



Guide to supporting care providers and social care staff

Care providers and social care staff have had to process and manage the enormous emotional impact of the Covid-19 crisis, which will have caused high levels of stress during this unique and unprecedented period.

We know some care homes and care providers have experienced staff, residents and clients being unwell and very sadly some people have died. This has also been the case for social care staff, and is likely to have a long-term impact.

We have looked at how we can continue to support you through the Covid-19 crisis and have developed this practice guide in partnership with Mountbatten Hospice. It has been acknowledged that the strategies and techniques contained in this toolkit are beneficial for application in any situation to maintain staff wellbeing.

In addition, we have gathered some wellbeing and resilience tools to help managers and staff to support each other and look after wellbeing.

We know people react to unwanted change in different ways depending on many factors and for some of us, situations such as Covid-19 will expose us to very emotionally difficult experiences, which we must try and make some sense of.

Understanding our own and others' individual journey is vital to aid not only how we “cope” with the “here and now” but how we can take the positives forward into the “newnormal”.

Tier 3 **Professional support**

For mental Health and trauma support:
Speak to GP
Primary care mental health – call 531860
Crisis line – call 111 or 522214
Community Safe Haven – call 520168
Mind charity – mind.org.uk

Tier 2 Peer support and reflection

Peer support – encouraging openness and support for each other, making sure people know they are not in this alone.
1-1 or group supervision sessions – set up within the organisation
Group debriefings (Mountbatten 217346)
Refer to 'Understanding Bereavement'
Individual bereavement referrals (refer to Mountbatten 217346)

Tier 1 Teamwork and self-care

Managers check in with teams/individuals daily
Think of three positive things before leaving work
Reflection 'rounds'
Refer to Calmness and Resilience Guide for coping with stress
For meditation and relaxation practice, refer to <https://www.headspace.com/> or <https://www.calm.com/>



Tier 1 - for care providers and social care staff

Calmness and Resilience Guide

Many situations can leave you feeling out of control, anxious and worried. However, there are still things you can control.

We would like to share some tools for helping to keep your sense of calmness and manage anxiety at this difficult time.

These are simple things you can practice in the moment and try to put into your daily routine.

Kindness – we all have the ability to be kind - do something kind.

Remember your basic needs - healthy eating, exercise and sleep can all reduce stress.

Three-minute mindfulness of breath exercise -

- For three minutes sit comfortably, close your eyes (or look at a blank spot on the wall or floor) and focus your attention on your breathing.
- Don't try to change your breathing in any way - just notice how it feels as you breathe in and out naturally.
- If you become distracted notice the distraction whether this is an external distraction like a noise or an internal distraction such as aches in your body or thoughts in your mind. Just notice the distraction and then return your attention to your breathing.
- Continue for three minutes.

Grounding practice:

- Pause/stop what you are doing
- Push your feet to the ground and notice your connection with the earth
- Look around you – name three things you can see
- Listen – notice three sounds around you
- Take three slow natural breaths

7/11 breathing:

- Pause
- Breathe in gently and calmly to the count of seven (if seven is too hard count to three)
- Breathe out gently and calmly to the count of 11 (if 11 is too hard count to five)

Remember the bigger picture - we are all in this together and this will end at some point.

Optimism and positivity - notice all the good things that you and others are doing during this difficult time. Notice how communities are working together, that there is a sense of shared purpose and connectedness.

Think of three positive things that have happened in your day. **Limit** your exposure to negative social media and news footage such as Covid-19 updates and do something else instead. **Make the most of time at home** - reconnect with pleasurable activities and hobbies, such as reading, a jigsaw puzzle, sketching, a board game, listening to music, gardening, watching a comedy show, playing a musical instrument, baking, cooking, phoning a friend, a crossword puzzle, learning something new, etc.

Remember - it is normal during times of stress and uncertainty to feel anxious and worried. If you are feeling worried or anxious speak to someone.



Tier 1 - for managers

How to look after your staff

Be visible and available – regular contact and communication with team members is vital for those in work as well as those unable to be at work during this time.

Listen - it's important to be able to listen carefully and fully understand and respond to workers and let them speak without being interrupted by phones, email or others.

