

Emotional Resilience



What is Emotional Resilience?

Emotional resilience is the ability to adapt positively in the face of adversity, stress, or challenges. In the assistance and therapy dog sector, this means staying grounded and emotionally balanced while dealing with the inherent challenges of working with both dogs and people in high-pressure situations.

Building Emotional Resilience

- 1. Cultivate a Growth Mindset:** Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth. Accept that setbacks and difficulties are part of the process and that improvement comes with time, patience, and persistence. For example, a trainer who faces setbacks when a dog doesn't meet a training milestone might view it as a learning experience to adjust methods or better understand the dog's needs.
- 2. Develop Healthy Coping Strategies:** Resilient individuals know how to manage stress effectively. Engaging in practices like mindfulness, journaling, or deep breathing can help regulate emotions and maintain calm in stressful situations. For example, if a trainer is feeling overwhelmed, taking a short walk or practicing deep breathing can help reset their emotional state before resuming training.
- 3. Seek Support and Build Connections:** Strong relationships with colleagues, mentors, or peer groups can provide emotional support and guidance when needed. Resilient workers seek help when they need it and aren't afraid to lean on others. For example, a handler who feels overwhelmed might reach out to a fellow handler to discuss their experiences and share coping tips, knowing they're not alone.
- 4. Set Realistic Expectations:** Being realistic about the challenges you face and setting achievable goals helps maintain emotional balance. Unrealistic expectations can lead to frustration and burnout, so it's important to set goals that are both ambitious and attainable. For example, a trainer might set a goal of working on one specific skill per week with a dog rather than trying to tackle multiple behaviors in a single session.

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5. **Maintain Work-Life Balance:** Emotional resilience depends on knowing when to take breaks. Ensuring that there's time for rest and relaxation outside of work is essential to avoid emotional exhaustion. For example, scheduling time off or engaging in activities that aren't related to work can help handlers and trainers refresh mentally and emotionally.
6. **Reflect and Learn:** Take time to reflect on challenging situations and identify what worked well and what didn't. This reflective practice can help improve future responses to stressors and enhance emotional resilience. For example, after a difficult training session, a trainer might reflect on what strategies helped and where they can adjust in future sessions.

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Building emotional resilience enables handlers, trainers, and others in the sector to cope with the inherent challenges of working with assistance dogs. This improves their ability to manage stress, adapt to changing situations, and ultimately provide better support to both dogs and clients.

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