



CULTIVATING RESILIENCE

ROOTED SELF

a self-paced guide

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Welcome



I wasn't looking for a life lesson the day I started clearing my Florida yard. I was just pulling back overgrown foxtail ferns when I noticed small, white bulbs tucked quietly beneath the soil.

These tiny bulbs are a botanical powerhouse - a built-in storage system that holds water and nutrients so the plant doesn't just survive tough conditions, but thrives through them.

Standing there in the heat, dirt on my hands, I had to ask:
What is storing our reserves when life gets dry?

We all face "dry seasons" - loss, transitions, or moments that knock the wind out of us. We can't always control when they arrive, but we can build the reserves that sustain us through them.

This guide is an invitation to build yours. Move at your own pace; there is no right or wrong way to do this. The goal is simply to deepen your understanding of your own inner strength.

Take it slow. Be curious. Let's begin.

I'm glad you're starting this journey.

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ROOTED: THE BIOLOGY OF RESILIENCE

Your nervous system is a lot like the roots of plants and trees.

Just as roots provide nourishment and stability for a plant's growth, your nervous system supports and grounds you, helping everything else function properly. It acts as the bridge between your mind and body, constantly sending signals back and forth. At its core, it's always scanning your environment and your internal state for one thing: safety.

Your nervous system's main job is to determine when it is safe to relax, connect with others, and grow. It also decides when it needs to activate fight, flight, or freeze responses in order to protect you and help you respond to potential threats.

In this self-paced course, we will work together to strengthen your internal wiring so you can move from simply reacting to life to intentionally navigating it. We'll build your resilience through five essential pillars:

- Defining the goal
- Foundations: Your Internal Garden
- The Storm: Biology of Stress
- The Interval & the 15-minute Rule
- Landscapping Your Internal Garden

Note: This is for educational purposes, not a substitute for therapy.

If you are in an emotional storm, help is available:

Emergency: 911 | FL 211: Dial 2-1-1 | Crisis Lifeline: 988 | Text Line: 741741

Part one:

DEFINING THE GOAL



Maybe you've heard it before: "Just calm down" or "Try a coping skill." In a difficult moment, that advice can feel hollow. That is because a coping skill isn't just a task to check off - it's a way of working with your biology, not against it.

Think of it like watering a plant: if the water doesn't reach the roots, it can't nourish it. Your nervous system works in a similar way. We can try different actions or activities to regulate ourselves, but if we don't have a clear sense of our intention or a plan for how to work with what's really going on, those efforts won't truly nourish or support lasting change.

This isn't about fixing yourself; it's about understanding how you work. The goal of resilience isn't to make the stress disappear - it's to ensure you have the support you need to move through it.

You can start right now with these small, simple "micro-practices":

- **The Heart Connection:** Place your hand over your heart. Feel its steady rhythm. Take a slow inhale... and an even slower exhale. Let your body register: I'm here.
- **The Butterfly Hug:** Cross your arms, hands on opposite shoulders. Gently tap - left, right, left, right. This rhythm tells your nervous system: You're safe enough.
- **Gentle Movement:** Slowly turn your head side to side. Don't force it; just notice. Where is there tension? Where is there space?



GROUNDING CHECK:

Real change doesn't happen during a crisis; it happens in the small, quiet moments when you choose to check in with yourself. Let's look at what you just experienced.

What worked for you? Of the three practices we just tried, which one felt the most natural?

- The Heart Connection
- The Butterfly Hug
- Gentle Movement

The Release: Did you notice a specific moment where you felt your body let go? Maybe your shoulders dropped, you took a deeper breath, or you just felt a bit more steady. That's your nervous system shifting out of "alert" mode and back into balance.

What did you notice? When you slowed down to move your head side-to-side, what did you learn about how you're feeling right now? Often, we carry tension we aren't even aware of until we pause to look for it.

The 60-Second Plan: You don't need an hour of free time to see results. You just need a minute of consistency.

- Which of these tools can you fit into your normal day?
- Try doing the Heart Connection while you wait for your coffee, or the Butterfly Hug before you walk into your house at the end of the day.

Which one of these will you try for just 60 seconds tomorrow?

Part Two:

FOUNDATIONS: YOUR INTERNAL GARDEN



In the beginning, we explored how your nervous system acts like the root system of a garden - hidden, intricate, and essential for sustaining life. Much like a gardener tending to soil, we can build a reserve within our bodies. This internal reservoir is what supports our growth through heavy seasons of loss, transition, and stress.

But even with a strong reserve, there are moments when our growth feels stunted. We notice the second a phone screen cracks or a warning light flickers on the car dashboard, but the signals from our brain are much quieter. They often go unnoticed or unrecognized because they are subtle and internal. To understand these signals, we must meet the two "characters" of your nervous system:

- **The Cortex (Your Reflective Layer):** The prefrontal cortex is the part of you that is thoughtful, intentional, and self-aware. When this character is in the lead, your "root system" is in a state of active growth.
- **The Amygdala (Your Protective Core):** Deeper inside sits the amygdala. This is your built-in security system. It is fast, powerful, and purely focused on survival.

