

COVID-19 BBI/Six Core Newsletter

Nurturing One Another: Staff Wellness in Times of Crisis

Part 1: Taking good care of yourself

This week's newsletter is the first of a three-part series on nurturance. In times of stress, taking care of ourselves and each other is more important, but it may be hard to do. In this 3-part series, we'll offer tips for how to take care of yourself, how to take care of others, and one for especially for supervisors and leaders on taking good care of your staff. This first one is the groundwork – taking care of ourselves. Below are a few evidence-based strategies and resources to explore.

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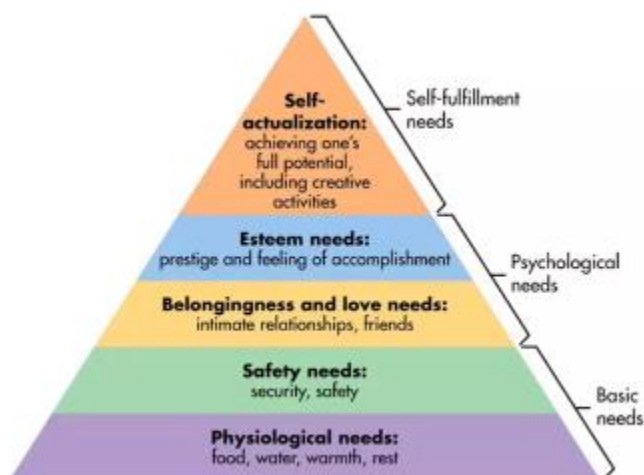
Practice the “Pause”

Don't let yourself be afraid of the pause, the moment where we stop pushing or acting, and just pause to be in the moment of the chaos. The 'pause' helps us reregulate our stress and immune system, which are both very active right now. Here are a few strategies:

- Take 10 seconds or a hundred seconds and just stop what you are doing. Breathe. Your mind may want you to keep feeling sensations caused by the chaos of the crisis – after all, we need these sensations to keep moving forward. Try to gently pull your mind towards how you are feeling on the inside.
- Name the feelings. Notice where they are in your body. Just notice and name, or try to name. Sometimes emotions are too complex to be easy enough to describe as “sad” or “frustrated” or “lost”. Give it a name though, even if it's not

specific or a traditional “feelings” word. “All up in my feelings” or “blah” or “untethered” can be a helpful way of saying that our feelings are really heavy and they want us to notice them. Give them little attention here in the pause and don’t be afraid – you’ll snap back into the action mode you need to be in afterwards.

- Reframe this moment – it’s easy to be hard on yourself and see “taking a break” as a sign of weakness or being unproductive or even letting others down. But try re-framing it -- it’s not a break from the work, it a break for the work and for ourselves. Taking this break increases our capacity to engage with others in the way that best reflects our own values.
- Model this for others and do it for yourself. Make this a part of your everyday practice. Need some help or would you like to see how this practice can work virtually? Check out [this video](#) and fast forward to about 10 minutes in. Don’t be afraid to practice the pause while you’re learning the pause.



It’s ok if you aren’t functioning at your “normal.”

When our basic needs are not met, our brain has to work much harder.

Although everyone is going through this together, everyone is also dealing with their own individual stressors related to the pandemic. Some days you might find more time on your hands and some days you may be in overdrive. You may find that you’re really tired and can’t focus or concentrate like you usually do, which may lead to feelings of defeat and like you’re letting people down. But being “less productive” is actually a very normal response to stress, especially an long-term event like Covid-19 that makes everyday a new day full of changes and uncertainty. Our brain simply cannot go on auto-pilot like you’re used to. If you remember Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (it’s okay if you don’t!) - it can offer an explanation for why you’re feeling this way. **Humans need to have their basic needs met before they can connect or help others**, and definitely before you can move on to productivity and writing the next great novel about the meaning of life. Right now, there’s

more stress around our basic needs than we might be used to, which makes it harder to address our psychological needs and self-fulfillment needs. Again, that's a totally normal response to the crisis we're in right now; sometimes, just having an explanation of why you're feeling what you're feeling can be helpful. Maslow's hierarchy offers one explanation for why we're reacting the way we are in this crisis. So, this is a friendly reminder that **you might not be yourself right now and that's okay – focus on what you need right now, not what you think you should be doing during this time or what others are doing.**

Make time for small actions that can build your resilience

The first two tips can help you get ready for this step, because when we are faced with a crisis we often forget to take care of ourselves. Cornell University offers advice around five “buckets” of resilience.

