

Resilience Case Studies

Module 3: Developing Resilience

Case Study #1 - So Many Barriers to Writing

Kayla needs to finish revisions to a manuscript, but there's always something urgent that needs to be done. She's set aside time each week to write, but gets interrupted - her PI wants her to make a figure, her student technician needs help with an assay, or her own experiments need her attention. At the end of the week, she feels guilty that she hasn't done more on the paper, and tries to work on it at home but doesn't get very far before she closes her laptop. She is too tired at the end of a long day and resolves to set aside time for it tomorrow.

This pattern continues for several weeks. In lab meeting, her PI asked her to prepare more data figures for his proposal and also asked how the revisions to the manuscript were coming. Kayla felt embarrassed she didn't have another draft, and also felt overwhelmed that her PI kept asking her to do more work for his grant. She is starting to feel really stressed out, especially ahead of her regular meeting with her PI tomorrow.

What advice would you give her going into this conversation? How can Kayla manage preparing data for the grant submission, ensure that she completes the revisions on her manuscript, and maintaining her own well-being?

Case Study #2 - Things are so different

After earning a PhD in her native Brazil, Mariana knew that a postdoc in the US would open up many career opportunities. Since she has friends who completed their PhDs at US universities, she expected there to be an adjustment period after moving to the US. Mariana is finding, however, that no matter how realistic her expectations were, the experience is still challenging. It's hard to be away from her family, especially since her first nephew was just born. The time difference isn't too bad and she's able to talk to her family every week.

She enjoys her position and has been modeling her work effort based on how she sees other postdocs in her group working in order to make sure she's keeping up with the lab culture. Her colleagues work long hours and don't take lunch breaks, opting to eat at their desks. Breaking for meals is central to life in Brazil, and after not doing that for a few months, on top of the long hours, Mariana feels off balance. Even though she's made some friends and joined a postdoc soccer team, she's exhausted, and honestly, becoming fairly unhappy.

As Mariana starts her sixth month in her postdoc, she is wondering if staying in the US is really worth the stress of being far from family and adjusting to a new work and social culture. What advice would you give Mariana?

Case Study #3 - New Postdoc and New Baby: Starting Two New Journeys

Phillipe just became a father. The first year of his postdoc position was going really well, but ever since the baby came it has been hard to maintain the same momentum. He is excited to be a parent and wants to be really hands-on. At the same time, Phillipe is really dedicated to his research - he wants to make progress this year and get a few manuscripts out. His son is in a good childcare setting, but still, the center closes earlier than he usually leaves the lab. And, then there are the never-ending doctor appointments, and of course his desire to spend some time together with his family before his son's bedtime. His spouse is also in a full-time job with limited flexibility, though they have the pick-up and drop off schedule well-choreographed. He has been trying to decide how to bring this up to his PI, but is worried about what her response might be. She has raised two children and built a successful research program, and he doesn't want to seem like he isn't committed to his work or can't keep up.

How should Phillipe proceed? Describe what positive actions or partial solutions might he be able to offer to his advisor.