims, whether civilian or military. A must read handbook for advice on psychological health and readjustment for clinicians seeking to help victims of trauma.

—Sharon M, Freeman, PhD, MSN and editor of
Living and Surviving in Harm’s Way

Many members of the military, trauma victims, and their families have confronted immense challenges in their emotional and physical well-being. Yet, as renowned psychologist, Donald Meichenbaum, emphasizes, the vast majority demonstrate the capacity to overcome these challenges and display resilience. In this very impressive book, the author skillfully summarizes those factors that contribute to leading a more resilient lifestyle, examining fitness in the physical, interpersonal, emotional, thinking, behavioral and spiritual domains. More importantly, he offers realistic practical strategies for nurturing resilience in each of these domains. This book will serve as a wonderful resource to read and re-read by those seeking to enrich their own lives or the lives of loved ones following hardship and trauma. It will also be an invaluable guide for clinicians working with these individuals and families.

—Robert Brooks, Ph.D., Faculty, Harvard Medical School.
Co-author of *The Power of Resilience* and *Raising Resilient Children*

Roadmap to Resilience

A Guide for Military, Trauma Victims and their Families

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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to all Service Members
and their family members*

and

*To my six grandchildren
Anna, Owen, Lia, Brayden, Cayden and Ben*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
By Way of Introduction	xi
How to Use this Book	1
What is Resilience?	3
Some Facts About Resilience and Post Traumatic Growth	5
Evidence of Resilience in Returning Service Members and their Families	11
Evidence of Resilience in Civilian Populations	19
Fitness Areas	25
<i>Physical Fitness (Action Items 1-8)</i>	27
<i>Interpersonal Fitness (Action Items 9-25)</i>	41
<i>Emotional Fitness (Action Items 26-44)</i>	65
<i>Thinking (Cognitive) Fitness (Action Items 45-67)</i>	105
<i>Behavioral Fitness (Action Items 68-85)</i>	145
<i>Spiritual Fitness (Action Items 86-101)</i>	163
Conclusions	181
<i>Psychological Characteristics of Resilient Individuals</i>	183
<i>Psychological Characteristics of Individuals who “Get Stuck” and Show Evidence of Ongoing Distress and Adjustment Problems</i>	185
<i>Ways to Successfully Reintegrate and Become More Resilient</i>	189
Appendix A: Resilience Checklist—My Personal Resilience Plan	191
Appendix B: User-friendly Guide of Resilient Behaviors	199
References	203
Order Form	209
About the Author	211

By Way of Introduction

Welcome to *Roadmap to Resilience: A Guide for Military, Trauma Victims and their Families*. For the last 40 years, as a clinical psychologist, I have worked with many groups of individuals who have experienced traumatic and victimizing experiences. Some have endured natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, earthquakes and floods. Others have been victimized by violence due to human intentional design. I have been involved in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack, Oklahoma city bombing and Columbine school shooting. I have trained clinicians who treat individuals who have been sexually and physically abused and tortured. Most recently, I have been consulting with the National Guard and Veteran's hospitals that treat returning service members and their families. [Note: For the author's complete biographical sketch, please see the end of this book.] This work is summarized on a website of an Institute for Violence Prevention that I oversee as Research Director (Please visit www.melissainstitute.org).

This *Guidebook* reflects all of the clinical experience and wisdom, as well as research findings that I have collected over 40 years. I have a "remarkable story" to relate, one of resilience, courage and growth that individuals, families and communities evidence following traumatic events.

Research indicates that all individuals have the ability to improve their level of resilience following the experience of stressful events, whether they are service members or civilians. In fact, some individuals, families and communities evidence post-traumatic growth and become stronger and develop closer meaningful relationships in the aftermath of stressful life events, whether these events are combat-related, victimization due to intentional human design like crimes or terrorist attacks, or due to natural disasters, accidents or illness.