Our behavior, emotions, and thoughts are fundamentally impacted by which "brain" is online at any given moment. Both are good and necessary for our survival, but understanding how to work with them to support our actions and abilities is essential to our growth.



JOURNAL ACTIVITY

Because internal shifts often go unrecognized, we must practice intentional noticing. This activity is about the process of awareness, not the final product - use these questions to decode your body's signals in real-time.

The Reflective State (Cortex)

- When do you notice times of greatest clarity?
- What does your environment look like in those moments?
- Recall a time it felt easy to see multiple points of view.
- What did your body feel like in that moment?
- What specific activities seem to "invite" your reflective brain to stay online?

The Protective State (Amygdala)

- Recall a recent moment of tension (tight shoulders, chest, or jaw).
- What happened just before you noticed that sensation?
- When did your voice last become sharp or strained?
- What was the "soil" of that environment (e.g., a specific person, a deadline, or noise)?

The Survival Impulse:

- When have you felt an urgent need to move fast, even without a true emergency?
- When have you felt a desperate need to be "right" or to convince others at all costs?
- When have you felt extreme exhaustion or a sudden desire to "shut down" and disappear?

Recognition is the first step toward tending your internal garden with grace.

Part Three:

THE STORM: THE BIOLOGY OF STRESS



Your body is constantly scanning the "soil" of your environment for threats.

When your amygdala senses a threat - whether it's a car swerving or a critical tone in a conversation - it takes priority.

It doesn't ask for permission; it initiates a physiological takeover.

This isn't just a mood; it is a chemical shift designed to ensure you survive the moment. Because this process happens so quickly, it often goes unrecognized until we are already in the middle of a reaction:

- **The Chemical Flood:** Your system is flooded with stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline.
- **The Physiological Shift:** Your heart rate increases and breathing becomes shallow. Your brain literally diverts energy away from the "Reflective" cortex to power the "Protective" amygdala.
- **The Cool Down:** Much like soil takes time to absorb a sudden downpour, your body takes time to process these chemicals. Your "thinking" brain cannot fully come back online until the chemical wave has passed.

Choosing to understand your reactions rather than fear them is a courageous start. It's the shift from self-criticism to soul-tending, allowing your foundation to mend with the patience it deserves.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY



Now that we are learning the biological "why" behind our internal landscape, we can move from theory to practice. We are going to take a break to check in with your body right now to help you reconnect with your reflective brain and signal safety to your system.

The Check-In

Take a few moments to move through these three layers of awareness:

- **Physical Scan:** Feet: Notice the weight of your feet on the floor. Are your toes curled or relaxed? Wiggle them once, then let them be heavy.
- **Cognitive Scan:** Observe your thoughts without judgment. Are your beliefs about yourself today coming from a place of protection (fear/judgment) or reflection (curiosity/growth)?
- **Sensory Action:** Take a sip of cold water. Focus entirely on the sensation - the temperature and the swallow - as it moves through your system.

I invite you to softly witness the next shift in your inner world, noticing the moment you move from open reflection into a protective brace. Naming this transition with compassion empowers you to pause and choose the most nourishing way to support your system in real time.

Part four:

THE INTERVAL & THE 15-MINUTE RULE



In the wild, animals "shake off" the intense energy used to meet a threat. As humans, we often remain still during stress, leaving adrenaline and cortisol trapped in our systems. These substances don't simply evaporate; they must be metabolized by your body.

The 15-Minute Rule

It takes roughly 15 minutes for your system to physically clear a chemical flood of stress hormones. How you respond in this window is vital; your reactions can either act as a bridge toward calm or keep the stress response growing.

Factors that keep stress hormones rising:

- **Negative self-talk:** Fueling the fire with harsh inner criticism.
- **Catastrophizing:** Assuming the worst-case scenario is inevitable.
- **Mental Replay:** Obsessively reviewing the event or "scripting" future arguments.
- **Physical Bracing:** Holding your breath or keeping your muscles tightly clenched.
- **"Shoulding":** Pressuring yourself with thoughts like, "I should be handled this better."

The Nurturing Process

Trust the timing. It takes both time and intentional action to guide your system back to a state of calm. The way we respond to ourselves in these moments - with intentional compassion - can significantly decrease the stress response.

Self-reflection



When stress feels heavy, how you speak to yourself determines how you recover. Self-compassion is a functional tool: it helps you work with your stress response to settle your nervous system, rather than fighting it and making the pressure feel even bigger.

Check in with your internal state without judgment:

- Is my inner dialogue helping me navigate this, or is it adding a second layer of stress to the original problem?
- Am I reacting to what is actually happening, or to a "worst-case" story I've created in my head?