Say thank you - a simple 'thank you' from a line manager can boost feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy in employees.

Always make sure you are specific about what you are saying thank you for so it's clear you have noticed what they have done well.

Give time and space - making sure there is time to adjust to the new circumstances and time for readjusting when 'normality' resumes.

Check on basic needs - Consider if individual staff members' basic needs are being met – are they getting enough sleep? How might you notice work-related fatigue? Are they paying attention to their food and water intake? How much essential contact are they having with their friends and family?

Be mindful of other life challenges that may be affecting individuals – financial, domestic violence, childcare issues, elderly parents or partners with co-morbidities, who may be at high risk of contracting the disease or who are unwell.

Encourage individuals to recognise and use their coping strategies - ask them what coping strategies they use when they are feeling stressed.

Be mindful of your limitations and when and how to signpost staff to specific services such as counselling or employee support services.

Promote self-care – Actively ask staff to share what they are doing to attend to their self-care needs and maintaining a good balance, this might be exercise or other activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness, art or crafting, starting a garden project or listening to music.

Model empathy, compassion and kindness – when people are working in pressurised conditions, the risk is that they may become less compassionate and empathic. Amongst the crisis, it is even more important to remember to give encouragement and positive feedback to staff.

Promote connectedness - Share with your team that this is a 'group human experience and not one we are going through alone' – this is important for promoting social connectedness and for lessening feelings of distress, anxiousness and isolation.

You could consider having a team 'check in' for ten minutes each morning, in order to keep in touch and for everyone to share what they have planned for the day.

Containing the container – for managers directly supporting staff, it is particularly important that you think about your own emotional needs and what you need to support and maintain your own wellbeing at this time. Take care of yourself. Be honest and compassionate with yourself in how you are feeling. Despite wanting to be there for your team, recognise that all good leaders need to have a break and get some rest. Have others relieve and support you. This also models good self-care to your team and psychologically permits them to rest when stood down too.

Guidance for the support and well-being of Adult Social Workers and Social Care Professionals in a pandemic crisis. The Tavistock and Portman NHS (2020).



Tier 2 - for Care Providers & Social Care Staff

Peer support and reflection

Sharing stories and feelings with compassion and empathy is really valuable when coping with a crisis.

It is important to talk about how you feel as it helps you feel less stressed, improve sleep and well-being and improve team working.

Make sure that you have time with your colleagues to share your feelings and concerns. You will find that you are not alone in what you are experiencing.

Understanding that others feel similarly will decrease any sense of loneliness, confusion and isolation.

What can you do?

- Find time during your shift to talk with others about your thoughts and feelings.
- Speak with your manager about how you can increase peer support opportunities.
- Peer support can be face to face, via the telephone or online.
- If you have a particularly difficult shift ensure you speak with a colleague or manager before leaving for the day.

Understanding bereavement

Bereavement is a common experience. Many will have cared for residents and clients they have known for many years and therefore it is common and understandable that people feel loss and grief.

The death of someone you have cared for can be devastating. There is no right and wrong way to grieve. However, there are some common feelings people may experience:

Shock: It can be hard to believe that someone has died. Shock can leave you feeling numb and confused. It may take some time to be able to make sense of a person's death and to realise that they are not coming back.

Physical feelings: People can experience physical changes to their appetite or sleep routine and can experience physical illness and pain.

Sadness: Sadness and, at times, a depressed mood are common experiences.

Guilt: At times, people may wish they could have done something to alleviate their pain or suffering even if everything possible had been done. You may find yourself playing over the events leading up to the death in your mind and wondering if things could have been managed differently.

Anger: This can be experienced when it is hard to make sense of the circumstances of someone's death, or when the death seems unjustified or unfair.

All of these reactions are part of adjusting to, the loss (the death). You may feel some, all, or non, of these emotions. If you are struggling with feelings of grief please talk to someone or request bereavement support and counselling.



Tier 2 - for Managers

Provide informal and formal support

If you noticed members of your staff are struggling emotionally during this time you can:

- Introduce supportive supervision sessions for individuals and teams
- Come together to share experiences at certain times in the day e.g. handover or beginning or end of shift
- Ensure inexperienced staff are paired up with more experienced staff
- Introduce a positive reflection at the end of the shift where staff identify three things they have done well that day.

