



Let's Talk, Lancaster

LetsTalkLancaster.org

Building Resilience for Helping Professionals

Every day you are making a difference for people in our community. You connect them to resources, provide food, companionship, housing, financial assistance, spiritual care and so much more. Most importantly, you recognize every person in our community as a valuable asset.

The work can be equally rewarding and stressful. When working with people experiencing traumatic events, many helping professionals feel symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue, secondary trauma and vicarious trauma are words used to describe the reaction helping professionals may feel when witnessing trauma experienced by others. Warning signs include:¹

- Reduced feelings of sympathy or empathy
- More sensitivity or total lack of sensitivity to emotional material
- Dreading working for or taking care of another and feeling guilty as a result
- Feelings of inequity toward the therapeutic or care giver relationship
- Poor work-life balance
- Reduced sense of career fulfillment
- Feelings of irritability, anger, or anxiety
- Problems in personal relationships
- Depersonalization
- Headaches
- Trouble sleeping
- Weight loss or gain
- Impaired decision-making

Taking Care of Yourself

The COVID-19 outbreak has greatly increased the demand for basic needs. It can be distressing to not have the resources to meet those needs. You are on the front lines witnessing the structural inequities in our society and there are no easy answers. We are all feeling a range of emotions. David Kessler states, "The loss of normalcy, fear, economic toll and loss of connection is hitting us and we are grieving"⁴. Taking care of our mental health does not mean not feeling emotional discomfort. Rather, it is the ability to cope with those feelings.⁵ Here are some tips to help you stay physically and mentally healthy every day.

- Eat healthy, balanced meals. The food we eat can impact our mood. Limit caffeine and alcohol during stressful times.
- Move your body: "Motion is lotion." Move your body often in whatever way you are able. Stretch, walk, ride a bike or dance.
- Talk to a mental health professional for help with developing coping strategies. The work you are doing is HARD. Make time to process with someone.
- Take time to nurture your spirituality in whatever way is right for you.
- Practice self-compassion. Talk about yourself the same way you talk about someone you admire.
- Think of a person, place or thing that makes you smile.
- Try to cultivate a feeling of gratefulness.
- Connect (virtually) with people who make you laugh.
- Create psychological safe spaces for you and your peers. Share issues, concerns, fears, and feelings regarding your work here.
- Journal your thoughts, emotions, hopes and concerns.
- Spend some time in nature. Hug a tree or sit in the woods.
- Create a dream list of things you would like to do or accomplish. What is one small step you can take tomorrow to make that dream a reality?
- Sing or listen to music that is uplifting.
- Make time for holistic practices such as meditation, yoga, massage, aromatherapy, etc.

You can find a set of simple, quick (5 minutes or less) self-care practices here:

acesconnection.com/g/lancaster-county-pa-aces-and-resilience-connection/search/tag/492355548690836798

Organizational Practices to Strengthen Resilience

Organizations can implement policies and practices that enhance staff resilience and well-being. This is a continual process. It is not a “one size fits all” approach and may include culture change. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines a trauma-informed organization as one that³: **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands paths to recovery. **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in patients, families, and staff. **Responds** by fully integrating knowledge of trauma into policies and practices. Seeks to actively **Resist re-traumatization**.³

Organizational Practices to Strengthen Resilience

- Consistently using of language that supports safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment.
- Providing interventions, benefits and services to address trauma among staff. This may include peer support, an Employee Assistance Program, paid time off, on-site and offsite counseling, etc.
- Including people with lived experience related to your service in meaningful organizational roles such as employees, board members, and/or volunteers.
- Completing assessments related to equity, bias and racism and tracks progress.

Sources

1. https://integration.samhsa.gov/pbhci-learning-community/Compassion_Fatigue_Office_Hours.pdf
2. <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>
3. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). SAMHSA’s concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach [HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884]. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4884.pdf>
4. Scott Berinato. Harvard Business Review “That discomfort You’re Feeling Is Grief. <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>
5. Helping Teens Make Room for Uncomfortable Emotions. Lisa Damour. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/well/family/coronavirus-teenagers-uncomfortable-emotions.html>

Additional Resources

- University of Minnesota Taking Charge of your health <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/>
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America Psychologist Jelena Kecmanovic provides some science-based strategies and tips for coping with COVID-19 anxiety. <https://www.jedfoundation.org/covid-19-and-managing-mental-health/>
- Shine and Mental Health America have come together to create www.virusanxiety.com resources for anxiety and your mental health during this climate of uncertainty. <https://www.virusanxiety.com/>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has created a fact sheet: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Taking-Care-of-Your-Behavioral-Health-During-an-Infectious-Disease-Outbreak/sma14-4894>
- Laura van Dernoot Lipsky is the founder and director of The Trauma Stewardship Institute and author of Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others and The Age of Overwhelm. <https://www.bing.com/videos/h?q=laura+van+dernoot+ted+talks&docid=608000565146158597&mid=598E92DE3300A77503FA598E92DE3300A77503FA&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>
- University of Buffalo School of SW Self-Care Starter Kit: <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html>
- Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health: https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/PEP20-01-01-007_0.pdf