

Psychological First Aid for Front Line Workers

COVID – 19



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- Given the current outbreak of COVID-19 and many people's rising concerns, about their health, their families and their jobs, preserving and building our personal and professional resilience supported by practical strategies is more important than ever.

Resilience

- Resilience is commonly thought of as the capacity to 'bounce back' after stressful life events, but it's also far more complex than that.
- The standard definition of resilience is about bouncing back from adversity.

- Why do some people bounce while others, when confronted with pretty much the same circumstances, seem to just fall down with a thud?

- Resilience is actually more complex than just bouncing back from adversity.
- However the key notion is of flexibility
- Take a rubber ball, for example.
- The reason it bounces is because it's flexible. It's pliant. And it's also incredibly strong.

- Because of this, it regains its shape very quickly

- Resilience is the ability to work in times of uncertainty and change
- Resilience is developed through the intelligent application and expression of identified emotions, this is known as emotional intelligence

Emotion and Resilience

- The issues with the phrase 'positive and negative emotion'
- It assumes that some emotions must be good and some must be bad.
- Emotions are emotions you experience them for a reason.

- It is not the emotion that is positive or negative it is the thought process and the behaviour that accompanies it that requires the label

- Resilience is something we build in concert with others: that is, we learn to become more resilient with the support of friends, family and colleagues both when we receive their help and when we help or engage with them.

- We need to develop a suite of skills and capacities, such as problem solving, creativity and communication, that act together to enable us to live more resilient lives.

- We need to be kind to ourselves and quieten our inner critic while remaining open and honest with ourselves; developing mindfulness practices can help with this.
- Purpose drives us: we are meaning-seeking creatures, and a strong sense of purpose in our life helps make us resilient

Compassion

- Is the feeling of empathy for another's suffering and the desire to do something to alleviate that suffering.

Compassion for self and others

- Helping others is a natural instinct wired into our brain. However, in addition to having compassion for others, we also need to show compassion towards ourselves

Compassion Fatigue

- It is really important to look after yourself in order to be able to look after others.
- Just like the flight metaphor of putting on your own oxygen mask before helping someone else on an aeroplane.
- We need to be feeling as good as possible in order to have energy and focus to help other people.

- Compassion fatigue Is the gradual lessening of compassion over time due to repeated demands

Compassion and resilience

- We can train ourselves to become more aware of others and more ready to be compassionate.
- This will have a positive effect on both us and on other people, as we tend to be happier when we are compassionate

- We can also learn to be more compassionate towards ourselves, which is particularly important when we fail as this is usually the point when resilience is most needed.
- We know that resilience is a social process (ie we need the support of others) and the circle of compassion allows us to claim that support.

- When we learn to be more compassionate – to both ourselves and to other people – we learn the right ways of both giving and asking for support.
- In doing so, we also become more resilient

What is Psychological First Aid

- Psychological First Aid is not a process of diagnosis formulation nor is it a process of therapeutic formulation and intervention
- It is not therapy it provides front line workers with acute, compassionate and supportive care in the wake of adversity.

- The goals of psychological crisis intervention, including psychological first aid, are primarily to stabilize and mitigate acute distress
- Working as a front line worker in a disaster or pandemic can cause Cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physiological reactions.

- These reactions can lead to two levels of burnout – one being distress and the more serious being dysfunctional

- Once a person reaches the dysfunctional level they have experienced complete burnout and are no longer able to complete their normal daily activities. The psychological first aid support is put in place to assess these signs and put support in place to stop the distress or dysfunction

Cognitive reactions: Examples

Distress

- Temporary Confusion
- Inability to concentrate
- Reduced problem solving capacity
- Overwhelmed
- Obsessions
- Reliving the event
- Nightmares

Dysfunction

- Incapacitating confusion
- Diminished cognitive ability
- Hopelessness
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Hallucinations
- Paranoid Delusions

Emotional Reactions: Examples

Distress

- Fear
- Sadness
- Irritability
- Anger
- Frustration
- Bereavement/Loss
- Anxiety

Dysfunction

- Panic Attacks
- Immobilising Depression
- Affective Numbing
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Behavioural Reactions

Examples

Distress

- Temporary Phobic avoidance
- Compulsions
- Hoarding
- Sleep Disturbance
- Eating Disturbance
- Easily Startled

