

Coping with COVID

Resources for Healthcare Professionals
Coping with Public Health Crises



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There is a LIGHT in this world. A healing spirit more powerful than any darkness we may encounter. We sometimes lose sight of this force when there is suffering, and too much pain. Then suddenly, the spirit will emerge through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways.

- Richard Attenborough





Healthcare workers are dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of others. No matter your specific role in the industry, everything you do plays a part in helping people.

In the war against COVID-19, healthcare workers are the ones bearing the brunt of the destructive impact of the disease. We are being exposed to physical and psychological threats and at times, we may be struggling. This strain is almost certain to produce stress responses, all of which are to be expected in the context of an extraordinary threat like COVID-19.

This guide is a resource for healthcare workers who are coping with the stress of the COVID-19 crisis. It describes common reactions to healthcare crises and frequently experienced stress responses. It offers suggestions for coping with challenging emotions and thoughts, and recommendations for behaviors to improve coping and promote resiliency. And finally, it lists resources that healthcare workers can turn to for additional information, strategies, and support.

Common Stress Responses During COVID-19

You May Be Experiencing:

Feelings	Physical Stress	Moral Distress	Loss & Grief
Fear of infection and infecting others	Problems sleeping	Can't provide comfort, or let families comfort dying patients	Death of patients, colleagues, family, friends
Worry about family	No appetite or overeating	Betrayal of trust	Loss of normal routine
Helplessness	Hard to concentrate	Not following standards of care	Loss of assumed safety
Anger/Irritability	Don't feel safe	Not enough PPE & medical equipment	Isolation from family, friends, community, co-workers.
Ashamed	No energy / numb	I should have...	Loss of job, financial security
Embarrassed not coping well	Irritable	Disillusionment with employer/government	Loss of hope
Insecure about working in new ways or with new people	Headaches	Survivor's guilt	
Guilt if taking time for self-care	Stomach problems		
Wanting to escape	Mind racing / negative thinking		
	Panic attacks		
	Body is tense all the time		

Workers on the frontline during public health crises are at high risk for psychological consequences. Many of these have been documented in prior pandemics and earlier stages of the COVID-19 crisis.

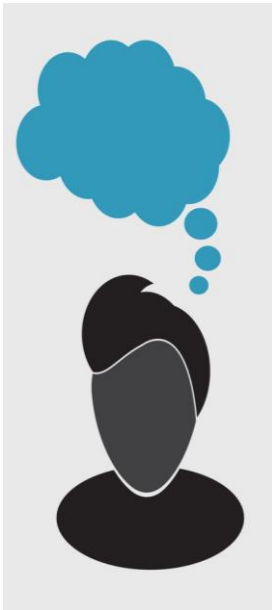
Distress	72%
Depression	50%
Anxiety	45%
Insomnia	34%

“You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.”
- Jon Kabat Zinn

If you are experiencing these common stress responses, know that it is normal and that most of the time these uncomfortable responses will go away on their own. If you continue to experience problems, then call a behavioral health support specialist. For now, you can help yourself be more resilient by practicing coping skills.

Coping Skills for Healthcare Workers

Take Care of Your Thoughts:



- Notice your thoughts. Thoughts are just things that show up in your mind. You can think many things that are not true. Just because a thought has emotional power doesn't mean it's accurate.
- Practice accepting that a thought is just *present* rather than trying to eliminate it. Accepting a thought's presence without allowing it to influence your behaviors takes away the thought's power to hook you.
- If you have negative thinking, look up cognitive distortions or thinking errors online. See if your thought fits the description of one of the distortions. If so, see if you can come up with a more balanced, less extreme thought. This website has some good examples:
https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/COVID_helpful_thinking.asp
- Look for exceptions to the thought. Are there times when the thought isn't true? Try adding the word "sometime" rather than "always or never".

Take Care of Your Emotions:

- Acknowledge your emotional reactions as *normal responses* to *abnormal circumstances*. Do not judge your responses as bad, weak, or crazy. Not only is this incorrect, it escalates rather than soothes distress.
- Talk to people you trust. Talking about emotions can be effective in reducing the distress they cause.
- Engage in mindfulness practices (meditation, mindful walking, mindful awareness of physical body, etc.) to focus attention on the here-and-now.
- Check out this workbook: Doing What Matters in Times of Stress
<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/9789240003927>
- Use diaphragmatic breathing to decrease fight-flight response, improve relaxation, help induce sleep.
- Focus on your 5 senses in the here-and-now to deescalate emotional crises and panic (grounding exercises).



Grounding Exercise

5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.



What are 5 things you can see? Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.



What are 4 things you can feel? Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.



What are 3 things you can hear? Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.



What are 2 things you can smell? Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.



What is 1 thing you can taste? Carry gum, candy, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors.

Coping with Moral Distress:

What is moral distress?

- You know the ethically appropriate action to take, but you are unable to act upon it, or you act in a manner contrary to your personal and professional values.

What are the sources of moral distress?

- End-of-life challenges, nurse-physician conflict, disrespectful interactions, workplace violence, and ethical dilemmas.

What can you do?

