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Simple Tools to Build Resilience in 2026

By Kathleen Harnish McKune
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As sisters, we grew up in a childhood home riddled with multi-generational incest, abuse, and neglect at the hands of our father and paternal grandfather. Our childhood and young adult years required constant vigilance, compromise, and fear, and required remarkable resilience. We survived, we know now, because we grew up in a small western Kansas farming community where people helped each other. Many community members helped us without knowing the extent of what was happening in our home.

Fast forward to today. We are both in our 60s and have the reflective capacity to look back on our resilience journeys, informed by the neuroscience of trauma, and understand how we became so resilient. We are both successful businesswomen and mothers (though dysregulated moms at times, which we will come back to) and together founded our nonprofit, Remarkably Resilient, Inc., with the mission to “empower healing from trauma” because, as we like to say, “It takes all of us to heal each of us.” As we each reset for the year, we want to share with you what our lived experience, informed by the neuroscience of trauma, has taught us about how anyone can strengthen their resilience.

When we talk about trauma and stress, you may hear the term “dysregulated.” This simply means that the nervous system is overac-

tivated – our body is on high alert – making it harder to think clearly, feel safe, or respond intentionally. The good news is that regulation is a skill that can be learned.

In our 2019 book, *Remarkably Resilient: Community Matters*, we share the five R’s of our resilience journeys, informed by what we learned from the neuroscience and neurobiology of trauma. Each R of resilience helped us translate the neuroscience, relate it to our lived experience, and see its role in strengthening resilience.

The Five R’s of Resilience

Relationships. Neuroscience clearly tells us that it takes only ONE safe, loving, consistent adult relationship in a child’s life to strengthen their resilience. Adults are no different. Our lived experience confirms this. We each named that person immediately upon learning this knowledge.

Reset #1: Cultivate your ONES. Reflect on who is/was pivotal in your life and why they made a difference. Reach out and let them know. Think about the ways in which you can interact with those you care about to be their ONE. When all is said and done, it is the people whom you uplift and support along the way that keep your memory and spirit alive in generations to come.

A new year is often framed as a fresh start, but for many people, stress, trauma, and emotional overload don't magically disappear with a new calendar,

~Kathleen Harnish McKune

Response. Neuroscience and neurobiology help us distinguish trauma responses (those involuntary nervous system responses we all know as fight, flight, freeze, and appease) from coping mechanisms (more voluntary strategies used to ease or escape). Taking this knowledge and looking at our lived experience helped us begin to separate our sense of who we are from these trauma responses and unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Reset #2: Choose your Response – that is, when you notice trauma responses and coping mechanisms in yourself or others shift a judgment view of “What’s wrong with me/them?” to a trauma-informed view of “What happened to me/them?” Learn to manage trauma responses and trade out unhealthy coping mechanisms for healthy ones.

Recovery. Psychology and social work science tell us that recovery is a journey, not a destination. It is NOT a straight-line trajectory but rather a roller coaster and a series of learning, moving forward, falling back, starting over, and learning again. Our lived experience mirrors this path as we both have instances of falling backwards – yet each time doesn’t feel as deep as the time before, and we are able to put our recovery knowledge into action quicker.

Reset #3: Create places, spaces, and grace for yourself and others. Shift your paradigm by stepping back and first giving yourself and others grace for the roller coaster path recovery often presents. Next, advocate for places for treatment and recovery and spaces (indoors and outside) that are safe, supportive, and emotionally regulating.

Reflection. Reflection is that purposeful and meaningful pause to observe,

think, consider and learn from what you experienced to move forward with more intentionality and insight. This important skill is how we learn, change, and grow as individuals. It is also how we can discover our WHY or purpose in life. Neuroplasticity tells us that the brain can create new pathways of thought and behavior. Our lived experience echoes this.

In our healing journeys, we each reflected on turning-point moments in our lives and behavioral changes that positively impacted our resilience. Reflection provides us with tools we did not learn in our childhood homes, where survival was the main priority. We are now able to ask open-ended questions that seek a clearer understanding of ourselves, which can allow for deeper connections with others. Questions such as “Why am I feeling this way? What does this mean? What does neuroscience tell me about what I’m experiencing? What do I find calming and soothing? Am I reacting to this because of what is happening in the present, or is this coming up from my past? What kind of impact do I want to have on others’ lives? If my life benefited others, what would I want that to look like?”

