How Mental Health Providers Can Care for Themselves and Support Colleagues During the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak

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National Center for PTSD
Factors in Recovery From Adversity and Stress

- Sense of Safety
- Hope
- Self Efficacy
- Calming
- Connect
No One Size Fits All
The Chaotic Context of a Pandemic: Cynefin Framework

Wellbeing requires:

• Responding to ever-changing contexts.
• Enhanced communication, flexibility.
• Modified expectations and patience.
• Staying present, centered and grounded in fluid conditions.
• Continuously re-assessing, experimenting, tolerating failure, and remaining creative.

## Double-Edged Sword of Provider Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Guiding Ideal</th>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placing the welfare of others above one’s own welfare</td>
<td>Selflessness</td>
<td>Personal wellbeing is not a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to accomplishing missions and protecting others</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Guilt after loss or perceived mission failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toughness and ability to endure hardships without complaint</td>
<td>Stoicism</td>
<td>Not acknowledging significant symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following an internal moral compass to choose “right” over “wrong”</td>
<td>Moral Code</td>
<td>Feeling frustrated and betrayed when others fail to follow a moral code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming the best and most effective professional possible</td>
<td>Excellence</td>
<td>Feeling ashamed of (denial or minimization) imperfections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Stress Continuum: Circumstances and Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READY</th>
<th>REACTING</th>
<th>INJURED</th>
<th>ILL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circumstances:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Well trained&lt;br&gt;Supported</td>
<td><strong>Circumstances:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Responding to multiple stressors at work or home&lt;br&gt;Double-edged sword vulnerabilities</td>
<td><strong>Circumstances:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Strong or multiple stressors:&lt;br&gt;• Trauma&lt;br&gt;• Loss&lt;br&gt;• Moral injury&lt;br&gt;• Wear and tear</td>
<td><strong>Circumstances:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Unhealed orange zone stress&lt;br&gt;Additional stress&lt;br&gt;Risk factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optimal functioning:</strong>&lt;br&gt;At one’s best&lt;br&gt;In control&lt;br&gt;Motivated</td>
<td><strong>Mild and transient distress or impairment:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Changes in mood&lt;br&gt;Loss of motivation&lt;br&gt;Loss of focus&lt;br&gt;Physical changes</td>
<td><strong>More severe or persistent distress or impairment:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Loss of control&lt;br&gt;No longer feeling like normal self</td>
<td><strong>Clinical mental disorder:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Symptoms persist and worsen&lt;br&gt;Severe distress&lt;br&gt;Functional impairment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of Stress First Aid

- Self-care and coworker support framework
- Early supportive / preventive actions
- Flexibility and “tiny steps” are emphasized
- Timing and context are important
- Mentoring and problem solving are highlighted
- SFA is not meant to address all ranges of issues
- Bridging to higher care is recommended when indicated
Stress First Aid Model

Seven Cs of Stress First Aid:

1. CHECK
Assess: observe and listen

2. COORDINATE
Get help, refer as needed

3. COVER
Get to safety ASAP

4. CALM
Relax, slow down, refocus

5. CONNECT
Get support from others

6. COMPETENCE
Restore effectiveness

7. CONFIDENCE
Restore self-esteem and hope
How Can You Use SFA?

Check
Approach
Decide what is most needed:

Anxiety
Guilt/Shame
Sleep Problems
Isolation
Severe Inability to Function

Calm
Competence
Connect
Coordinate

Grief

Cover
Confidence
Check: Be Aware of Red Flags

- Not feeling in control
- Loss of cognitive abilities
- Intense feelings
- Feeling numb
- Inability to engage
- Sleep changes
- Avoidance

Significant and/or persistent negative changes in behavior / habits

Uncharacteristic behavior

Making more mistakes

Becoming more isolated from others

Compulsive behavior
Check On Others

- Those affected by stress may be the last to recognize it
- Stigma can be an obstacle to asking for help
- Stress zones and needs change over time
Checking on Others

• Pick the right place and time to talk
• Begin with a casual two-way communication
• Find the right way to check on someone
• Check in on anniversaries or after reminders
SFA Group Questions

1. What are / have been your greatest challenges, hassles, or frustrations?

2. What are / have been your greatest rewards or successes?

3. What does it mean to be a in this team?
SFA Group Questions

**Cover**
- How has this affected your sense of safety?

**Calm**
- What changes have occurred regarding sleep or ability to keep calm?

**Connect**
- Has there been an impact on how you connect with others?

**Competence**
- Do you have any concerns about being able to handle anything?

**Confidence**
- Have you noticed any change in your confidence in:
  - yourself
  - leadership
  - mission
  - Other

What do you need? What can I/We do to help?
What Contributes to Each Zone in Pandemic?