- Talk to someone who is non-judgmental and who is okay with you sharing intense feelings and acknowledging this normal human reaction.
- Resolve thinking distortions allowing a more realistic perspective on personal responsibility
- Opposite action, use Moral Courage. Speak up, express how you feel.
- Take care of your thoughts and emotions! Help your nervous system regain balance so you don't become stuck in fight, flight, or freeze.
- Hold hope that good triumphs over evil.
- Believe that you can make a difference. that helping is noble, worthwhile work

(Amer Assoc of Critical-Care Nurses, n.d.; Guy, 2020)



Take Care of Your Well-Being:



- Move! Daily exercise is an excellent way to reduce the physical symptoms of stress. Any kind of exercise that you enjoy is great and being outside is a de-stress bonus.
- Get creative. Sew, paint, make music, whatever your medium. Express yourself!
- Maintain a normal daily routine. To reduce stress, we need routine to feel in control. Stick with regular patterns of sleep, meals, work, leisure, and social interaction.
- Pay attention to what you eat and drink. Healthy foods and adequate hydration are critical to maintaining physical health under stressful conditions. Try to limit alcohol and caffeine which are dehydrating and can intensify emotional and cognitive symptoms.
- Change the emotional environment in your mind by watching happy/funny movies, TV shows, or other feel-good media. Check out the pandas: <https://zooatlanta.org/panda-cam/>

Take Care of Your Sleep:

- Going to sleep and waking up at the same time each night/day is best and makes it easier to fall & stay asleep.
- If you work nights, consider sticking with the awake at night pattern for a month if you are struggling with insomnia. Consistency can help reset your sleep patterns.
- Pay attention to the “sleep window”. Cortisol (stress hormones) levels are lowest for most adults between 7 and 10:30pm. Sleep may be easiest to initiate then if it is possible.
- Stop using screens (TV, computer, phone, tablet) 1 hour before bed. Read, knit, talk with family, etc... instead.
- Can't sleep? Get up if you're still awake after 20 minutes. Tossing and turning trains your brain to be awake in bed. Return to bed when you feel drowsy. (No screens!)



Take Care of Your Relationships:



- Humans are social animals! Spend dedicated time with your loved ones. Being with the people to whom we are most attached is our best stress buster.
- Can't be with friends and family? Set up virtual dinners and coffee hours. Play games together online. Set up regular morning or bedtime calls.
- Connect with your community. Wave and say hello when out in your neighborhood, participate in virtual religious or community activities. Make cookies and leave them for neighbors with notes of encouragement.
- Write emails or messages to friends you haven't spoken with in a while. When they write back, set up a phone call or video chat.

Remember These Words of Wisdom:

- ✚ You are doing the best you can! Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a negative experience or difficult challenge.
- ✚ Connecting with others through empathy and understanding can remind you that you're not alone in the midst of difficulties.
- ✚ Develop some realistic goals and do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward the things you want to accomplish.
- ✚ This is our present day reality, but not our future!
- ✚ An optimistic outlook empowers you to expect that good things will happen to you!

COVID-19 Resilience Resources

Help Lines

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Call 1-800-985-5990 (English & Spanish)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

Crisis Counselor. Text HOME to 741741 to connect. Free 24/7 support in US and Canada <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (English & Spanish) <https://www.thehotline.org/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK (8255) (English, Spanish, Hearing Impaired)

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/disaster-survivors/>

Decrease Stress & Build Resilience

Face COVID – Russ Harris <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmvNCdpHUyM>

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide. Download the PDF and listen to audio to reduce stress. World Health Organization. Russ Harris (ACT).

<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/9789240003927>

The 4A's to Rise Above Moral Distress

https://www.emergingnleader.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/4As_to_Rise_Above_Moral_Distress.pdf

Stress and Coping (English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean)

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fmanaging-stress-anxiety.html

Helpful Thinking During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak. PTSD: National Center for PTSD (English and Spanish)

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/COVID_helpful_thinking.asp

That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

Mindfulness & Meditations

<https://www.headspace.com/health-covid-19>

<https://jackkornfield.com/return-joy/>

<https://www.sharonsalzberg.com/covid-19-resources/>

<https://dorleemichaeli.com/covid-19-anxiety-and-stress-30-free-self-care-tools/>

Fun Distractions for Coping

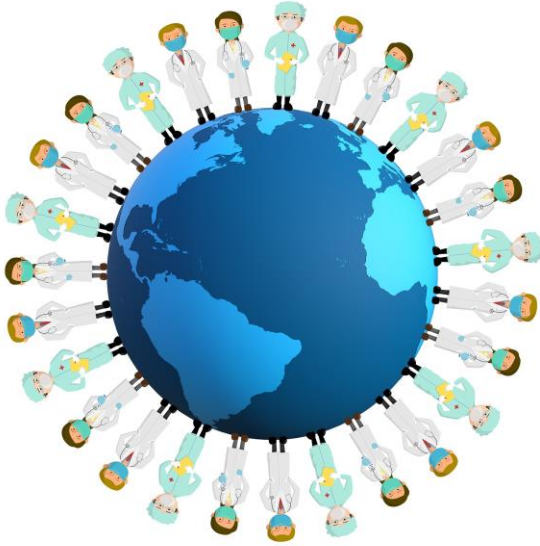
Livestreams from the National Aquarium <https://www.aqua.org/Experience/live>

PandaCam from Zoo Atlanta <https://zooatlanta.org/panda-cam/>

Virtual Tour of the Great Wall of China <https://www.thechinaguide.com/destination/great-wall-of-china>

Google Arts & Culture – 10 Museums to Explore from Home <https://artsandculture.google.com/>

E-Learning Tools <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yekPd-cNTVN0-JGM36-yrgfPNbDz62h3/view>



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***If things become too distressing, we are here to help.
You are not alone on this journey!***

***We have been providing telehealth since 2016. Our
clinicians are available to support healthcare
professionals by video and when allowed, in-person
throughout Massachusetts.***



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