Dysfunction

- Persistent avoidance
- Immobilising compulsions
- Aggression/violence
- Reclusiveness
- Impulsive risk taking
- Self medication

Spiritual Reactions – Examples

Distress

- Questioning Faith
- Questioning gods actions

Dysfunction

- Stopping of faith or related practices
- Projecting faith onto others

Physiological Reactions (Examples)

Distress

- Change in appetite
- Change in libido
- Psychogenic Headaches
- Psychogenic Muscle aches/spasms
- Decreased immunity

Dysfunction

- Changes in cardiac function
- Changes in gastro intestinal
- Unconsciousness
- Chest pain
- Dizziness
- Inability to speak

- It is really important for you to keep a check on your symptoms and ask for support from your manager or psychological first aider if you notice that you are starting to experience any of the above reactions.

- If you notice that you are starting to feel distressed:
- Take yourself away from any Provocative cues – anything that makes your distress worse – obsessively watching the news, relatives that have just lost a loved one, work colleagues that are negative or highly anxious.

- Give yourself positive things to do – This is a great distraction technique and will help you to become engaged and focussed on something else which may ease the distress for a while

- Carthasis Allow yourself the time to offload to others – friends, family, work colleagues, psychological first aider.
- Delay impulsive actions – if you find yourself starting to behave in negative ways eg, becoming snappy, using alcohol/drugs try to distract yourself by going for a walk, talking to someone, breathing exercise

- Self Care
- Does this front line work take a toll on the people who do it?
- Yes it does, or at least it can, words like burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma those are the terms that apply to the people who actually provide the care and support on the front line.

- So taking care of yourself is the most important thing.
- What can you do to protect yourself?

- Like many people within the helping professions you are likely to say
- ‘I don’t need this Self- Care – I don’t care for myself – I can for others’
- ‘The best way to care for others is to care for yourself’

- If you don't care for yourself, you risk burnout, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue which will mean you will not be well enough to care for others.
- 'You do not want to be a victim to the process of helping'.

- Self Care - Involves the actions that individuals take for themselves, in order to develop, protect, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing or wellness.
- Self-care - is essential to enable people to function well when they are helping to care for others

Stress Management Techniques

- **Stress Definition**
- Stress occurs when the demands placed upon a person/team exceed their perceived ability to cope

- **Initial Stress Response**
- Brain perceives threat
- Brain “sends the cavalry” in form of hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine to deal with the threat.
- Body responds: Fight / Flight / Freeze

