



Thriving Abroad

Thriving Abroad Podcast – Creating a strength in resilience

#37 – DANA WILSON CHEAT SHEET

Dana Wilson is an American Counsellor living in Lyon, France. Dana has a PhD in Clinical Psychology and offers her counselling services to English speaking expats, international students and others who are struggling with emotional or personal difficulties.

Through her work Dana supports clients who want to strengthen their emotional resilience, develop greater self-awareness and personal compassion, build more authentic and satisfying relationships and deepen the sense of meaning in their lives. Dana is also the host of the podcast The Mindful Expat, recorded for expats and overseas adventurers who are looking for a guidepost for emotional well-being and resilience in their lives abroad.

Here I share my take-aways from my recent conversation with Dana:

During the first part of the interview Dana shares her personal story as she relocated to live in France with her French husband. She talks us through the experiences and stages she took to build her new life and most importantly for her, her career as a counsellor in France. She says:

“It’s made an enormous difference in my quality of life, since I have been able to envision a life that feels good here.... I’m building something, and I worked really hard to create it....that was a real challenge at first being able to work from a legal standpoint.”

For me Dana demonstrates resilience in action in this first part of the interview – listen and see if you can identify what she did to build resilience and ultimately her successful career in France.

Definition of resilience: Resilience is the capacity to recover from adversity. We could think of it as our ability to bounce-back when we encounter challenges. It is not the ability to navigate challenges without distress. Instead, when we do experience challenge, resilience represents our ability to get back on track, rather than having it derail our lives and get us into place where we are not functioning well.

It is not like you either have it or don’t have it. We are all able to dial it up and down in different circumstances. Lots of things contribute to an ability to bounce-back - even for people who find it tough, there are strategies to help people get back on track.



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Resilience is not a fixed ability that we are born with. It is an ability we can develop over time. Different people with similar life experiences may have different abilities to develop resilience.

One really important point that Dana made is that resilience is not something that is only inside of us. We are not resilient in a vacuum. We are resilient because we have support systems. It is important to recognise our support systems and ask for help when we need it.

Challenges arise when the support system is not there for example in the case of expats. There will be time when we are struggling and need to reach out for help and it is that realisation and reaching out action that is an example of resilience, that recognition of the need *and* ability to ask. That in itself is a strength.

Factors that contribute to our levels of resilience include:

- Having caring/supportive relationships in our lives
- Ability to reach out and engage that support
- Capacity to make realistic plans and carry out those plans
- Positive view of our selves
- Confidence
- Communication
- Problem solving skills
- Ability to manage emotions.

We will experience emotional distress and it is our ability to overcome that distress that is what makes us resilient.

Looking at the above list, we can see which factors can be challenged when relocating abroad:

- Cut off from social support structures.
- Social networks not understanding our experience which makes it hard for us to engage our normal home-based support networks.
- Cultural and language factors impact on our ability to engage support abroad.
- Problem solving skills don't work the same way in different situations and cultures e.g setting up a business in a foreign country where we find it difficult to communicate or understand the systems and processes and how things work generally. This can cause us to feel hopeless, lacking in competence lacking in confidence.
- Competence can be a cumulative thing, the more we feel uncomfortable, the more we doubt ourselves and so on.



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- Stressors all build, it is not necessarily one issue or challenge that impacts on our resilience but the culmination of a number that combine to give us a sense of overwhelm.

What can we do to develop our level of resilience?

- Remember we all face challenges in our lives whether we move abroad or not. But when we move abroad, we have an awareness that challenges will arise and if we research well and set appropriate expectations, we can be better prepared for them.
- Maintain social connections and make new social connections as soon as possible. Having that social supports when needed is important.
- Manage our attitude and mindset to the challenges and recognise they are temporary. It is a journey. We need to problem solve and tolerate this uncomfortable feeling knowing it won't be there forever. It is not about devaluing our experiences or telling ourselves how it 'should be'. We need to acknowledge the struggle and practice self-compassion.
- See the challenges as opportunities for growth. When we can make meaning out of experience we are able to cope better. If we see the challenge of adjusting to a new culture as an opportunity to learn about ourselves, as a developmental opportunity, then we can perhaps better tolerate the challenges we face.
- Give ourselves credit for successes – however small – acknowledge our achievements and accomplishments. Give credit for small things.

Want to Learn More:

Dana's website: www.dananelsoncounseling.com

Book by Linda Janssen – [The Emotionally Resilient Expat](#) available on Amazon

Access the American Psychological Association for some great resources on resilience [HERE](#)

Access the accompanying article and podcast link www.ThrivingAbroad.com/expat-podcast

Listen to [Podcast episode 34](#). Keeping Calm and Serenity Amongst the Chaos with Dr Tami Nelson and Dr Kelli Jones Sanness