This book will provide a *roadmap* on ways to improve your level of resilience. We will begin with a brief discussion of the concept and definition of resilience and some facts about resilience. Then we will consider the research evidence of examples of the adjustment capacity of returning service members, family members, and civilians to successfully adapt to adversity. The major portion of this book will be to provide specific practical "How To" ways to improve your level of *resilience* and *fitness* in six important areas:

1. Physical Fitness
2. Interpersonal Fitness
3. Emotional Fitness
4. Thinking (or Cognitive) Fitness
5. Behavioral Fitness
6. Spiritual Fitness

In each area of Fitness you will learn “tricks of the trade” of what *resilient* individuals *Do* and *Do Not Do*. Specific practical steps to enhance your well-being are enumerated based on research findings. These are supplemented by *Quotable Quotes* offered by returning service members and civilians. Distributed throughout are specific self-assessment tools, self-examining *Hinge Questions* that allow you to swing open the gate of possibilities toward personal growth and well-being. These questions are accompanied by *practical* steps you can take and things you can implement *right now*. In addition, there are sections on *Useful Information* that discuss briefly why engaging in such bolstering behaviors can enhance your resilience and also contain additional resources such as websites, agencies and hotline telephone numbers.

You will be given an opportunity to create your own “tool kit” of *resilient-bolstering behaviors* that can help in the transition from military to civilian life. The military has taught service members how to prepare for combat and military activities. This guidebook is designed as a *roadmap* to help individuals to meet the challenges of post-deployment. Although many of the examples offered were created with the returning Service members in mind, these same resilience-bolstering activities apply equally well to the general civilian population.

These same fitness activities can be used by family members and also by civilians in the aftermath of traumatic and stressful experiences. *Appendix A* provides a list of 101 ways to bolster your resilience. How many of these resilience skills and activities do you presently engage in? Which Fitness activities do you wish to refine or develop further?

For example, are you having difficulty in sleeping, relating to family members, experiencing positive emotions and regulating intense negative feelings, finding meaning, maintaining hope, forgiving yourself and others, and going for help? This guidebook provides ways to address each of these challenges and others. There are many different pathways to resilience and what works best for one individual may not work for someone else. You will have an opportunity to develop an individual plan for coping and look for opportunities to practice your new found resilience-bolstering behaviors.

How To Use This Book

There are four ways you can use this guidebook to enhance your level of resilience.

1. You can read the book cover to cover and discover specific *Action Plans* that you, your family and friends can take to enhance resilience in six major areas: physical; interpersonal; emotional; behavioral; thinking (cognitive); and spiritual .
2. You can go to a specific area of resilience that interests you and read about what actions resilient individuals have taken to “bounce back” after a traumatic experience. Learn how others have coped with the aftermath of trauma and loss.
3. You can go directly to Appendix A (pages 191–196), which is a user-friendly guide to all of the ways to enhance resilience. Next to each *Action Plan* is the page number on which you will find specific suggestions of resilience-bolstering behaviors.
4. And finally, you can go directly to Appendix B (pages 199–202) which is a summary of “How to” steps that are listed in *alphabetical* order. Here you can look up a specific need or area of interest and locate the page on which you can find the important “how to” information. If you are in a hurry and want specific information for a specific problem, then use Appendix B.

Both Appendices A and B are like *mini-computers*, providing specific resilience-bolstering activities *on demand*.

I have decided to list each *Action Plan* in the first person (“I” statements) in order to help you see yourself, your family and friends taking specific steps to bolster your resilience. This guidebook is designed to expand your coping tool kit and provide practical suggestions that can be tried by you at your own speed. You will encounter “success stories” of individuals, families and communities who have managed to survive and transform themselves and their surroundings having suffered a traumatic episode.

And one last thing . . . at the end of each of the major sections you will find a request form asking you to contribute other examples of ways to improve your *fitness* in

each area. I would like you to please email me at examples@roadmaptoresilience.org your suggestions on ways that you, your family members and friends have used to bolster resilience and achieve post-traumatic growth that may not have been discussed. I will share your suggestions with others, but I will keep all suggestions completely *anonymous*. With your help, we will go *viral* and share these examples of resilience-bolstering activities on our website, www.roadmaptoresilience.org. Together, we can build “nurturing environments” that will be useful to everyone.

What Is Resilience?

Resilience is defined as the capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity.

Resilience is a broad multidimensional concept that reflects the ability to:

- adapt and overcome
- successfully adjust to difficult or challenging life experiences
- confront and handle stressful life events
- grow and thrive in the face of challenges and adversities
- bounce back and beat the odds
- negotiate adversity
- be stress hardy and mentally fit
- stretch (like elastic) or flex (like a suspension bridge) in response to pressure and strains of life
- recover from or adjust to misfortune or change
- endure traumatic events
- maintain a healthy outcome

Resilience derives from the Latin words *salire* (to leap or jump) and *resilire* (to spring back).