Reset #4: Ask open-ended questions with curiosity – and without judgment. Open-ended questions are most powerful when asked in a facilitative style that seeks understanding, versus an accusatory style that seeks to judge. For example, “Can you help me understand a bit more about how you came to that conclusion?” versus “Now, what made you think that?!!” Practice this new communication style, then ask yourself in six months, how has your relationship changed with yourself – and with others?



Healing doesn't have to be overwhelming or expensive – and it isn't about perfection,

-Karen Dickson

Regulation. Bruce Perry, M.D., PhD, one of the leading neuroscientists studying trauma and its impacts, implores us to “Teach emotional regulation to everyone!” Our lived experience concurs. Though we were able to break the cycle of multi-generational incest and abuse in our paternal family, we were dysregulated moms, letting our emotions get the best of us at times.

Everyone gets dysregulated, and when we do, our thinking shifts to the emotional brain and away from the thinking brain. This is not an effective place for sound decision-making. Learning to recognize when you are becoming dysregulated – and finding rhythmic, repetitive activities that calm the nervous system is critical to wellbeing.

Reset #5. Become a regulated human with a full resilience cup! When we decided to share what the neuroscience of trauma teaches us about the impacts of stress and trauma on our bodies and brains, we knew learning about regulation and self-care earlier would have been immensely helpful to our overall well-being. When you recognize that your emotions are getting the best of you, pause and do a regulating activity – anything that you find soothing and calming. Your breath is your most accessible regulating tool. When you feel depleted, take time to fill your resilience cup by doing something that brings you joy or feeds your soul. Nature, connecting with others, and hobbies are some examples of self-care. Do them regularly.

To learn more about our work and the resilience-strengthening tools we have developed, visit our non-profit website at remarkably-resilient.com. Click on the Remarkably Resilient Together® (RRT) tab to learn more about our community-wide campaign to strengthen resilience.

We believe healing is not about perfection or “fixing” yourself – it is about learning how to support your nervous system, build self-awareness, and practice compassion for yourself and others, one moment at a time.

Our RRT campaign starts by teaching emotional regulation and self-care with

- Two decks of cards featuring emotional regulation strategies for “In the Moment” and accessible, low- or no-cost self-care practices to support resilience “Over Time.”
- **A Guided Reflective Journal** that encourages self-awareness, supports emotional regulation, and helps individuals build healthier habits and personal insight through reflection

Together, these tools help users regulate emotions, respond more intentionally to triggers, and keep their “resilience cups” full — whether at home, at work, or in high-stress environments. RRT helps people recognize the strengths they already have and use practical, everyday tools in the moments they need them most. Coming soon: Guided Reflective Journals on each of the five R's of Resilience.



Kathleen Harnish McKune's professional and personal work has always focused on empowering others. Professionally, she is a co-founder and CEO of TeamTech, a Kansas City-based strategic facilitation and leadership training firm whose work embodies trauma-informed principles. She is one of the authors of TeamTech's leadership curriculum, *Everyone A Leader*®, and teaches trauma-informed, facilitative leadership skills at all levels of organizations. Kathleen also serves as CEO of Remarkably Resilient, Inc., a non-profit entity she co-founded in November 2024 with the mission of "Empowering healing from trauma." She and her sister, Karen, provide **Remarkably Resilient and Remarkably Resilient Together**® workshops, all aimed at empowering others on their healing journeys. Kathleen volunteers with Johnson County Corrections and the Kansas Department of Corrections, teaching incarcerated individuals emotional regulation and self-care and sharing the Remarkably Resilient Together materials. She is also a certified HOPE facilitator (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) from Tufts Medical Center

Karen Dickson is co-author of *Remarkably Resilient: Community Matters* and is a former EMT/ER technician and corporate recruiter. She is currently retired and is a practicing Reiki Master in her local community. Karen has spent her lifetime helping others in various capacities and brings that energy and passion to her conversations about their healing journeys. She brings a depth of personal lived experience with trauma, both from her childhood and from her experiences as a volunteer EMT. Since 2019, Karen has been a presenter at various conferences centered around childhood abuse and mental health. Her passion is to help individuals heal and grow, and find the tools and techniques that foster positive changes in their lives and in the lives of those they love and encounter. Karen is the program director for Remarkably Resilient and is a Tufts Medical Center certified HOPE facilitator (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences).

