

Caring for Yourself and Your Staff

The demands of caring for others can lead to high levels of stress in even the best of times. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has made it even more essential we find ways to manage our own stress and emotions, and help our staff do the same. Everyone has been facing their own set of stressors, related to work or life outside work. All of these stressors impact our wellness and capacity as caregivers.

Even if staff do not share their specific concerns with supervisors or leaders, it is safe to assume they are facing some adversity. Maybe they are afraid for their personal health, worried about medically vulnerable loved ones or feel isolated. They may have financial concerns and many have the added pressure of supporting their children's education at home.

The potential to build a strong and resilient workforce will come through our acts of compassion, flexibility, adaptability and understanding. In general, efforts to make the stress moderate and predictable for employees can help mitigate the impact of the multiple stressors. The more unpredictable, prolonged and extreme the pattern of stress is, the more likely it is to create vulnerability in ourselves and our staff. Flexibility and understanding are important, but structure and consistency are equally important.

Caring for Ourselves

As leaders, we need to protect and nurture our capacity to make rational and well-informed decisions. If we are operating in a state of panic, that will likely be mirrored and internalized by staff. When we are in alarm, fear or terror, we are less able to access the parts of our brain where organizing, planning, cognitive flexibility and productive problem-solving take place. In that way, fear and stress really are contagious. The good news is if we are calm and centered, it can spread among our teams. We can model and create spaces for our staff to nurture their caregiver capacity as well. Simple things like check-ins, building in time for brief emotional self-regulation activities and encouraging the naming of emotions and taking time for self-care can make a significant difference in the wellness of your staff.

Self-regulation Activities

Self-regulation activities can help us shift from a state of fear and feeling overwhelmed to a state of calm and focus. Included are some brief and easy activities that you could do for yourself, and encourage your staff to do as well.

- Find time to take a five to 10-minute walk outside.
- Start meetings with a series of deep breaths.
- Create opportunities to laugh together – laughter releases hormones that can reduce stress.

Checking-In

Create opportunities for staff to share how they are doing – and model it by doing the same. A poster like this is an available tool. This poster is a place for staff to stick post-it notes with their names on them. Or share this information in other ways. You do not ever want to put staff on the spot and require they share publicly, but you want to extend the invitation and help make it comfortable for them to do so.

[Download](#) a copy of the poster to use in your nursing home.



Caregiver Capacity

As leaders, we need to prioritize caregiver capacity for ourselves and our employees. Remind yourself there are many things happening right now that are out of our control. Embrace what you can control and let go of what you cannot. One thing in your control is to encourage staff to take good care of themselves.

Other Resources

- Your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). They offer services at no charge. Speak with your Human Resources Department or designee for more information.
- [COVID-19 Well-Being Toolkit and Resources](#) from the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison
- [Taking Care of You](#) tip sheet from the National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center