

## **Well@Work Podcast Season 4, Episode 3 Using Resilience Buddies to Enhance Wellness@Work**

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is made possible by a grant from SAMHSA to the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities and the UK Center on Trauma and Children. On this episode Alex Clark discusses using resilience buddies to enhance wellness at work. And now Alex Clark.

Hello, I'm Alex Clark, a licensed marriage and family therapist at the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. Work related trauma exposure can impact a provider's mental and physical health and world view. Research shows that strong team support can help buffer the impact of secondary traumatic stress, also known as STS. Resilience buddies is an example of a specific strategy to increase peer support in the face of trauma exposure. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences. Resilience buddies represent a conscious effort to move forward in a positive and insightful manner, harnessing resources within and around us to overcome hardship and sustain well-being. Resilience buddies collaborate to set and achieve goals related to wellness. The partnership is a source of support and inspiration. Both partners encourage ongoing self-monitoring and self-directed care. It's important that this relationship is entered into voluntarily, and confidentiality should be maintained to preserve trust and increase efficacy. Often, selecting a buddy and getting started can be the hardest part, but it will be worth the work you put in. Resilience buddies have been shown to increase effectiveness in a wide variety of fields including healthcare, education, business, health and wellness, spirituality, and finance just to name a few. Many professionals have knowledge of self-care practices but often struggle to translate that knowledge into personal practice. Resilience buddies can help professionals create wellness plans and support one another to put their plans into action.

Let's take the example of Claudia, who is a child welfare worker who investigates allegations of child abuse. She is exposed to disturbing situations and stories involving child abuse and neglect on a daily basis. Claudia works long hours in the field and has been feeling overwhelmed and isolated. She's supposed to meet with her supervisor on a weekly basis, but supervision often gets cancelled due to crises. Claudia often thinks about what she hears during her investigations when she's at home trying to decompress. So what can you do if you're experiencing challenges like Claudia? Here's how having a resilience buddy can help.

Tip number one: make this process a priority by taking the time to identify a potential partner. This will be someone around your same level of professional development who can relate to your experiences and that you can trust and respect. Claudia would want to choose a buddy who has a similar role in child welfare, perhaps another worker who does investigations. This person should be able to provide honest feedback and support as you navigate professional stressors. Additionally, a resilience buddy helps affirm your work while keeping things in perspective. Talk to your new resilience buddy about your goals. Your partner will provide support as you discuss your challenges at work and your desires to act. Be specific about the actions you want to take to meet your goals. Your partner will help you take the steps needed to reach them. Schedule a time to meet with your resilience buddy weekly that cannot be easily interrupted. This meeting could be virtual

rather than in person if needed. This time together will become a source of connection that builds resiliency, as resilience increases when we run towards someone else instead of turning away from the challenges.

Tip number two: be honest with yourself and your resilience buddy. Build in a grace period to get to know each other and to begin to identify your resilience goals. Setbacks will happen, and when they do, work together to overcome challenges. Also, speak truth. Don't be afraid to share your thoughts and feelings. Vulnerability, even in small doses, brings us together and helps remind us that we're not alone in facing the challenges of work-related trauma exposure. Next write down your goals and share them with your partner.

Tip number three: put the partnership into action at work. There's a variety of ways to do this. Here's just a few ideas: take a walk outside or engage in mindfulness activities together. Mindfulness walks can be done together via video conferencing if needed. Remind each other to self-reflect during the workday and then share these check-ins with your partner, making time for both persons to check in. For someone like Claudia who works in the field, daily check-ins may happen via email or messenger with a once a week meeting in person. It also helps to process your feelings about the difficult aspects of your work with your resilience buddy using low impact processing techniques, focusing on how you feel as opposed to slinging your colleague with graphic details of trauma exposure that can weigh them down. Build competence by participating together in professional developmental activities. Increased self-efficacy builds resilience, and professional development is always more pleasant with an enjoyable coworker. Lastly, have lunch or take breaks together and have time for non-work related conversations too. These strategies are just a starting place. For more tips to manage stress and build resiliency, visit our website, and remember stay well at Work.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast. Follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website, and of course stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work.