Social engagement. Cultivate social connections and limit isolation

- Find ways to connect with colleagues, neighbors, and each other. This can be a call, text, a funny pic or meme, a card, a meal, etc. When you can't connect with people for any reason, take a moment to pause and think about someone you care about. Reflect on what you love and maybe what you miss most.
- Practice random acts of kindness
- Start conversations. Be a good listener. Be kind when you can. f-awareness and self-care

Practice self care. Self care starts with self-awareness. Pay attention to both what you're thinking and what you're doing – sometime our brain and body aren't working in unison. Self-care helps us gain self-awareness and soothe ourselves. It's a double gift!

- Eat well, move your body, and get enough sleep
- Manage stress – we are all taking this day-by-day. YOu may be realizing that things you thought were important, aren't as important as you thought and it's ok to press pause on those things for now, if you can.
- Practice self-compassion
- Make time for quiet time for yourself. Find a little space that you can make “off limits” for a short period of time. Use the time and space to reflect, meditate, pray, journal, yoga, stretch, create, cry, laugh, and just be who you are. Practice gratitude.
- Play, and have fun!

Focus your Attention. We often think of attention as the way we focus on something. We also need attention to tune out information, sensations, and perceptions that are not relevant at the moment. Our attention feels limited during a crisis because we are using our amazing brain power to keep us safe. Attention is not an endless well – it's limited and needs to be replenished. Here are some strategies to help you manage your attention as a resource.

- Focus on one thing at a time and avoid multi-tasking
- Unplug; if you are using your phone to take a break, be sure you turn on the Do Not Disturb to have a short period of uninterrupted attention
- Listen to gentle music, like music without a fast beat or lyrics, or natural soundscapes like ocean waves, wind, or birdsong to tune out the “external noise” and help you focus on the task at hand.

Make meaning out of the chaos and develop a growth mindset. Making sense of our experiences is an important way that we learn and understand ourselves. Look for meaning in the chaos. *What* are we learning? *Who* will we be when this is over? *How* do we make this extraordinary experience truly matter?

- View challenges and set-backs as opportunities to grow, to learn something new
- Reflect on what's going well and what's not
- Explore spiritual or religious practices that fit your world view and values
- Strive to accept what you cannot change; make conscious choices to take action where you can influence a process, outcome, or relationship
- Acknowledge and embrace your imperfections
- Applaud your efforts big and small - this is hard

Visit Cornell’s [website](#) to learn more about what resilience is, how it’s helpful, and what it looks like when you have it.



This is hard and we all need support right now

If you feel "burned out", like it's hard to connect with your coworkers, or the family and youth that your agency serves, you are not alone! Please reach out to a trusted colleague, a

supervisor, or to [this hotline](#) that was created especially with you in mind. In fact, call the hotline if you need anything at all! We'll get through this together.

NC HOTLINE HOPE4HEALERS (919) 226-2002

Save the Date

April 24th at 1pm: [North Carolina Conversations: Prevention strategies in PRTFs.](#)

May 13th: [Live Webcast from Greensboro AHEC "Building Resilience and Self-Care for Healthcare Providers"](#)

Resources and Additional Reading

[Psychology Today – 10 Things Mentally Strong People do during a Pandemic:](#)

[Yoga with Adrienne – Free yoga videos](#)

[Covid Coach App from the VA](#)

More information about the Building Bridges Initiative and The Six Core Strategies can be found [here](#)

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