

**THE RESILIENT COUPLE:
NAVIGATING TOGETHER THROUGH COVID-19
Drs. Lynn and Philip Levy**

We hear a great deal about resilience during this challenging period of Coronavirus – how individuals cope, manage the daily stressors, adapt to new work/life challenges, and do their best to maintain good health along with a sense of emotional well-being and equilibrium.

Resilience is the ability to bounce forward in the face of a challenge that upends your life.

What is unique about this situation is that it is new to virtually everyone; we are all experiencing it for the first time and, therefore, we cannot apply knowledge and skills that are familiar to us, but must adapt what we know for a situation that is unknowable. We do not know how long it will last or what life will look like on the other side of this, yet we have no choice but to go forward and find useful skills that will not only sustain us but allow us to overcome this situation. Hopefully, we can navigate together to avoid the disaster of a crushing tsunami.

While much has been written about individual resilience, it is equally important, especially as couples and families are unexpectedly quarantined in their homes, **to address resilience as a couple, and family during this unprecedented time.**

When we wrote **The Resilient Couple: Navigating Together Through Life**, it was intended to be a guide for couples to develop the skills to manage the daily stressors and unexpected crises of life. We referred to our Tsunami, our personal crisis, and how we overcame it and thrived as a couple and family. Today, many couples and families are experiencing COVID-19 as a Tsunami. They are faced with uncertainty, fear, anxiety, financial pressure and so much more, all while

having to “physically distance”. Now more than ever, the skills of being a **Resilient Couple** are essential to well-being, happiness, and family survival.

We introduced the acronym, **RED: Respect, Empathy, and Dialogue** in *The Resilient Couple*; so many couples contacted us to let us know how useful these three simple directives had become to their relationships. In such close quarters as we find ourselves today, many couples are stretched to the limit; home-schooling their children, working virtually from home, and trying to provide the essential safety measures for their family, including food, financial stability, and good health. We recognize that this can be quite overwhelming.

In the face of this pandemic, many individuals and communities have demonstrated extraordinary strength and resilience, and we marvel at their ability to do so, but there are many of us who struggle to find that inner strength and resilience and whose hopefulness and stability are being challenged. Loss is deeply personal; what constitutes an excruciating challenge for one person, couple or family may seem relatively minor to another. Are those people merely blessed with an optimistic personality that sees the glass perpetually half full? Perhaps, but likely they are drawing upon other resources they have gathered over the years. We define resilience as the **sum total of the strengths within the relationship**. At this time, our focus must be on how to share those strengths as a couple and family – the commitment at this time must be to the success of the couple or family unit, not solely to the individual members. If you possess a particular strength that your partner does not, **SHARE IT!!** Demonstrate generosity, patience, and kindness.

We have some tips that may be useful:

Respect one another and your different viewpoints

Empathize – demonstrate sensitivity and concern by placing yourself in your partner’s position

Dialogue – keep communication lines open. Reflect back what you have heard. Practice Active Listening. Start your sentences with “I”, not you. “Start with a stroke”

Accept Influence – Allow your partner to influence your thinking. Remember, we are all reacting to this pandemic differently. Be open to your partner’s ideas.

Commit to the Success of the Relationship – if you can make it through this environment, you will have built a strong foundation to be a resilient couple.

Give Up on Winning and Being Right – strive for Win/Win Resolutions that meet both your needs.

Trust – this is a time to ramp up trust in your partner. Give one another the benefit of the doubt, whenever possible.

Intent vs. Impact – Try to remember that your partner’s intent may not be what you have experienced. Assume positive intent while communicating the actual impact.

Control Your Impulses – especially anger.

Practice Forgiveness – this is important for you and your partner. It feels good to forgive.

Take Breaks – Remember, we are all experiencing frayed nerves at times. Take a Long, Deep Breath and find a diversion (exercise, meditation, music, art, games, cooking) from the immediate stressor.

Tell “Your Story” – what brought you together is what will sustain you through this crisis.

Stay Connected! You are physically distanced from your friends and loved ones, but you need not be socially and emotionally distanced. Reach out by phone, text, or other virtual outlets.

We never needed technology as much as we do now! Use it!

These are unprecedented and extraordinary times, which are challenging us as individuals, couples and families– we believe that we can sustain ourselves by gathering strength from one another and building resilience together. Our ability to succeed will be determined by the resilience we develop as couples and families.

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