### Safety:
- Staying informed
- Facing facts

### Calm:
- Changing expectations
- Being patient
- Keeping balanced

### Connect:
- Apart But Connected

### Self-Efficacy:
- Planning and adapting
- Focusing on prevailing
- Problem solving
- Making routines
- Seeking mentoring/training

### Hope:
- Living by values
- Gratitude
- Faith / philosophy actions

### READY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions:</th>
<th>Short-term view / approach</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking on too much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignoring drops in functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not changing expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not checking in with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Underestimating needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not adapting self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overriding concern of others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-medicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unhelpful thoughts / habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stigma</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### REACTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions:</th>
<th>Continuation or increase in yellow zone actions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stuck in unhelpful patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More disengaged / isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overdoing without balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Underdoing what is needed</td>
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</table>

### INJURED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions:</th>
<th>Continuation or increase in orange zone actions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not seeking help / expertise</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### ILL
Prioritizing Self-Care Actions Towards the Green Zone

**READY**
- **Safety:** Staying informed, Facing facts
- **Calm:** Changing expectations, Being patient, Keeping balanced
- **Connect:** Apart But Connected
- **Self-Efficacy:** Planning and adapting, Focusing on prevailing, Problem solving, Making routines, Seeking mentoring/training
- **Hope:** Living by values, Gratitude, Faith / philosophy actions

**REACTING**
- All Green Zone actions and:
  - **Safety:** Marathon approach, Building healthy habits, Setting boundaries
  - **Calm:** Disciplined break-taking, Identifying unhelpful thoughts, Practicing helpful thoughts, Focusing on what you can control
  - **Connect:** Seeking specific support
  - **Self-Efficacy:** Building resilience skills
  - **Hope:** Making time, Seeking mentoring /support

**INJURED**
- All feasible Green / Yellow Zone actions and:
  - Getting help with setting routines and boundaries, Identifying unhelpful ruts, Building tiny health habits, Asking for targeted / sustained support

**ILL**
- All feasible Green / Yellow Orange Zone actions and:
  - Formal MH treatment, Finding a mentor, Regaining lost ground, Making bigger life changes, Reconnecting with values, Rehabilitating as you would a physical injury
Cover Self-Care Actions

- Actively seek information
- Get an accurate understanding of risks in order to plan
- Educate loved ones about activities / risks
- Get help with personal responsibilities
- Self-monitor for stress reactions
- Plan for regular check-ins with coworkers
- Making contingency plans for different scenarios
Cover Actions: Coworker Support

- Provide information on how the organization is working to keep employees safe
- Elicit needs and suggestions
- Provide information on keeping oneself safe
- Brainstorm and problem solve solutions
- Help reduce anything that make the person feel unsafe
- Brief staff regularly about changes in practice / strategies / resources / events
**Calm Self-Care Actions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prioritize simple preferred strategies to use daily:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection/meditation/yoga/prayer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whatever helps you to keep focused on the present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being realistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for long term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you’re grateful for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting beliefs that don’t serve you in this context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful thoughts and habits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Calm Actions: Coworker Support

- Mentor
- Give information
- Communicate calmly
- Listen empathically
- Validate concerns
- Distract
- Acknowledge / praise
- More flexibility
- Encourage breaks
- Assist with practical needs
Calm Actions: Loss

- If you don’t know what to say, stay present, stay quiet and listen
- Be authentic
- Take things off the person’s plate so they have time to grieve
- Offer a menu of options of what you can provide
- Provide ways to honor the loss
- Believe in the person
- Check in over time
Connect Self-Care Actions

- Seek out contact
- Be open to different types of support
- Discipline yourself to have conversations
- Reprioritize your schedule
- Find creative ways to engage in social activities
- Connect with others around resilience actions
- Help others as you can
Connect Actions: Coworker Support

- Open communication with co-workers
- Check in regularly
- Offer different types of social support (practical, inclusion, emotional).
- If someone has retreated, find ways to indirectly include them
- Help problem-solve obstacles to connection
- Keep calling, texting, and talking with co-workers
- Assist with any negative social influences
Competence Self-Care Actions

- Focus on what is most needed
- Shift expectations
- Learn from others
- Create routines
- Be flexible
- Re-prioritize
- Evaluate the absolute risk
- Proceed with life’s necessities
- Learn or practice resilience skills
Competence Actions: Coworker Support

