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RESILIENCE IN ADOLESCENT CHRONIC PAIN: AN EXPLORATION OF COPING MECHANISMS AND PERSONAL GROWTH

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Adolescents living with chronic pain (CP) are vulnerable to negative outcomes such as disability and impaired quality of life. They often miss opportunities for social engagement and suffer from anxiety and depression. Central to all accounts is a sense of interrupted life—phrases with negative connotations such as “couldn’t do” and “had to stop” are repeatedly used to express feelings of loss of control.

To regain control over their situation, participants create within themselves a positive internal dialogue whereby they reconstruct the meaning of normalcy, practice acceptance, make downward social comparisons, and engage in daily positive affirmations. They also create a positive external environment, surrounding themselves with compassionate individuals as well as advocating for proper accommodations at school.

While CP disrupts their personal and academic trajectories, the experience of living with pain has instilled in them the pursuit of significance. This pursuit is propelled by the imagery of a fulfilled life and seems to be particular to this age group. Ironically, some participants are grateful for their pain for granting them intuitive empathy for the suffering of others and the emotional credibility to help others. ■