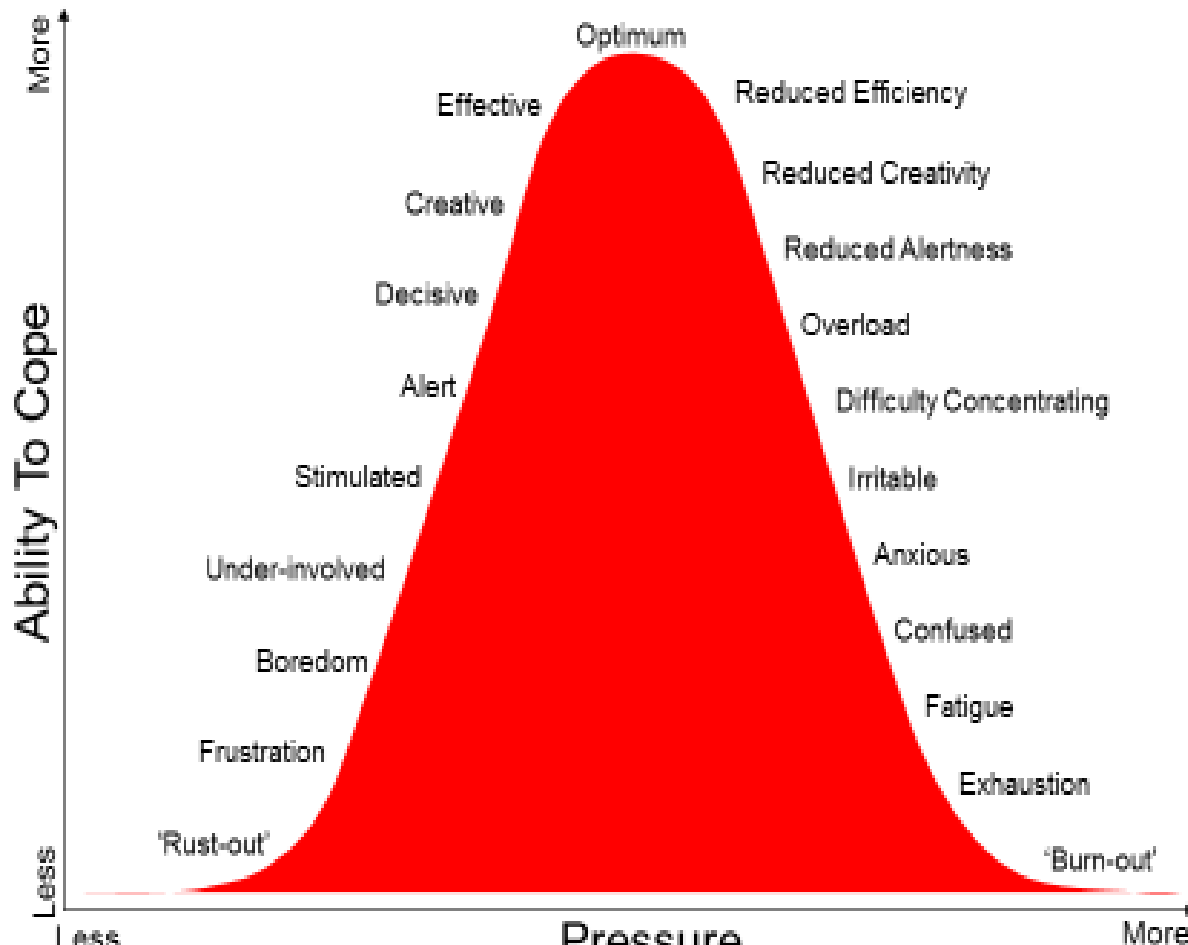
Stress Bridge

- The stress bridge represents the stressors that we accumulate on a daily basis.
- We are the bridge holding up all of these stressors.
- These stressors build up over time and if we do not take some of the stressors away the bridge will collapse.

- So it is really important that we recognise how much stress we are carrying daily and any stressors that we can share with others or disregard (if they are not currently a priority) will help the bridge (us) to stay strong and resilient

Watch your stress: The stress curve

The Nature of Stress



- The stress curve shows us how easy it is to dip from optimum productivity at the top of the curve to burnout at the bottom.
- We mostly go up and down this side of the curve depending on how many demands are placed upon us at one time and if we are using our positive coping strategies to build our resilience.

- The only way we can get back up the curve is to ensure we have fun, enjoyable and relaxing activities within our week. These activities actually give us energy and take us up the curve rather than demands which reduce our energy and make us slip down the curve.

- So it is very important when going through a period of extra demand that we ensure we have fun, enjoyable and relaxing activities in our weekly plan.

Consequences of poor self-care

- Burnout
- Compassion Fatigue
- Get sick or injured
- Substance abuse
- Risk taking/impulsive actions
- Can't function effectively
- Guilt

Burnout

- Is a state of utter emotional and physical exhaustion caused by a prolonged period of stress and frustration

- **Burnout is a term used to describe the consequences of severe and prolonged stress and high ideals experienced by people working in “helping” professions. This is thought to be partly because of the high-stress work environment, and emotional demands of the job.**

- Responding to signs of burnout is important
- Burnout ‘a slow erosion of psychological and physical resources’
- Burnout happens slowly and that’s why it is so hard to notice, others may notice this before you do they may see changes in your behaviour

Burnout Symptoms

- Procrastination
- Chronic fatigue
- Cynicism
- Chronic lateness
- Difficulty experiencing happiness
- Pessimism
- Sense of foreshortened future
- Loss of satisfaction in one's career or life.
- Questioning one's own faith.

