

Tips on Supporting Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a mental and emotional toll on Americans across the country. Healthcare workers feel the burden of this crisis the most. Providers must take steps to ensure the health and well-being of their staff as they navigate this challenging time.

The ideas below can help providers prevent burnout and ensure staff feel supported at work. This can help promote employee engagement and foster culture, something that is extremely important considering the workforce crisis.

RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

What Leaders and Managers Should Do

Talk to the leaders and managers in your organization about how they should be checking in with their employees to support them.

- Check in with staff frequently during this time; set an expectation for managers to reach out once a week.
- Ask staff how they are doing and feeling, and how their families are doing - make sure they feel heard and understood.
- Find small ways to show your support and care for staff. Help them identify solutions to problems and find support services where needed (see resources below).
- Make sure staff are taking care of themselves (e.g. encourage staff to take a five-min mental health break, provide lunch or food to make sure they are eating well).
- Many people are worried about their loved ones during this time and feel the need to connect often. Allowing them time to call family during shifts if needed to check on them.
- Asking staff who their support network is and how they access it during times of social isolation.

Understand and Identify Burnout Secondary Traumatic Stress

Responders experience stress during a crisis. When stress builds up it can cause:

- Burnout – feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed.
- Secondary traumatic stress – stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event.

Coping techniques like taking breaks, eating healthy foods, exercising, and using the buddy system can help prevent and reduce burnout and secondary traumatic stress. [Recognize the signs of both conditions](#) in yourself and other staff to be sure those who need a break or need help can address these needs.

Employee Programs

Setting up or accessing programs to support employees can make a big difference for staff who may be struggling with challenges in their personal lives that can prevent them from being effective employees.

- **Emergency Assistance Programs:** If you have them, make sure staff know how to get in touch and what it is for.
- **Set up a Quiet Room for Staff.** During stressful and demanding shifts, staff may benefit from a where staff can take a break and re-group. Provide snacks, access to meditations or soothing sounds, aromatherapy, or guides on stretching or deep breathing.
- **Ensure Staff Can Access Food and Other Essentials.** Many staff are working and don't have time to get supplies, and also may not have the means to stock up as so many Americans are doing right now. This can cause anxiety and stress. Work with local food pantries to see if they can possibly deliver to your building, or provide snacks or meals so that staff have something nutritious to eat during their shift.
- **Connect staff with resources for childcare.** Many staff are dealing with school and childcare closures across the country, and may not have or be aware of resources to provide care for younger children. Check out [AHCA/NCAL's information on how states are handling childcare for healthcare workers](#). If your state is not listed, check with your state affiliate or department of health for more information. This document also contains ideas for how centers/communities can implement directly, such as flexible scheduling.
- **Engagement Programs:** Even during this time of crisis, it's important to recognize and engage staff. Find ways to acknowledge them – treats in the break room, appreciation from residents/other staff/families, appreciation from leadership.

Get Support from Team Members

[In a buddy system](#), two employees partner together to support each other, and monitor each other's stress, workload, and safety. The goals of the buddy system are to:

- **Get to know each other.** Talk about background, interests, hobbies, and family. Identify each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- **Keep an eye on each other.** Try to work in the same location if you can.
- **Set up times to check-in with each other.** Listen carefully and share experiences and feelings. Acknowledge tough situations and recognize accomplishments, even small ones.
- **Offer to help with basic needs** such as transportation.
- **Monitor each other's workloads.** Encourage each other to take breaks. Share opportunities for stress relief (rest, routine sleep, exercise, and deep breathing).
- **Communicate your buddy's basic needs and limits to leadership** – make your buddy feel "safe" to speak up.

DIRECT RESOURCES FOR STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

Here are some additional resources employers can provide to their leaders and staff directly:

- [The Disaster Distress Helpline](#) is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service. Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions to a disaster. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.
- [CDC Manage Anxiety & Stress](#)
- [CDC Poster on Coping with a Disaster](#)
- [HHS Supervisors Guide to Managing Stress During a Crisis](#)
- [Response Resources for Leaders](#)