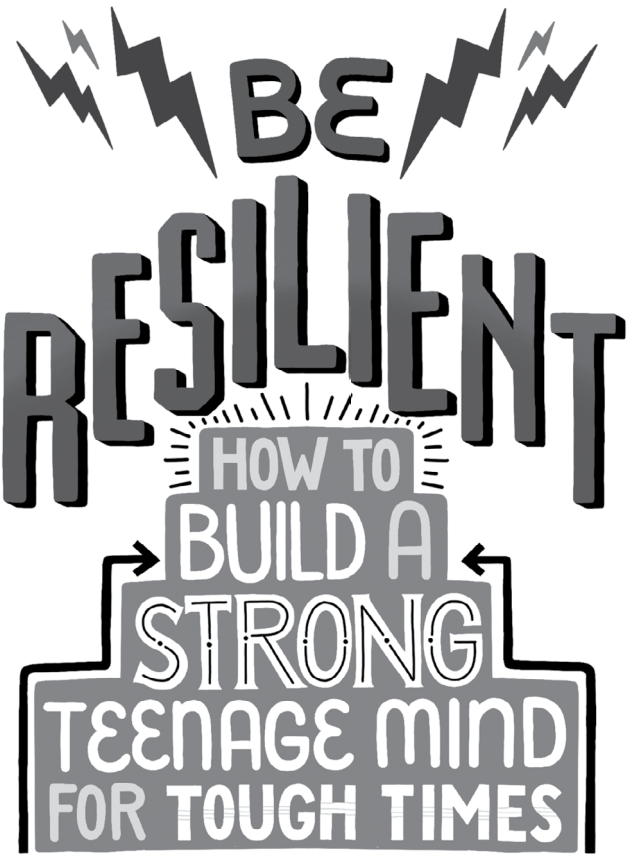
NICOLA MORGAN





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To Wyn, Bethan and Megan, heroes of resilience,
with love.

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It's one of the hardest facts of life that every human must learn: bad things can happen. From small upsets or disappointments to major, life-changing distresses, they can happen to anyone, whether we "deserve" them or not, and we don't know when or what they will be. Our challenge is to know this and yet not live in fear, not ruin every happy moment by dwelling on bad things that might – but might not – be round the corner. Because wonderful things happen, too! We have to be realistic and ready, but positive and confident in our ability to stay strong. That's resilience.

Our lives are like an ocean and we are the small boat trying to cross safely. Sometimes the water is calm and we sail easily, without a care in the world. But storms can come, sometimes out of a blue sky. The storms can be small and brief or long and treacherous. Just as some parts of the ocean are more dangerous than others, some parts of our lives are more difficult. And not all oceans are the same, just as some people's lives have more challenges than others.

Teenage years are often particularly rocky. Younger children can face challenges, too, but it's easier for adults to reassure or distract them and they often feel secure in the knowledge that their adults can sort things out.

But you, an adolescent, are not so easily reassured. You've learnt that no one can be entirely safe from harm and life cannot be risk-free; you've noticed that good and innocent people

can have sadness or disaster; you might have experienced it yourself. Your teenage brain allows you to understand big concepts, to discuss topics such as war, disease, death, suicide, abuse and injustice – and you need to be allowed to have those discussions, even though they can be frightening and painful.

Adolescence can be exciting but it can also be scary. You might not have the reassuring comfort of adults and now you're trying to work out how to find your way without the support young people deserve. When I was a teenager, we were in the Cold War, which coloured my fears. I had horrible war-related dreams and I needed my parents to reassure me, to put my fears in context and to tell me that all would *probably* be well. And they needed to push my mind in optimistic directions, towards success, knowledge, work, the things I could control rather than the things I couldn't. That helped me build resilience, though resilience was not a word that was much used.