HOW STRESS IMPACTS



HOW STRESS IMPACTS

- **Physically**
- Headaches
- Irritable bowel
- Kidney Infection
- **Behaviourally**
- Aggressive
- Isolating
- Using Alcohol/Drugs
- **Emotionally**
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger
- **Cognitively**
- Unable to concentrate
- Forgetful
- Unable to problem solve

RECOGNISING STRESS AT WORK – YOU AND OTHERS

- Increased absenteeism (sick leave)
- Presenteeism (attending work whilst sick)
- Leavism (taking leave to catch up with work)
- Reduced sense of humour – increased irritability
- Arguments/disputes with colleagues
- Decrease in work standards and output
- Working late/early
- Taking less breaks
- Indecisiveness and poor judgment
- A problem with drinking or drug taking
- Increase of accidents
- Suffering with physical symptoms, e.g. headaches, nausea

If you notice any of these signs in yourself or work colleagues

- Discuss with your dedicated Psychological First Aider who will provide techniques to help support you and ensure your work colleague is also well supported

RECOMMENDED STRESS COPING TECHNIQUES

- **Sleep: how sleep helps build resilience**
- Sleep is the cornerstone of health. It allows us to regenerate both physically and mentally, yet most of us don't get nearly enough of it.

Why is sleep so important?

- Everyone needs seven to eight hours of sleep a night. Anything less will have a detrimental effect on our health. It's a myth that some people can maintain their health with less than this.
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- Lack of sleep has a cumulative effect on our health, and you can't undo the damage by grabbing a few extra hours on the weekend. Those who regularly miss sleep are at a much higher risk of diseases like Alzheimer's disease, cancer, diabetes and heart disease

- We all go through a pattern of five different phases in our sleep and we need plenty of time to get enough of each. Each sleep phase has different effects on our brains whether that be transferring information from short-term memory to long-term, processing unusual or difficult experiences, or consolidating learning.

- Although many people believe that alcohol helps them sleep, it actually does more harm than good. Alcohol in the evening fragments a person's sleep and, more critically, it tends to repress REM – or dream – sleep. Dream sleep is one of the key ways that our minds process emotions and solve problems while we're asleep

What does sleep mean for building resilience

- **Sleep is essential for emotional regulation** – brain scans of sleep-deprived people show an increase of activity in regions of the brain that generate reactivity and impulse, and a decrease in activity in regions that control rational decision making. This is why a sleep-deprived person often swings between emotional extremes

- So sleep is essential for our long-term physical resilience against disease as well as our everyday resilience.
- It enables us to learn and process our learning and enables us to find that balance between emotional reaction and careful decision making

LISTEN TO OR MAKE MUSIC

- It has been researched that listening to music that you like will actually reduce your blood pressure and boost your endorphins (happy chemicals)

ASK FOR SUPPORT

- Asking for support can be a difficult thing to do however it is really important that you do ask for help if you feel you are struggling.

MAKE TIME FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- It is important to make time to interact with family and friends on a daily basis.
- Whether through one to one interaction or through telephone calls
- Speaking to family and friends during your working day can help alleviate stress/anxiety.
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BE ACTIVE

- Exercise is an extremely important coping strategy in times of stress and is one of the ways that the stress chemicals can drain from the body (sweat)
- It is also important to get out into nature as often as possible as this has been researched to decrease stress and increase wellbeing.

BREATHE

- We all take breathing for granted and think that we breathe well however the majority of us do not.

Breathing Exercise

- Try taking a breath in through your nose for the count of 9 and then out through your mouth for the count of 11.

- Breathing this way actually inflates your lungs to maximum capacity – when we take short shallow breathes (which happens when we are stressed or anxious) we do not take in enough oxygen and this sends the message to the brain that we are in danger and keeps the stress response on

- One of the quickest ways of reducing anxiety/stress is to take two to three long deep breathes first thing in the morning, lunch time, dinner time and bed time.

PURSUE HOBBIES

- Hobbies are an excellent distraction from the stress of daily life.
- Whether you enjoy reading a book, watching films, listening to music, watching sport, building lego with your children, taking your dog for a walk.

- All of these things will increase your wellbeing and energy and decrease your stress/anxiety levels and keep you resilient.
- We would advise that you take part in hobbies daily whilst going through the stress of a pandemic.

EAT WELL – DRINK WATER

- Eating well and drinking enough water during the day have been researched to decrease stress and build resilience.
- If you are working make yourself a healthy lunch and take a water bottle with you every shift

TALK TO SOMEONE

- Talking to someone is the key to staying resilient and reducing stress.
- Talk to your family and friends daily.
- Talk to your colleagues.
- Talk to your psychological first aider weekly, or more regularly if needed

TAKE BREAKS

- It is essential that you take regular breaks when at work.
- Sometimes when in periods of stress we can work harder and faster and forget to give ourselves a break.
- This can lead very quickly to burnout

USE MINDFULNESS

- Mindfulness is one of the best techniques to build resilience.
- Mindfulness isn't about stopping your thoughts, but about finding new ways of being with them

Mindfulness as self-care

- Mindfulness is a series of self-care techniques that can help us better manage these thought processes.
- These techniques enable us to take care of ourselves in the midst of our everyday busyness.

