

## COVID TRAUMA RESPONSE WORKING GROUP RAPID GUIDANCE

### Updated advice for health and social care staff coping with stress during acute phases of the COVID-19 pandemic

The entire health and social care workforce has been doing work that has been mentally, emotionally, and physically challenging for many months under extremely difficult circumstances.

As a member of this frontline workforce, there may be times when you feel you are coping well and times you feel that you are coping less well. You might have felt anxious, stressed, alone, scared, sad, overwhelmed, angry, helpless or even numb. You might have felt guilty about difficult decisions that you have had to make. Over time, you may feel like you are “running on empty”. You may have different reactions to this challenging period.

These are all normal responses to an extremely difficult situation. Everyone is different, and everyone will experience different emotions at different times.

#### **There are things that you can do to take care of yourself.**

Give yourself permission to take regular breaks during your shifts when possible. If you are a team leader or supervisor, it is helpful to role model this to your team. It is important to try to eat and drink properly. Make sure that you take some time out between shifts. Protect your sleep. It is being responsible, not selfish, to look after yourself. Try to think about and use or adapt strategies that have helped you in the past to cope with stressful situations.

Try to find ways to keep in touch and stay connected with the people who are important to you and give you support. Spend quality time with people in your household or in your bubble.

Engage in exercise and physical activity. Spend time outside when possible. Maintain a routine as much as you can. Plan regular activities that help you feel good. Avoid relying on unhelpful coping strategies like smoking, alcohol or other drugs.

Limit the time you spend watching, reading or listening to the news, including on social media. This can help you take a break from thinking about the pandemic.

Spend time deliberately engaged with focused activities that take your mind away from the current crisis. Any active task may help distract you, including baking, puzzles, and paint by numbers. There is even some evidence that distracting activities that make use of spatial skills can be helpful in reducing distressing memories, such as playing the computer game Tetris.

Be kind to yourself. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time, but being too self-critical can increase stress. Show the same compassion to yourself as you would to your friends, family and colleagues.

You are not alone in this situation – your colleagues are likely to be experiencing similar things to you, and you can support each other. Book in regular chat times. It is OK to say you are not OK.

If you feel overwhelmed, know that there are ways to get support. You could talk to your

colleagues, your manager, or someone else that you trust about how you are feeling. Many organisations, including the NHS, are now offering additional dedicated psychological support services for health and social care staff. Check on your organisation's website for more information. You can also speak to your own doctor about this.

Try and focus on what is in your control. Pay attention to things that are going well when you can - share and celebrate the successes or small wins. Some of the experiences you have had during this time are likely to have significance in your personal or professional journey. Hold on to your values and your beliefs. Remember the contribution that you are making. Aim to actively increase your awareness of experiences for which you can feel grateful. Even though this has already been a marathon, it will not last forever.

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