



AzMAT Mentors Program Provider Collaboration Quick Guide #6 *Identifying and Affirming Patients Strengths and Resiliency Factors*

The AzMAT Mentors Program aims to increase capacity for offering opioid use disorder (OUD) prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. This quick guide is a tool to assist all medication assisted treatment (MAT) providers in understanding, identifying, and promoting resilience in patients. We recommend experienced providers use this when collaborating with less experienced MAT providers.

Defining Terms:

■ **Resilience** is the ability to “successfully adapt to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands”.¹

■ **Protective factors** enhance one’s ability to be resilient.

Protective factors may include:

- Individual Factors: personal identity, a feeling of power and control over one’s life, a feeling of self-worth, good coping and problem-solving skills, a positive outlook for the future.²
- Family Factors: trusting relationships, a safe environment, good goal-setting and decision-making skills.²
- Community Factors: involvement in the community and activities that give the individual opportunities to develop positive relationships, a sense of belonging.²

■ **Risk factors** are attitudes, beliefs, or environmental circumstances that can create stress for an individual and affect their ability to be resilient.

Risk factors may include:

- Negative emotionality, conflict in relationships, trouble with social determinants of health (safe housing and transportation, education, job opportunities, income, access to nutritious foods and opportunities for physical activity, clean water).³

Understanding the key terms are important for developing treatment plans that enhance resilience and protective factors. During collaborative consultations it might be helpful to have these key terms readily available. Then, determine how they can be incorporated in treatment plans. See next section.

What are some strategies for developing a strength-based treatment plan?

Search For Strengths

It can be common for providers and patients to focus on health deficits.⁴ Identifying and affirming patients strengths and resiliency factors means taking a strengths-based approach to facilitate healing. Strengths include personal assets such as faith, use of humor, flexibility, positive outlook, and close relationships with friends or family, as well as external resources such as ability to access community resources for health.⁴ A “search for strengths” approach helps providers identify resilience factors in patients:⁵

Search for Strengths:⁵

- Patients can have many different strengths that, when realized, can lead to resilience. A conversation with the patient can help the patient identify the strengths they already possess and build resilience based on these strengths.⁵

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- Providers can ask patients about their passionate interests, committed values, small daily activities that they enjoy, or positive sustained habits.⁵ By discussing daily activities that the patient enjoys or ways that the patient feels accomplished in their daily life, the provider is able to identify strength and resiliency factors. Strengths can be identified in these daily experiences and should be brought to the patients attention.
- Patients can be directed to discuss positive life experiences to find strength factors. Choosing to search for strengths in positive areas of a patient’s experiences is more likely to reinforce resilient behaviors.⁵
- Patients may discuss obstacles that they face in these daily activities, and attention should be brought to how they persist and demonstrate the resilience to continue their interests, daily activities, or positive habits in the face of obstacles.⁵
 - To learn more about searching for patient strengths, look here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cpp.1795>

*“Obstacles are the window into resilience because there is no need to be resilient until one encounters difficulties”.*⁵

After strength and resiliency factors have been identified, the provider has the opportunity to assist the individual in transitioning these strengths into general resilience strategies:

- Take the strengths identified by the individual and create a general plan for how these strengths can be utilized to handle obstacles. For example, if an individual identifies having a good sense of humor and a strong relationship with a family member as strengths, a plan could be made to find humor in difficult situations, or the individual could plan to talk with the family member they are close with.
- Write the plan in the individuals own words, as the individual is more likely to be invested in and commit to a plan that they created.⁵

Providers have the opportunity to help the individual understand how mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can promote resiliency:

- Practicing mindfulness is a technique for building resilience. Being mindful means having a “non-judgmental, non-reactive, present-centered attention and metacognitive awareness of cognition, emotion, sensation, and perception.”⁶
- Practicing mindfulness can help patients cope with stress, negative experiences, and substance use impulses.⁶
- Practicing MBIs decreases stress reactivity which allows the individual to practice resilience in situations that might lead to maladaptive behaviors.⁶
- Utilizing “techniques like mindful breathing, body scan, and mindfulness of everyday life activities to de-automatize substance use habits, and strengthen self-regulatory capacity.”⁶
- Utilizing mindfulness programs or apps, which may include meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises.
 - To learn more about mindfulness meditation in the treatment of substance use disorders, look here: <https://doi.org/10.2147/SAR.S145201>
 - Please also refer to Quick Guide #5: *Wellness and Well-being for Healthcare Providers* found on the AzMAT Mentors website here, <https://crh.arizona.edu/mentor> or directly here, https://crh.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2023-07/230726_ProviderFlyer_Wellness_Quick_Guide_508.pdf

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Self-Care and Resiliency:

Self-care is a critical component of building resilience, and it involves practices that maintain or improve one's physical, emotional, and mental wellness.⁷ Practicing self-care can assist in finding healthy ways to manage and cope with stress.

- Patients can practice self-care to promote resiliency.⁸ Even small acts of self-care can make a big difference. Self-care strategies include:
 - Reflecting and journaling to help to identify successful strategies for dealing with difficult situations.⁸
 - Setting goals and priorities to help alleviate stress. It is important to try and be mindful of what has been accomplished at the end of the day, instead of what has not.⁷
 - Practicing gratitude and positive thinking by identifying and challenging negative and unhelpful thoughts can improve one's ability to cope with stress.⁷
 - Eating a nutritious and well balanced diet.⁷
 - Getting an adequate amount of sleep.⁷
 - Getting regular physical activity and exercise.⁷

Cultural Considerations:

Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes who are resilient and have cultural traditions and practices that serve as protective factors.⁹ Native American communities have seen a 39% increase in overdose deaths in one year (2019-2020).¹⁰ Engaging Indigenous populations to connect to their culture and community can bring a sense of healing and is best practice. Here are some ways providers can achieve this:

- Address the patient's sense of community and connectedness. A sense of community allows for positive role models, advice, and emotional assistance during the recovery journey.¹¹ Many resilience factors can be found in a patient's relationship to culture and can be rooted in community and connectedness.
- Understand cultural values and the patient's connection to Indigenous traditions and history.
- Discuss the value of cultural connectedness with the patient. Cultural values can be protective against substance use disorders by creating a support system in the community, increasing self-awareness and identity, and providing alternative therapies.¹¹
- Understand that positive patient relationships with health care providers "involve communication that is open, honest, and respectful".¹²
- Employ communication strategies that consider the patient's cultural values and preferences.¹²
 - To learn more about resiliency specific to Indigenous communities, look here: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2019.0017> and <https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2022.83.613>
 - Please also refer to Quick Guide #2: *Improving Cultural Humility to Better Serve Diverse Populations* found on the AzMAT Mentors website here, <https://crh.arizona.edu/mentor> or directly here, https://crh.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2022-09/20220922-ProviderFlyer_Culture_Tool-2.pdf

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