Perhaps, the concept of resilience was best captured by Helen Keller who was born blind and deaf when she observed,

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it.”

As one returning Vet commented:

“Resilience is moving from taking orders or completing other people’s missions to creating your own missions and bringing on-line your own decision-making abilities. I have a deeper meaning of life as a result of my deployments.”

And, as often observed:

“Man has never made a material more resilient than the human spirit.”

Some Facts About Resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth

“In moderation, whatever does not kill us has the potential of making us stronger.”

About 20% of people in North America are likely to experience a traumatic event in a given year. Over the course of a lifetime, some 60% of people will experience such traumatic events that may include experiencing natural disasters, interpersonal victimizing events, accidents, illness and losses.

Following a natural catastrophe or a traumatic event no one walks away unscathed by such events, but neither do most survivors succumb in the aftermath to despair. Most show remarkable levels of resilience. Following exposure to traumatic events, 70% of individuals evidence resilience. The ceiling for harmful effects is about 30% of those exposed.

Research indicates that individuals who had a history of *moderate* amounts of adversities have *lower* levels of distress, *less* functional impairment, *higher* life satisfaction and well-being than did people with no history of adversity. Exposure to stressful life events can have a “steeling or inoculating effect” and help individuals prepare to handle future stressful events.

Exposure to stressful events can contribute to psychological “toughness” having a protective effect when the exposure is limited with an opportunity for recovery. Once “toughness” develops, it can permeate across domains and settings. For example, studies of communities in Israel that were exposed to repetitive rocket attacks compared favorably to non-exposed matched control communities in terms of mental health indicators. Despite exposure to chronic rocket attacks, the residents evidenced *resilience*. Their common ideology, solidarity and social resources of communal life provided a means of protection against stress.

Such resilience is common, rather than an extraordinary phenomenon. People are much more resilient under adverse conditions than they might have expected. A person may be resilient in some situations and with some type of stressors, but not with other stressors. Resilience is more accessible and available to some people than for others, but *everyone* can strengthen their resilience.

Resilience may be available and more accessible to a person at one period of time in his/her life than at other times in his/her life. Individuals may go through periods of extreme distress, negative emotions and poor functioning and still emerge resilient.

Resilience (positive emotions) and negative emotions can occur side-by-side. Personal distress and growth can coexist.

As noted by Ann Masten, resilience does *not* come from rare and special or extraordinary qualities or processes. Resilience develops from the everyday magic of ordinary resources. Resilience is *not* a sign of exceptional strength, but a fundamental feature of normal, everyday coping skills.

It may take some time for resilience and positive changes to emerge.

There are many different pathways to resilience. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities. Predominant among them are:

1. The perceived availability of social relationships and the ability to access and use social supports.
2. The degree of perceived personal control and the extent to which individuals focus their time and energies on tasks and situations over which they have some impact and influence.
3. The degree to which they can experience positive emotions and self-regulate negative emotions. Individuals who have a ratio of three times as many experiences of positive emotions to one negative emotion on a daily basis (3-to-1 ratio) are more likely to be resilient.
4. The ability to be cognitively flexible, using both direct-action problem-solving and emotionally-palliative acceptance skills, as the situations call for.
5. The ability to engage in activities that are consistent with one's values and life priorities that reflect a stake in the future.
6. The nature and number of concrete resources (financial aid) and emotional and social resources (empathy, guidance) that is available.

Finally, it is not possible to achieve positive growth by denying and avoiding the pain and other negative emotions. Rather facing, working through, experiencing and sharing one's painful memories and emotions are preconditions for growth and mental remedies. Sharing opens one to possibilities, relief and joy.

There are many different roads to travel and many forks along the pathways to resilience. It is important to keep in mind that these pathways are heavily influenced by one's specific culture. A Western approach encourages individuals to perceive

trauma as an “enemy” that should be challenged, confronted and conquered with the belief that they can emerge from the struggle stronger. An Eastern approach views life as transitory and some degree of suffering inevitable, and encourages individuals to accept trauma as a “companion”. They are encouraged to feel the pathos of nature and the pain that others may feel and incorporate trauma into their lives. Individuals with an Eastern orientation evidence a more stoic, private response to crises. Their effort at resilience-bolstering behaviors takes into consideration group harmony and acceptance strategies. In short, the pathways to resilience take different forms and it is possible to change course at many points. This volume, *Roadmap to Resilience* incorporates *both* Western and Eastern approaches.