You might be worried about terrorism or illness: as I write this we are living through the COVID-19 outbreak that began in 2020 and our lives are dramatically affected by various restrictions and lockdowns and all the worries associated with the virus. Maybe you have other worries, too: something going on in your family, or with a friend, or your schoolwork. You could have small fears or big fears but they can all seem big at the time, especially because, while we are in any particular crisis, we don't *know* what the outcome will be.

If we are the boat on the ocean of our life, we need to be built strongly enough to withstand storms – small or big – that we can't foresee. Not only built well but looked after, repaired

and strengthened regularly.

We must learn not only to navigate the bad weather but also to repair any damage after each battering wave. And perhaps to come back stronger, so that we are even better able to deal with the next one. Humans are learning creatures, adapting and using what we've learnt to become stronger, fitter, healthier. That's great resilience.

Life isn't just about surviving bad things, though: it's also about pleasure, success, appreciation, fulfilment, purpose, excitement. If all we are doing is being prepared for possible negatives, we'll miss the actual positives. If survival means feeling constantly anxious, unconfident, ready for disaster, that's not really living.

In short, we need to build resilient bodies and minds, create in ourselves the strength to withstand any storms but also to bounce back and enjoy the calm rhythms and the sunlight glinting off the water. That's living well. That's being brilliantly resilient.

I can't know what challenges you face now and no one knows what is round the corner for you. Sometimes, you'll have your family or friends or trusted adults to support you and share your challenges; at other times, you might be more alone. Sometimes everyone around you will be experiencing a difficult time together, though it will always be slightly different for each individual. Sometimes you might have something bad going on inside your own head, perhaps accompanied by dark thoughts you deal with alone at night. But whatever these difficulties, whether personal or shared,

whether short-lived or lingering, whether small or huge, the resilience you can grow now will help you get through and also give you the strength to face forward and welcome all the wonderful things in your future with optimism and bravery and hope. To put fears in perspective and not let them spoil your life.

Be Resilient offers you the practical tools to build a truly resilient life, with both your mind and body.

In this book, you will find:

- All about what resilience is.
- Five areas of your life where you can build your resilience: your support network, skills, coping strategies, courage and future.
- Practical activities to build each of those areas.
- Fictional characters who are struggling with resilience, for you to think about and empathise with. You might identify with them yourself.
- Reflection activities so you can say how you'd help those characters – and you'll find my suggested responses, too.
- Diary activities – things you can, if you wish, record in a notebook or diary to help you see how you're building your resilience. You could buy or find a beautiful notebook, or just open a new document on your computer or use an app on your phone. You can obviously write anything you want in your diary – it's for your eyes only – but I will give you some prompts and ideas at the end of each chapter.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience literally means "the ability to rebound or bounce back". It comes from a Latin word – resilire, meaning "to bounce back" – and has been used since the seventeenth century. But for the first couple of hundred years it was only used to refer to objects, describing whether they could bounce or spring back to their original shape after being stretched or bent. Today when we talk about an object being resilient, we refer to how well it stands up to or recovers from various attacks. Some types of stone or wood are more resilient to water than others; some plants are resilient to frost or drought and others are not. The word wasn't used to describe people until the nineteenth century.

When we talk about people being resilient, we mean they have the ability to bounce back after a problem or setback; to recover their confidence and optimism so that they can face the future positively.

The problem or setback could be illness (mental or physical), distress and sadness, fear, loss of money or job, criticism or failure. It could be small, such as getting a low mark in a test or

being told off; or big, such as failing to achieve something that you'd worked hard at for years, or breaking up with a friend; or even bigger, such as being abused or dealing with the death of someone close. Different people will feel each of these problems in their own way, depending on many circumstances: for example, when parents split up, this can be a worse experience for some people than others. Any upsetting experience you can think of will not be felt in the same way by everyone.

We also talk about communities being resilient. A family might need to bounce back after a loss of income or a death or serious illness. A company might need to be resilient against financial recession or rent or taxes going up. A school might need to be resilient after a tragic event happening to someone in it. Your group of friends could be resilient if, for example, you don't fall apart when you have an argument or upset. (On the other hand, it's also quite natural for friendship groups to separate and change over time so this is not a judgement.)