- These days, many people have heard of ‘mindfulness’, and you may have already tried a form mindfulness, such as meditation.
- That said, there are also many misconceptions about what mindfulness is, how it works and what it helps us to do

Mindfulness and everyday life

- It's a fact of life that we often find ourselves caught in a difficult spiral: we're really busy and this can make us feel stressed.
- You know that you need to take care of yourself, but you keep putting it off and putting other people first.

Practising mindfulness

- Mindfulness practice often focuses on the rhythm of our breathing by drawing our attention to the sensation of each breath at the tip of our nose or to the rising and falling of our belly as we breathe in and out.

- So, when your mind wanders away from how you're breathing – as it inevitably will because that's simply the way our minds work – just notice that this has happened and come back to noticing your breath again.
- It's that act of bringing your attention back to a point of focus that's the essence of mindfulness.

- Gradually this practice will allow you to put distance between you and the constant commentary that goes on in your mind

New Puppy!

Metaphor for Mindfulness

- Think of bringing a new puppy into your living room and placing it into a box.
- Will the puppy stay in the box?
- No it will get out of the box and cause chaos.

- The only way to get the puppy to stay in the box is to train it.
- This is exactly the same for our brains which like to wonder off and cause chaos and make us worry about things we have no control over.
- Mindfulness is the technique that will train your brain to stay in the here and now and not wonder off

Practising everyday mindfulness

- Mindfulness isn't just something you do at home or in a class; once you know
- For example, you can stop and take a few deep breaths as you walk towards a difficult encounter or in those moments of waiting between things (eg at a bus stop, while waiting for a friend or waiting for a meeting to start)

- However, mindfulness isn't only about breathing. It's about using different cues in your environment to become aware of your body, thoughts and emotions

Spot meditations

- You can use a number of techniques in your day to develop mindfulness, such as focusing on the sensation of your feet touching the ground as you walk.
- As you gradually become more familiar with these practices, several things can happen

You learn to pause

- Pausing adds a different type of rhythm to our day and is an effective way of taking some control over the day's progress, even when things may seem 'out of control'
- It also informs the brain that we are not in danger therefore switching off the stress response of fight, flight , freeze and the production of adrenalin.

You begin to become more aware of your body

- Mindfulness is very much about the body, not just the mind. The two most popular mindful techniques (following the breath and scanning sensations in the body) rely on paying attention to the body to calm the mind

You begin to become more aware of your emotions and feelings

- Learning to read the way that your body, mind and emotions act as a connected network of signals means that when you sense something in your 'gut'.
- You can pause and try to discern exactly what's going on.
- Often just acknowledging, naming and noting a feeling will allow you to move forward more confidently

- This also allows you to purge your emotion if you feel tearful or sad in any way.
- Instead of pushing it down all the time which will make you less resilient it is important to notice the feeling and allow yourself time when you can to be able to purge the emotion through crying.

- Crying and sweating are the only two ways that the chemicals made in your body through times of stress can exit the body.
- If you do not allow yourself to cry or exercise your body will become flooded with the emotion and chemicals and you will find that your emotions will be uncontrollable and you will start to feel unwell – the first signs of burnout.

Spot meditation and self check-ins for a pandemic

- In times of crisis cultivating regular self check-ins and spot meditations become an important way of creating a routine that can anchor and support us.
- One of the key pieces of advice from health experts about protecting ourselves and each other during the COVID-19 pandemic is to wash our hands frequently. This can become an invitation to pause and mindfully focus

Apple Technique

- **Acknowledge:** Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.
- **Pause:** Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Pause and breathe.
- **Pull back:** Tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are not statements or facts.
- **Let go:** Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.
- **Explore:** Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully with your full attention

- Contemplative exercises:
a four-week planner to build resilience
- https://ugc.futurelearn.com/uploads/files/81/9d/819d668f-d83f-4424-8030-2b7221fe6678/Contemplative_exercises_a_four-week_planner_Step_2.14.pdf