These steps will help improve staff well-being and emotional health as well ensuring better team working and communication.

Peer support will also decrease stress in staff and therefore reduce burnout.

It is important that any peer support is offered regularly and everyone is encouraged to attend. It is also important to continue these sessions beyond the immediate crisis as often people are unable to express more difficult emotions until after the pressure has gone.

It may be that it will take several weeks or months for staff to acknowledge the impact this has had on them and begin to freely talk about their experiences.

In addition:

For some individuals, particularly, if they have experienced a recent bereavement or significant stress additional external support would be beneficial.

Individual bereavement support can be accessed from Mountbatten or other counselling services such as Cruse - <https://www.cruse.org.uk>

Free counselling sessions can be accessed from key link workers - <https://www.keylinkcounsellors.co.uk/>

Looking after yourself

It will be important to pay attention to your well-being. Often this is overlooked when you are busy looking after your staff and residents but your emotional and physical health is crucial.

Make sure you ask for help when you need it.

Make sure you can take some time off.

Think about what support and supervision you may need.



Tier 3 - for Care Providers & Social Care Staff

Signs of trauma and how to manage it

It can be understandable to experience symptoms of traumatic stress following a distressing event, whether it's the coronavirus pandemic, or a sudden and traumatic event.

Often, the unsettling thoughts and feelings of traumatic stress, as well as any unpleasant physical symptoms, start to fade as life gradually returns to normal over the days or weeks following a catastrophic event or crisis.

But there's also a lot you can do to assist in your recovery and better come to terms with the trauma you've experienced.

Emotional symptoms of traumatic stress include: Shock, fear, grief, helplessness, and anger.

Physical symptoms include: Feeling dizzy or faint, stomach churning, excessive sweating, shaking, cold sweats, rapid breathing, pounding heart, even chest pains or difficulty breathing. Changes in your sleeping patterns and perhaps insomnia or nightmares, loss or increase in appetite.

Strategies to cope:

- Remember there is no "right" or "wrong" way to feel. People react in different ways to trauma, so don't tell yourself (or anyone else) what you should be thinking, feeling, or doing.
- Don't ignore your feelings — it will only slow recovery. It may seem better in the moment to avoid experiencing your emotions, but they exist whether you're paying attention to them or not. Even intense feelings will pass if you simply allow yourself to feel what you feel.
- Avoid obsessively reliving the traumatic event. Repetitious thinking can overwhelm your nervous system, making it harder to think clearly.
- Partake in activities that keep your mind occupied (read, watch a movie, cook, play with your kids), so you're not dedicating all your energy and attention to the traumatic event.
- Re-establish routine. There is comfort in the familiar. After a disaster, getting back— as much as possible — to your normal routine, will help you minimise traumatic stress, anxiety, and hopelessness. Even if your work or school routine is disrupted, you can structure your day with regular times for eating, sleeping, spending time with family, and relaxing.
- Put major life decisions on hold. Making big life decisions about home, work, or family while traumatised will only increase the stress in your life. If possible, try to wait until life has settled down, you've regained your emotional balance, and you're better able to think clearly.

If symptoms do not resolve over time seek help.

- GP
- Crisis line
- Community Safe Haven
- [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)



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Tier 3 - Managers

When to ask for help

Some staff will cope with the experiences during a traumatic event and adjust well after the initial stress has passed.

However, others, particularly if they have additional stress or underlying mental health conditions, may struggle to return to 'normal'.

Signs that staff need additional support:

- If symptoms do not resolve over time
- If symptoms are interfering with daily living
- If a staff member feels unable to return to work or failed attempts to return to work
- If a staff member cannot move on and they still talk about the stress as if it were yesterday.
- If they experience ongoing anxiety
- If they have persistent difficulty in completing work tasks and staying focused
- If they persistently avoid any reminders of the events your use of alcohol or medication
- If they have persistent mood swings or low mood

Where to refer to:

- GP
- Primary care mental health – call 531860
- Crisis line – call 111 or 522214
- Community Safe Haven - call 520168
- Mind Charity – mind.org.uk
- NHS App for your area