

COVID-19: Support for First Responders, Front Line Workers and Public Facing Employees



You have been provided this handout as an aide to support yourself, co-workers and family members as a result of the questions and possible challenges you may be facing from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a first responder, front line worker, or a public facing employee, you are subject to ongoing and unique challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this article, we will provide tips on building resilience, preventing burnout and managing your intake of media surrounding the pandemic.

Building resilience

Resilience is an important quality given the fast-paced, stressful, and ever-changing world of COVID-19 realities. Resiliency is our ability to face life's challenges, cope with

disruptive change and to rebound from setbacks without acting in a dysfunctional way.¹ Being resilient doesn't mean you don't feel sad, angry or upset because of a traumatic or difficult event. It ultimately means you find a way to deal with the challenges presented. To help build resilience, you can follow the tips below:

- 1. Create a support system.** Having family members, friends or even coworkers who you can share your thoughts and feelings with is an important step towards building resilience.
- 2. Be aware of your mental health.** Pay more attention to your feelings and acknowledge how you are feeling or reacting at the time of these events.
- 3. Don't judge or blame yourself.** Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions, and remember to be patient with yourself.

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4. Develop your problem solving and communication

skills. When faced with a crisis, learn to rationally examine the situation and come up with solutions. Stay calm and remain focused on the problem.

5. Find ways to distract yourself during non-working

hours. Some people find it helpful to dedicate time to hobbies, exercise or routine chores.

Resilience helps us in every aspect of our lives—from the day-to-day frustrations and challenges of parenting and working to coping with unexpected challenges, tragedies and setbacks. It's more than bouncing back from adversity. Resilience is the ability to bounce forward—coming back stronger, wiser and better able to face future adversities.

Preventing burnout

Working and placing yourself at increased risk of infection during the COVID-19 pandemic may be adding additional stress and complexities to your personal life and everyday working situations. Many front line workers may be experiencing increased fatigue and signs of burnout during these unprecedented times.

Burnout has been defined as the consequence of severe stress, high ideals and from working too hard, too much and for too long. In times of unprecedented hardships with long hours and workloads partnered with the constant emotional demands of the job and pressures to excel can take their toll on a person's emotional, physical and mental health. Severe conditions may cause one to become disillusioned, exhausted, and in some instances unable to cope with the events of the day. They're burned out.

Symptoms of burnout

- Feeling tired and drained most of the time
- Frequent headaches, back pain, muscle aches
- Change in appetite or sleep habits
- Self-doubt, feeling as if you've failed
- Feeling helpless, trapped or defeated
- Loss of motivation
- Withdrawing from responsibilities
- Using food, drugs or alcohol to cope

Take some time for yourself. When was the last time you took the necessary time to relax, reflect and recharge? Rest and relaxation not only revitalize, but provides new goals and new perspectives.

Managing your media and online intake

With the inundation of COVID-19 news and media coverage, it can be difficult to disconnect, especially while being submersed during working hours. There are unlimited sources of information, and it can be overwhelming. What can you do to help stay calm during this period of unprecedented change?

It's common that during periods of difficulty or natural disasters we are more exposed to media and our feelings of distress or anxiety may increase. It's important to give yourself a break from the news and being submersed in the realities of the pandemic. It's important to not avoid the news entirely but be mindful of the source—as some information can be vague or unfounded. It's always better to rely on trusted forms of communication from organizations such as Health Canada, Centers for Disease Control or World Health Organization rather than social media and other, sometimes unreliable resources. Check back periodically, but don't overconsume to a point where you are feeling overwhelmed.

Try and focus on something else. During this time, relying on your support network can be particularly helpful. Keep in touch with your friends and loved ones, but talk about things other than COVID-19 (entertainment, pop culture etc.) so you aren't causing or feeding into more worry. Also try and take some time to focus on a hobby such as reading, writing or trying something new to help you relax.

If you find that your distress, burnout or anxiety is interfering with relationships, school or work, you may want to reach out to your EAP or a mental health professional. If you are already in treatment for a condition, you should continue being treated during the pandemic.

How to prevent infection

Although many measures have been implemented to protect the public from COVID-19, we each play a part in managing risk. As a reminder, here are some tips to implement into your daily practices and routines to further protect yourself while on the job.²

Wash your hands frequently. Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

Maintain physical distancing, when possible. When someone coughs or sneezes they emit small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you may breathe in the droplets.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

Practice respiratory hygiene. Droplets spread the virus. By covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, you protect the people around you from further risk of infection.

If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

Homewood Health would like to extend our thanks and express our gratitude for all first responders, health care workers, front-line and public facing workers including those who are putting themselves at risk to help others during these difficult times.

References

1. American Psychological Association / University Of New Hampshire (2015).
2. World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public [cited 2020 Mar 2]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>



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