



Self-Care During COVID-19 Pandemic

Why is Self-Care more important now than ever?

It's no surprise that health care workers are experiencing more stress and anxiety than ever before related to the COVID – 19 Pandemic. Which is why it is imperative that we take some time to learn about stress, anxiety and how to build strategies and resiliency.

Is there a difference between stress and anxiety?

Yes! Stress relates to the external pressures that actually exist. Workplace stressors may include physical conditions, job dissatisfaction, over/under load, poor scheduling, unclear demands, lack of control, job security, etc. This can often fit into the following equations;

High Demand + Low Control = High Stress

High Effort + Low Reward = High Stress

Anxiety is defined as worries and fears about things that could threaten us and often feel very similar to stress. Anxiety alerts us to danger and can become persistent in nature. These worries are often things you can't control, such as the past or future. If this becomes unmanageable, it is important to seek out support.

Is stress bad for you?

Stress can have negative implications on us. Many of us start feeling stress physically in our body and we all hold it differently. Think about how you hold stress; Where does it hurt? Try to be aware of how you are holding stress. Some common manifestations of unresolved stress are depression, anxiety, sleep issues and pain..

Not all stress is bad! Try to change your mindset about stress. If you view it as "energy", rather than stress it can be a very helpful tool. For example; when you become stressed, breathing increases. This, in turn, increases oxygen flow, which is a good thing. When you switch your mindset about stress, it may be less negative impact on the body.

How can I share my concerns or help others?

Ask – Express concerns or worries to people that you trust. Alternatively, ask or comment on what you have noticed. Ex. "Lucy, you have been very quiet that last few days and that's not like you. Is everything ok?"

Listen – Listen without judgment. Validate what others are feeling or experiencing. Ex. "I can see how hard that would be."

Encourage – Encourage action. How can I support you?

Check-in – Continue support. How are you? Ex. Phone call, text messages, facetime, etc.

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Tips to build resiliency and practice self-care

-Sometimes our perceptions or perspectives of a situation can take over. Be mindful of how you attach meaning to your thoughts. Additionally, don't try to ignore or suppress your thoughts. Accept them and challenge thoughts that are not helpful.

For example; Many have the worry, "How am I supposed to work and homeschool my children?". It's OK to have these concerns, but be alert when they become consuming and negative. Rather, attach positive affirmations to worries, like, "I am doing the best I can for my children, given this situation. They are going to be ok."

-When building positive coping strategies, think about what works for you. Acknowledge and process what you are feeling. Make time for enjoyable activity, even 15-20 min a day is helpful.

-Lean on each other. Oxytocin is a natural "feel good" hormone that is released when we help others, and when we are being helped. Team work is more important than ever.

-Find ways to laugh. Studies show that children laugh much more than adults and hard "belly" laughing has been equated to vigorous exercise such as running. Many people find comfort in joking and laughing during difficult times.

-Practice Gratitude, meditation and mindfulness. When we do this daily, it helps to change our perspective and attitude. Focus on what you value, rather than what you fear.

-Cut back on social media and news, especially at bedtime and if it contributes to your stress and anxiety. When we scroll through endless posts and articles, it can be overwhelming. Our brains weren't created to process that much information. Think about sites/people that affect you and consider un-following or muting them. Keep up with local news sites and remember to take some things with a grain of salt.

-Accept that this is where we are at right now and that everything is being done in accordance by the Government and Public Health Unit to keep us safe and healthy. Remember, we are all experiencing the same stress right now! That can offer a lot of new connections with people whom you may not talk to regularly. It's OK to not have all the answers.

-Lastly, and most importantly, remember to be kind to one another! As the old wise phrase goes "This too shall pass".

References

- [1] Harness Your Energy – Build Your Resiliency Webinar offered by NE BSO and presented by Beverly Beuermann-King, CSP
- [2] Building Resiliency – Managing Stress and Anxiety Webinar offered by CMHA and presented by Margo Cameron

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