- Remind of strategies and skills that have worked before
- Encourage active coping
- Help problem-solve and set achievable goals
- Give extra training / mentoring
- Help “recalibrate” expectations/goals
- Connect to community resources
Confidence Self-Care Actions

- Use small triumphs to build confidence.
- If you have doubts, talk with mentors, friends, or spiritual guides, or read more self-help books or articles.
- Don’t push yourself to “process” the situation in any particular time frame, but if something triggers you, give yourself time.
- Use the wisdom gained from experiences to reconfirm your values, make changes in your life, or help others.
Confidence Actions: Coworker Support

- Support each other and remind each other of strengths
- Focus on core values, priorities
- Look to learn from each situation
- Look for any meaningful elements of the situation
- Find ways to enhance gratitude
- Mentor or recommend seeking out mentoring
- Honor and make meaning of losses
- Reframe guilt and self-defeating statements
- Be willing to talk with them as many times as they need
Information from the National Center for PTSD related to Covid-19

AVAILABLE NOW OR SOON AT
WWW.PTSV.A.VA.GOV/COVID

• Managing Stress
• Managing Healthcare Workers’ Stress
• Providers and Community Leaders
• Mental Health Providers
• Leadership: Supporting Employees
• Helpful Thinking
• Supporting Others
• Grief
A panel of expert clinicians from the PTSD Consultation Program provide suggestions and resources.

Presented on March 18, 2020

Treating PTSD During the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak

Recording and slides available at: www.ptsd.va.gov/consult

PTSD Consultation Program Team
The following resources may be helpful:

- **PTSD Provider Resilience Toolkit**
- **PTSD Coach mobile app**
- **Mindfulness Coach mobile app**
- **PTSD Coach online**
- **VA’s Moving Forward** (Problem-Solving website or mobile app)
- **Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) Online Course**
About the Consultants

- Experienced senior psychologists, psychiatrists, pharmacists, and other health professionals who treat Veterans with PTSD
- Available to consult on everything from toughest clinical scenarios to general PTSD questions

Ask about:

- Evidence-based treatment
- Medications
- Clinical management
- Resources
- Assessment
- Referrals
- Collaborating with VA on Veterans’ care
- Developing a PTSD treatment program

Available Resources www.ptsd.va.gov/consult

- Free continuing education
- Videos, educational handouts, and manuals
- PTSD-related publications
- PTSD and trauma assessment and screening tools
- Mobile apps, and more
PTSD Consultation Program
FOR PROVIDERS WHO TREAT VETERANS

PTSDconsult@va.gov
(866) 948-7880
www.ptsd.va.gov/consult
Please enter your questions in the Q&A box and be sure to include your email address.

The lines are muted to avoid background noise.
Welcome users of VHA TRAIN!
To obtain continuing education credit please return to www.vha.train.org after the lecture.

TRAIN help desk: VHATRAIN@va.gov
CEU Process for users of VHA TRAIN (non-VA)

Registration → Attendance → Evaluation → Certificate

Register in TRAIN.

Listen to the lecture.

Return to TRAIN for evaluation.

Follow the directions to print certificate.

TRAIN help desk: VHATRAIN@va.gov

(866) 948-7880 or PTSDconsult@va.gov
CEU Process (for VA employees)

1. **Registration**
   - Register in TMS.

2. **Attendance**
   - Join via TMS and listen to the lecture.

3. **Post**
   - Posttest is no longer required for this lecture.

4. **Evaluation**
   - Return to TMS and complete evaluation.
     - Search “My Learning” to find it.

5. **Certificate**
   - Print certificate from “My History” section of TMS.
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**SAVE THE DATE:** Third Wednesday of the Month from 2-3PM (ET)

**PLEASE NOTE:** Topics are subject to change in the coming months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Cognitive-Behavioral Conjoint Therapy for PTSD</td>
<td>Candice Monson, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>Using CogSmart with Veterans with PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury</em></td>
<td>Elizabeth Twamley, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>How Do We Make Effective Treatment for PTSD More Effective?</em></td>
<td>Paula Schnurr, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>19</td>
<td><em>Massed Treatment for Veterans with PTSD</em></td>
<td>Cynthia Yamokoski, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>16</td>
<td><em>Treating Co-occurring PTSD and Anger</em></td>
<td>Leslie Morland, PhD</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For more information and to subscribe to announcements and reminders go to [www.ptsd.va.gov/consult](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/consult)