

Dear Class,

As many of you know I've had breast cancer twice. So everything I write about (and teach), I've had the opportunity to test drive many, many times over (to say the least). I know a lot about the theory of resilience. And I know what works and doesn't work for me to be resilient. Needless to say, I practice what I preach. All of this is to say that as the pandemic wears on and it becomes even more important to be resilient, I worry that it is going to be harder and harder for parents to be resilient. I worry that parents will be too weary to do the hard work necessary to make themselves resilient. I worry that telling parents what to do is just making matters more difficult. So, I've decided not to offer any suggestions this time, instead I want to share what I've learned from my life.

1. When I find what I can control, and let go of what I can't, I'm more resilient. As I've said before I really don't like people telling me what to do (it brings out the two year old in me). What I've learned is that even during those times when it feels like everyone is telling me what to do (and it's in my best interest to heed their advice, even though I'd prefer to do the opposite), I can always find things I can control and that makes me feel better. Remember flexibility is essential to resilience. I might not be able to control the same things I used to control, but I can ALWAYS find something to control. And controlling things is not a dirty word. It's not the same as being controlling which tends to have a negative connotation. Knowing what you can and can not control makes you more resilient. Notice I say knowing what you can and can not control, therein lies the distinction between being controlling (in a bad way) and being resilient.

So during this time, look for what you can control (I guess I am going to offer suggestions, oh well...). Remember it might not be the same thing(s) you used to be able to control, but there is always something. I remember while I was going through treatment, complaining to a friend about how I had lost control over my life, that everyone was telling me what to do. This very wise friend reminded me I had the ultimate control, I could decide to do or NOT do what I was being told to do. I had never thought about that (remember flexibility is important). Those simple words gave me back the power.

So be flexible and look to take back your power by figuring out what you can control and doing so. Just as important, figure out what you can't control and let it go. I can't emphasize enough the importance of doing this. I know when I look to control my behavior and that which I can control, I'm able to be more resilient.

2. When I have realistic expectations, and listen for my thoughts to hear what expectations I'm setting, I'm more resilient. I have absolutely no doubt as to the importance of my thoughts and what I'm telling myself. When I'm upset, it is usually because I'm telling myself something that is making me upset. Like someone or something **SHOULD** or **SHOULD NOT** be doing something or the other. I'd like to say I learned years ago that I really can't control life, my husband, my kids, my friends, my family etc, etc. and that the only thing I can control is myself (aka having realistic expectations). However, truth be told, even though I know I can only control myself I still

like to try controlling everything else. And when I try this, when I tell myself, "This shouldn't be this way, they (it) should be different." I make myself very unhappy.

The expectation of how something should or shouldn't be is not under my control. The only thing I can control is myself and how I should or should not be or think, try as I might, I can't control anything else. So when I tell myself to the contrary I debilitate my resilience. All of this is to say that what I've learned is having realistic expectations works better for me. Realistic expectations for myself, for others and for life. During the difficult times I try not to tell myself I should be happy. I try not to tell myself things should be different. I try not to tell myself that I shouldn't be so miserable. I try to hear my self-talk and keep it realistic and accurate, given the circumstances. And ironically, when I am able to do this, I am able to feel less miserable.

And when I feel less miserable, I am able to gradually feel less and less miserable and surprise of all surprises I usually feel better. So here I want to emphasize the importance of having realistic expectations and listening for your unrealistic self-talk. I know I've said this more than once, but I think it is worth repeating. It is unrealistic to expect to go from unhappy to happy. Real, sustainable change only happens in small increments. I know when I'm realistic about my expectations, when I'm realistic about what I tell myself should or should not be, I'm able to be more resilient.

Well so much for not offering any suggestions, oh well...

Wishing you realistic expectations and awareness of what you can and can not control and the ability to let go of what you can't control,

Susan

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