

### ACTIVITIES TO BOLSTER RESILIENCE AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

In addition to seeking out trauma-informed care, the following activities are designed to build resilience and post-traumatic growth (PTG).

#### RESILIENCE

Resilience is the process of successfully adapting to and bouncing back after challenging life experiences. The following evidence-based concepts and activities can help strengthen resilience within us.

**Build connections:** Connecting with empathetic and understanding people can remind us that we're not alone amid difficulties. Although the pain of traumatic events can lead to the desire for isolation, focus on finding trustworthy and compassionate individuals who can validate our feelings. Alternatively, take part in a trauma peer support group. This can help validate and normalize our emotions which can help us feel less isolated.

**Foster wellness:** Self-care is an essential practice for improving mental health and building resilience. Promoting healthy habits such as proper nutrition, ample sleep, hydration, and regular exercise can strengthen our body to adapt to stress and reduce the toll of emotions like anxiety or depression. For instance, mindfulness, journaling, yoga, and spiritual practices can help build connections and restore hope. We also want to avoid negative outlets such as alcohol and other substances.

**Find purpose:** By volunteering or helping support a friend in their own time of need, we can garner a sense of meaning, self-worth, and connection with others. We can also find purpose by creating a vision statement. This might include working on small steps towards achieving aspirations that move us in the direction of balanced well-being.

**Embrace healthy thoughts:** Maintaining a hopeful outlook by visualizing what we want and focusing on the good in our lives in the present moment can be a positive approach to building resilience. Although we can't always control traumatic emotions and memories from surfacing if they are triggered, we can become mindful that we have control over how we respond to those distressing thoughts and emotions. Through practices that foster greater self-compassion, including creating positive affirmation statements of self-worth and developing a daily gratitude practice, we can help bring about more a positive mindset.

### POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) is part of our natural capacity to make meaning, heal, and learn from hardship, and the following activities are designed to foster it.

**Education:** To achieve growth after a traumatic experience, you may find that you need to rethink your circumstances and challenge your beliefs and assumptions. This process can be confusing and frightening initially and you may find yourself repetitively thinking, *“What’s happening? What should I do now? What will the future look like?”* Eventually, you will learn to develop new thought processes and learn new ways of coping. This can be achieved by seeking treatment with a trauma-informed mental health professional, reading or listening to recommended books about trauma and PTG (*included in the resource handout*), and/or attending peer support groups for traumatized individuals.

**Emotional regulation:** You need to be in the right frame of mind to change, learn, grow, and adapt after a traumatic experience. That means learning to manage negative emotions such as anger, fear, bitterness, and guilt as well as putting failures and losses behind you. Exercise, meditation, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques can help you manage negative emotions and focus on the present.

**Disclosure:** This step involves talking about the traumatic experience and the various ways it has affected you. Describing the experience to others and telling them what you’ve been struggling with — both in the past and in the present — can help you reflect on it and process it. Identifying an individual, you feel safe to share your experience with can help alleviate isolation.

**Service:** In the aftermath of trauma, many people do better if they’re able to help others in their community. For instance, people may choose to help other victims who have had similar experiences or work with organizations that are taking steps to prevent others from experiencing the same trauma. This could take various forms, such as donating money, volunteering time or expertise, or by sharing one’s experiences and advice to improve awareness of the issue.

**Narrative development:** It can be helpful to think about how the traumatic experience has affected the trajectory of your life and brought you to the path you are on. Your story is authentic and sharing how it’s impacted you can help you find meaning in your life. This can be achieved by journaling about the strengths that you have exhibited and continue to exhibit in your healing process and how the traumatic event has brought positive changes to your life.