

MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS TIPS FOR FRONT LINE STAFF

1. Reach out to others at least once a day for thirty minutes. Try to do FaceTime, Skype, phone calls, texting—connect with other people to seek and provide support.

2. Stay hydrated and eat well. This one may seem obvious, but stress and eating often don't mix well, and we find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, and avoiding food. Drink plenty of water and eat some good and nutritious foods.

3. Develop a self-care toolkit. This can look different for everyone. A lot of successful self-care strategies involve a sensory component (seven senses: touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, vestibular (movement) and proprioceptive (comforting pressure)).

An idea for each:

- a comfortable chair or mattress
- a hot chocolate
- photos of good times
- comforting music
- geranium, lavender or eucalyptus oil
- a small swing or rocking chair
- a weighted blanket.

A journal, an inspirational book, or a mandala coloring book is wonderful, bubbles to blow or blowing watercolor on paper through a straw are visually appealing as well as work on controlled breath.

4. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and a wide berth. A lot of cooped up time can bring out the worst in everyone. Each person will have moments when they will not be at their best. It is important to move with grace through blow ups, to not show up to every argument you are invited to, and to not hold grudges and continue disagreements. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this.

5. Everyone find their own retreat space. Space is at a premium, particularly with city living. It is important that people think through their own separate space for work and for relaxation. For children, help them identify a place where they can go to retreat when stressed. You can make this place cozy by using blankets, pillows, cushions, scarves, beanbags, tents, and “forts”. It is good to know that even when we are on top of each other, we have our own special place to go to be alone.

6. Expect behavioral issues in children, and respond gently. We are all struggling with disruption in routine, none more than children, who rely on routines constructed by others to make them feel safe and to know what comes next. Expect increased anxiety, worries and fears, nightmares, difficulty separating or sleeping, testing limits, and meltdowns. Do not introduce major behavioral plans or consequences at this time—hold stable and focus on emotional connection.

7. Focus on safety and attachment. We are going to be living for a bit with unprecedented demands of work, homeschooling children, running a sterile household, and making a whole lot of entertainment in confinement. Remember these are scary and unpredictable times for children.

8. Lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance. We are doing too many things in this moment, under fear and stress. This does not make a formula for excellence. Instead, give yourself what psychologists call “radical self acceptance”: accepting everything about yourself, your current situation, and your life without question, blame, or pushback. You cannot fail at this—there is no roadmap, no precedent for this, and we are all truly doing the best we can in an impossible situation.

9. Limit social media and COVID conversation, especially around children. Find a few trusted sources that you can check in with consistently, limit it to a few times a day, and set a time limit for yourself on how much you consume. Keep news and alarming conversations out of earshot from children—they see and hear everything, and can become very frightened by what they hear.

10. Notice the good in the world. Alongside the scary, negative, and overwhelming things about this pandemic, there are also people sacrificing, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways. Try and hold hopeful information.

11. Find something you can control, and control the heck out of it. In moments of big uncertainty and overwhelm, control your little corner of the world. Organize your bookshelf, clear out your cupboards, put together that furniture. It helps to anchor and ground us when the bigger things are chaotic.

12. Engage in repetitive movements and left-right movements. Research has shown that repetitive movement (knitting, coloring, painting, clay sculpting, jump roping etc) especially left-right movement (running, drumming, skating, hopping) can be effective at self-soothing and maintaining self-regulation in moments of distress.

13. Find an expressive art and go for it. Our emotional brain is very receptive to the creative arts, and it is a direct portal for release of feeling. Find something that is creative (sculpting, drawing, dancing, music, singing, playing) and see how relieved you can feel.

14. Find lightness and humor in each day. There is a lot to be worried about, and with good reason. Counterbalance this heaviness with something funny each day: cat videos on YouTube, stand-up show on Netflix, funny movie—we all need a little comedic relief in our day, every day.

15. Reach out for help—your team is there for you. If you are having difficulty coping, seek out help. Remember it is normal to feel anxious at the moment and you are very likely to benefit from professional support. Consider initiatives such as www.doctorsarah.co.uk as different and innovative approaches to providing support.

16. “Bite size” your life, take it moment by moment. We have no road map for this. We don’t know what this will look like in 1 day, 1 week, or 1 month from now. Focus on whatever bite-sized piece of a challenge feels manageable. Whether that be 5 minutes, a day, or a week at a time—find what feels doable for you, and set a time stamp for how far ahead in the future you will let yourself worry. Take each chunk one at a time, and move through stress in pieces.

17. Remind yourself daily that this is temporary. It seems in the midst of this pandemic that it will never end. It is terrifying to think of the road stretching ahead of us. Please take time to remind yourself that although this is very scary and difficult, and will go on for an undetermined amount of time, it is a season of life and it will pass.

This text is adapted from work by Angela Naylor- Clinical Psychologist, New York State