What would it be like to try a New Narrative?

I am human; this is learning. It's uncomfortable and I trust myself to get through it.

I don't have to have the 'right' reaction. I just need to be here with myself.

This is a moment of struggle, not a lifetime of failure. I can handle this one step at a time.

Compassionate Action

Kindness acts as a release valve for stress. What is one small way to show yourself compassion in the next five minutes?

Part five:

LANDSCAPPING YOUR INTERNAL MAP



By naming the depth of your experience, you can better understand how stress moves through your system. On this scale, 0 is deeply rooted calm, and 100 is the most intense storm you have ever weathered.

- 0–20 | Deeply Rooted: Your system feels flexible, present, and safe. Your roots are secure, and you are open to growth.
- 20–40 | Stirring Soil: You notice a light breeze in your internal landscape. This is the time for gentle tending - perhaps a deep breath or a quiet moment of awareness.
- 40–60 | The Rising Gale: The wind is picking up; your heart rate may increase and thoughts begin to race. Your roots are being tested - it's time to "drop the anchor" and find your center.
- 60–80 | The Pounce: The storm is here. As you cross the 70 mark, your "Logic Threshold" begins to fade. Your focus shifts away from reasoning and entirely toward stabilizing your system.
- 80–100 | The Flood: You are in survival mode, and the landscape is overwhelmed. This level requires immediate physical safety, stillness, and protection until the waters recede.

The goal isn't to hit zero instantly, but to get your "alarm system" and "logical center" talking again. By identifying where you are, you can utilize specific tools to support your nervous system and empower your brain to shift from survival mode back to intentional control.

Measuring Distress



Awareness of how stress feels in your body empowers you to work with your nervous system instead of fighting it. Identifying these states allows you to settle your system rather than letting the pressure grow.

Check in with your mind and body. Can you name a specific time when you have felt in these zones?

100 - Peak Distress: Your highest stress. What does this feel like in your body?
Racing heart, feeling trapped, or shutdown?

80 - High Intensity: You are "bracing." What is the first thing you lose access to here?
Loss of patience, clear logic, or deep breath?

60 - The Tipping Point: Crossing from "busy" to "distressed."
What does your "Mental Replay" or "Shoulding" sound like?

40 - Manageable Friction: Pressure is present, but you can still pivot.
What is the "story" you are telling yourself at this level?

20 - Light Awareness: You aren't at a 0, but you feel the weight.
What are the small signs you are drifting away from rest?

0 - Deep Rest: A time you felt truly peaceful. What are the physical sensations here?
Stillness, steady breath, or a quiet mind

By naming these levels, you move from being overwhelmed by stress to observing it, giving you the clarity to choose a response that supports your well-being.

Bonus:

COPING SKILLS



Let's be real: there are far too many coping skills out there to fit into a single guide. The trick isn't knowing every single one; it's making a mental note of what actually works for you.

One specific tool from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is incredibly helpful to keep in your back pocket for those moments when stress feels like a total emergency. It's called the TIPP skill.

The TIPP Skill

- **T: Temperature:** Splash your face with cold water, drink cold water, put an ice back on the back of your neck, or hold an ice cube.
- **I: Intense Exercise:** Give your "fight or flight" energy an exit. Spend 1–2 minutes doing jumping jacks, a quick sprint, or heavy wall pushes.
- **P: Paced Breathing:** Slow your breath down. Try inhaling for 4 seconds and exhaling for 6. That longer exhale sends a direct signal to your brain that you are safe.
- **P: Paired Muscle Relaxation:** Tense a muscle group (like your shoulders or fists) as hard as you can while inhaling, then release the tension completely as you exhale.

Remember, the goal isn't to make the stress disappear instantly - it's to lower the intensity just enough to help you navigate the situation.

Pro Tip: You don't need to do all four! Most people find that one specific letter of TIPP is their "magic button." Which one sounds like it would work best for you?

Conclusion



Thank you for taking the time to walk through this guide with me. It's been a privilege to share this space with you as you learn to nourish your roots.

In this guide, we've looked at how your nervous system actually works and practiced ways to work with it instead of fighting against it. We've explored coping skills that help you move from "bracing" back to a place of rest.

Reading through these pages is a beautiful start - it's the beginning of a journey that allows you to strengthen your foundation so you're ready for whatever life brings.

We know that life is filled with both the good and the hard. This work is about preparing you to fully soak up the joyful moments and stay resilient during the storms. Like a palm tree, you're learning how to sway with the wind without breaking; and like a redwood, you're becoming deeply grounded in your own strength.

Please remember: **this is a practice, not a perfection.**

If you find yourself needing a little extra support or if you'd like to work through this material together with someone, please don't hesitate to reach out. I would love to support you as you continue to grow and trust yourself through this process.

You are human, this is learning, and you've got this.



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