Individuals who are *low* in resilience are at risk for experiencing stress, depression, anxiety, interpersonal difficulties and poor health.

A *Resilience Reintegration Program* can promote *Post Traumatic Growth* (PTG) and physical and psychological well-being. PTG refers to positive change resulting from the struggle with major life crises. Emotional distress is most often a necessary condition for the perception of growth. Many months are often needed for positive change to emerge.

Many individuals not only survive following their exposure to traumatic events (natural disasters, victimization due to intentional human design—terrorist attacks, sexual abuse, rape, illnesses, accidents, losses and combat), but they go onto becoming “*Thrivers*” and evidence PTG. They learn about themselves and what they consider to be most important in life (a spiritual, philosophical and existential reawakening), and they have improved relationships and become more altruistic.

Tragedy can be a *springboard* for transformation. In fact, all of the great religions of the world—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam espouse the idea that some form of suffering is inevitable, but growth emerges through such suffering. The stress that is experienced in the aftermath of trauma can act as a trigger or as an engine for PTG. Traumatic stress reactions and PTG can co-exist. PTG does *not* imply the absence of emotional distress and difficulties in living. PTG is not necessarily reflected in the reduction of psychological pain. Such struggles can enhance maturing self-acceptance, courage, fulfillment, positive outlook, sense of purpose and meaning, and improved social relationships, closeness and appreciation for family and friends. Different areas of PTG will develop at different rates. Each person’s journey and their *road to resilience* and PTG will be unique. Individuals need to assume responsibility for undertaking and maintaining their personal journey.

In order to determine where you are on this journey from “victim” to “survivor” to “thrivers,” you can assess yourself by taking the *Post Traumatic Growth Inventory* at cust-cf.apa.org/ptgi/ (see the APA Help Center Post Traumatic Growth Inventory). We urge you to visit this website and take this Inventory. You do not have to report your scores to anyone. This is for your own personal record. After reading this book, you can take the *PTG Inventory* again and determine in what ways you have changed.

The Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) contains 21 items measuring the degree to which an individual experiences personal growth following the struggle with adversity in five areas:

1. Relating to others
2. New possibilities
3. Personal strength
4. Spiritual change
5. Appreciation of life.

In order for PTG to emerge, there is a need to make sure that the level of Post Traumatic Stress does not become too intense or too prolonged. This book provides a number of practical suggestions on ways to turn PTG into concrete actions, and thus, enhance overall well-being. Consider some of the comments offered by individuals who have experienced traumatic and victimizing experiences and who have evidenced *resilience* and *Post Traumatic Growth* (PTG).

"I learned it is not possible to realize personal growth by avoiding or denying my pain. Rather by facing, sharing, working through these negative emotions (guilt, shame, and anger) are preconditions for growth."

"Personal distress and Resilience can co-occur."

"Without emotional distress, I would not have experienced growth."

"I now feel more self-reliant."

"I can now handle adversities and provocations better."

"I can make something positive out of negative events."

"I learned that I am more vulnerable than I thought, but much stronger than I imagined."

"Even though my rules in life have changed, I can handle things better."

"I am more independent."

"I am better at accepting things the way they work out."

"This experience has made me more patient."

"I can endure what cannot be changed."

"I have a greater willingness to express and share my emotions."

"I appreciate each day and the value of life. Life is precious."

"I have a greater sense of openness with others."

"I invest more energy in my family."

"I am more empathetic and understanding of other people's suffering."

"When it comes, I have learned to enjoy my loneliness."

"I am more likely to try new things and try to change things."

"My eyes are wider open. I feel this has been an eye opener for me, and something like a Great Truth about life dawned upon me."

"I can look at life through the lenses of growth, rather than through the lenses of distress and dysfunction."

"Remember that slow can be fast."

"I have a stronger religious faith and a better understanding of spiritual matters."

"My community is closer and more cohesive as a result of this tragedy."

"People say, I am different now, but in a good way."

For further examples of resilience in returning service members and their spouses, visit www.afterdeployment.org and view 29 accounts of *resilience* stories.