This book is about you and your resilience. I'm sure you have already experienced setbacks of some sort. Some of you will have had some really difficult things to deal with. You might feel you've coped well or you might feel very fragile and perhaps frightened about bad things happening again. Everyone is different in the challenges they have experienced, the support they have around them and how they feel when they think about problems that might be ahead. Everyone has different levels of anxiety and amounts of existing resilience, different pasts, presents and futures. None of that is your "fault" but this book will help you overcome any problems you might have had and feel stronger for the future.

One thing about humans is that *everything* changes us. We will never be *exactly* the same after an event as we were before. So being resilient doesn't mean bouncing back to being precisely the same as you were: it means being just as strong or even stronger than before. It often means accepting change and seeing it as growth: "I dealt with that – it was hard but I learnt something about myself from it and I know I can deal with tough things now."

This book will show you how to do that, in practical ways that you can use throughout your life, whatever age you are.

Other words for resilient

When I was investigating the word "resilient", I came across lots of synonyms – words that mean the same – and I thought you might like to see some of them. They will set you off feeling positive about resilience, which sounds quite a dull word!

Springy, bouncy, elastic, flexible, rubbery, stretchy, whippy, supple, strong, adaptable, irrepressible, hardy, quick to recover, stretchable, pliable, tough.

Which is your favourite? I like irrepressible, which literally means "you can't keep me down".

Is resilience a fixed personality trait?

Most psychologists – experts in human behaviour – now believe

that resilience is not a fixed aspect of personality and that we can learn to be more resilient. Although it sometimes looks as though some people just are naturally more resilient than others, this is not true. Resilience may be *easier* for some people than for others, for various reasons.

Your resilience may be different from someone else's at this moment because of factors such as:

- Whether lots of negative things or lots of positive things have happened in your life.
- Whether the negative things feel as though they've dominated your life – or there's been one big negative thing that you haven't been able to shake off.
- How the adults around you helped you process negative experiences.
- Whether the adults in your life display resilience themselves.
- Whether the adults in your life have shown you that you can make good choices and that those choices will make a difference – or whether you've learnt that you have no control and everything must be done for you and happen to you.

Those factors, which you have no control over, can affect your mindset. For example, they might make you tend to explain bad events through a self-blaming, negative, fatalistic filter ("It's my fault or I'm just an unlucky person") rather than with a positive attitude ("Well, that happened – how can I deal with it?").

How you *explain* your experiences in your head can affect your resilience. This is because resilience is in your mind and your mind contains language. The thoughts you have and the way you talk to yourself make a difference to how you feel and how you feel makes a difference to how you act. Thinking, feeling and acting are all tied together. So the words you use in your head – your thoughts – make a difference.

However, personality can also play a part in how easy or hard it is to be resilient. For example, if you are by nature a worrier, you might dwell more on negative situations. Or, if you are a particularly caring or sensitive person, you might be more affected by distressing events than someone else and therefore could have a more difficult task to overcome them.

On the other hand, lots of people would argue that many "personality traits" are things we have developed and learnt, rather than them being fixed and inborn. For example, a person might develop perfectionist tendencies after watching a parent behave like that; or after experiencing praise when doing something very well and wanting that praise again; or seeing an older sibling praised for an achievement that the younger one can't manage; or after hearing unintended messages about perfection from the adults around them, or on television or social media.

Human behaviours are caused by *many* things, including emotions, temptations, biological instincts or reflexes, behaviours of the people we see, events that happen to us, and aspects of our personalities that we have either been born with or developed during our lives up to this moment.

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This book springs organically from a tangled accumulation of wisdom and ideas from everything and everyone I've read, agreed with and listened to over my life. But if it were not for one person, it would still be tangled: my perceptive and clever editor, Alice Primmer. Thank you! You did it again.